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## Exhibitions: Demonstrations of Mastery In Essential Schools



### IN THIS ISSUE:

**The Deep Irony of No Child Left Behind:**  
*Horace* interviews Linda Darling-Hammond

**Representing: Elementary to the**  
**Exhibition of Learning**

**Presenting Themselves with Power**  
**and Passion: What Exhibitions Do**  
**for Students**

**Frameworks for Making**  
**Science Research Assessable**  
**for All**

**Structural and Curricular**  
**Design: What Changes**  
**When an Essential School**  
**Commits to Exhibitions**

# The Deep Irony of No Child Left Behind:

## Lisa Hirsch interviews Linda Darling-Hammond

In January 2007, longtime CES educator Lisa Hirsch interviewed Linda Darling-Hammond, the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University, where she launched the Stanford Educational Leadership Institute and the School Redesign Network. Darling-Hammond talked with Hirsch immediately after returning from testifying to a congressional committee about No Child Left Behind's upcoming reauthorization, and suggested that Essential school educators do what they can in their communities to educate legislators and policymakers to create a new assessment climate that supports meaningful, personalized, and challenging teaching and learning.

**Lisa Hirsch:** At Fall Forum last year, you spoke about how, as we head into No Child Left Behind's reauthorization, we need to find ways to capitalize on the tiny "cracks" in specific states where there's doubt about high stakes testing—that is, on the promise represented by what's emerging in specific states that are creating assessment systems using multiple and locally based measures, not just high stakes testing. Can we look at those states as models for a system that more fully includes performance-based assessments?

**Linda Darling-Hammond:** In different degrees, these are states where exhibitions, portfolios and performance tasks are the bulk of assessment systems for high school curriculum and graduation. Nebraska is perhaps the best example now, and there are others. You can look to Vermont for its use of portfolios and Rhode Island for senior projects. And in Rhode Island, for example, standardized state assessments cannot count for more than ten percent of the graduation requirements. So testing factors in, but it doesn't dominate. And some states are going much further in introducing performance-based assessment, such as Connecticut and Oregon. So there are a number of states that are trying to have multiple measures systems with performance-based elements.

**Hirsch:** So with this in mind, what are some of your suggestions? I think that leveraging exhibitions at CES schools helps make a difference as we move toward reauthorization. In my situation, we're trying political outreach—our state senator has come to see our exhibitions, and

we're working on getting more politicians involved. What other kinds of things do you think schools and teachers could be doing to help people to see the light?

**Darling-Hammond:** First of all, you're educating your local political representatives about what good education looks like, what types of assessments are supportive of good education, and what the effects are of more thoughtful assessment. That's really important because when the policy makers make these policies, they don't know what's inside the black box of testing. They really need images of what's possible and what's desirable. I think that's extremely important. Teachers need to get involved in the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind. They should form coalitions through professional associations, organizations like the Coalition, and other organizations likely to have an influence on legislative proposals. As individuals, teachers can write to congressional representatives, write letters to the editor, put together position papers and documents and get those circulated.

What legislators need to know is what you're asking them to do. They may agree with you that this is important, but then you need to have done the work to show them other possibilities. You need to ask for explicit encouragement for performance assessment and for local assessment to count in the determination of individual students' progress and the school's progress. We have to be very clear when we ask for changes and be able to say, "This is the implication for the law."

**Hirsch:** What are your biggest concerns thinking about NCLB's reauthorization? And is the biggest concern high stakes standardized testing?

**Darling-Hammond:** Well, I actually want to list some things that are currently working. One of those, although it needs some tweaking, is the highly qualified teacher provision, which is about getting more high quality teachers in schools. There is a need to adjust the standards for interdisciplinary teachers and others so that they can be declared highly qualified in the fields that they teach. But certainly, the general idea that we ought to hire qualified teachers for all kids is a good one, as is the fact that we ought to look at the performance of kids from different income groups.

The Achilles' heel in the law is that everything involved with that has to be comparable, and this drives us back toward the traditional multiple choice, norm-referenced standardized tests that aren't supposed to be used for high stakes and punitive purposes. That is the biggest problem.

**Hirsch:** I have also seen sensible, veteran teachers do crazy things, such as put a grade on a diagnostic test. People are so freaked out and feeling totally undermined.

**Darling-Hammond:** You really do start to develop an Alice in Wonderland world in which the practices become sort of surreal because you're being asked to respond to a nonsensical sort of intention. And that's the biggest problem. Nobody really meant for that to happen in the federal

### Related Resource

Linda Darling-Hammond is one of the conveners of the Forum for Education and Democracy. Visit the Forum online to read more from Darling-Hammond and others about flaws in the current iteration of NCLB legislation and ideas for change.

Forum for Education and Democracy  
[www.forumforeducation.org](http://www.forumforeducation.org)

Congress, the state plans and so on, but what you have is a lack of understanding of how curriculum, assessment, school improvement, and measurement operate. That went into the law, that has gone into the regulation, and that has gone into the state plans that have been trickling down to the school and classroom level in ways that end up creating these kinds of bizarre circumstances and negative consequences. That is the deep irony of a law entitled No Child Left Behind.

**Hirsch:** That's a great way to put it: the deep irony of No Child Left Behind. I am pretty sure that the people who wrote NCLB did not intend for teachers to act insensibly, but the pressure is so great, and teachers do not know what to do in response. We grade things that should not be graded, we are intent on measuring and assessing more and more, and we do not take time to reflect, which is a huge part of learning. If the stakes weren't so high, we wouldn't have such ironic implications that are happening all over the place.

**Darling-Hammond:** I think that the trick is to change not just the stakes but also the nature of the assessments. Ideally, we should have really thoughtful assessments at the state and local levels that support the curriculum and that provide continuous information. Teachers could get smarter and smarter about how to interpret that, and it would inform instruction.

And ideally, the stakes for this would not be fashioned in such a way that there would be incentive to narrow curriculum, to push kids out of school if they are "keeping the school's average down," which is happening in a lot of places, or to traumatize kids. Some states have fashioned systems that they're fighting to keep in the face of federal pressure to undo measures that are thoughtful about what kids ought to learn, how we can assess that, how the assessments can be used to help teachers understand the standards and the learning process better, and how to improve instruction in ways that are not punitive to the kids or the school. And I think that's what most of the people that voted for NCLB would like to see happen. To the extent that people have been able to make sense out of a law that's invoked a great deal of nonsensical responses, it probably does have some salutary effects of calling attention to certain aspects of the learning process. But you can have very different effects of

the law for kids in some schools where the responses are going to be more reductionistic and where they don't have the capacity to improve the quality of instruction. There's a tremendous amount of complexity—what one kid or one teacher experiences in one school in one state is not necessarily what a different kid or teacher will experience in another state.

**Hirsch:** So what more can we do to move the reauthorization more towards the middle, more toward the performance-based? What can we do to make sure that the curriculum is not compromised and how could it actually be made more robust because of federal mandates?

**Darling-Hammond:** There are people at various levels of government who are interested in this problem. They're hearing this from their constituents, and they're trying to figure out how to improve the law, so I think it's really important for educators individually and collectively, through every organization they belong to, to tell legislators about what they want to see happening because there's a possibility that it will be heard at this moment.

### Related Resource

#### Multiple Measures Approaches to High School Graduation

Authors: Linda Darling-Hammond, Elle Rustique-Forrester, Raymond Pechione and Alethea Andree.

This 2005 report from the Stanford School Redesign Network provides an in-depth examination of the assessment systems in 27 states that use multiple measures approaches. It also discusses testing for English language learners and students with disabilities, and makes recommendations about test uses and effects.

[www.schoolredesign.net/srn/mm/mm.php](http://www.schoolredesign.net/srn/mm/mm.php)



## Representing: Elementary to The Exhibition Of Learning

by Laura Baker, Greenfield  
Center School

Greenfield Center School (GCS) students have a long history of engaging in meaningful projects as the culmination of their studies. Once students have completed these projects, they own their learning; they understand it deeply and can explain how it relates to themselves as well as to their community. In addition, we believe that these presentations raise standards. Projects are presented to audiences as authentic exhibitions. These presentations can be to peers, parents, the entire school at our weekly All School Meeting, or community audiences. In each venue, our job as educators is to make sure that students reflect upon how they have grown and what they have learned. Over time, we have refined this work to be more reflective of essential understandings that connect each classroom's studies to the school's mission. The pillars of our mission help students develop challenging academic skills in the service of empathy, equity, sustainability and participation.

### Representing

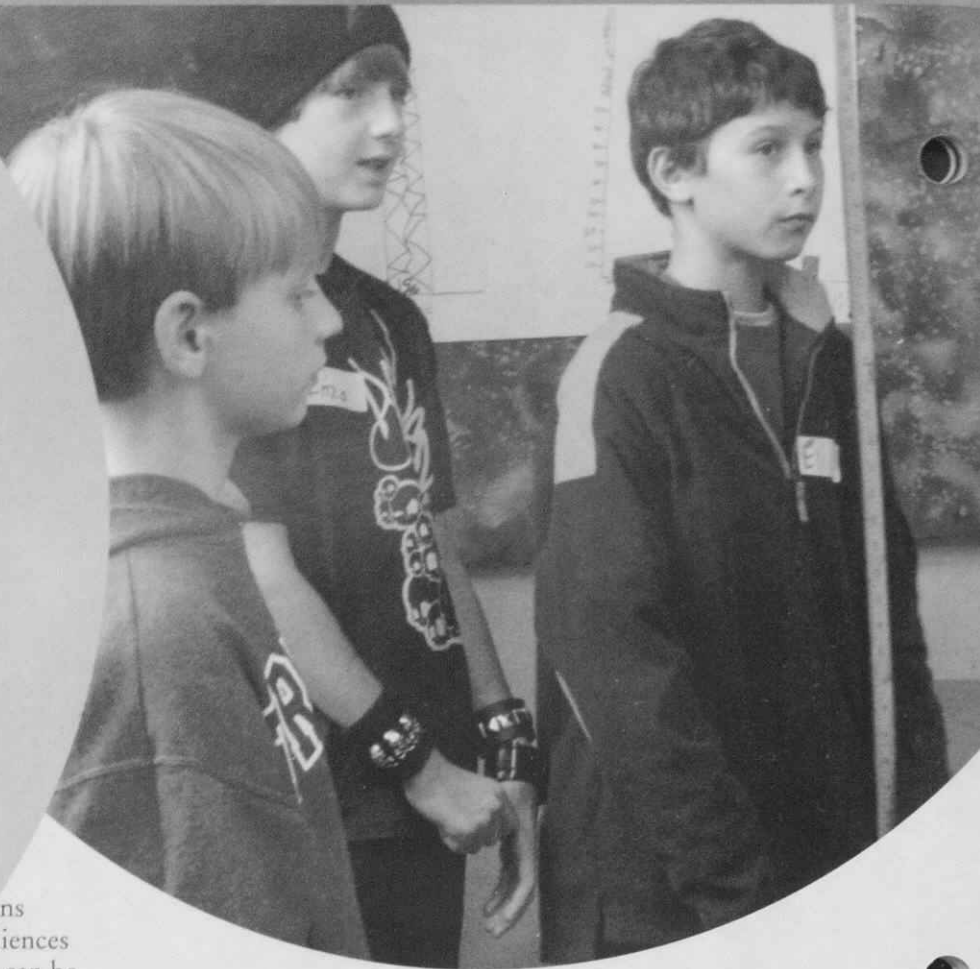
The process of showing one's understandings begins with the practice of representing work, which commences in kindergarten and occurs regularly in all content areas. At GCS "representing" means translating one's learning into a different medium, and then reflecting in writing or orally on this translation. For example, when second and third grade students studied water, they divided into groups for a variety of field trips. One group went to a local sewage treatment plant. They returned to the school and with blocks recreated the process of cleaning water that they observed. Then they explained to the rest of the class how the system worked to clean and re-use water.

Literature assignments typically ask students to represent their understandings as we work to develop perspective, empathy and understanding of self in relation to others and to location. Primes (kindergarten and

Greenfield Center School is a laboratory school serving kindergarten through eighth grade students in the rural community of Greenfield, Massachusetts which integrates a challenging curriculum with ethical decision-making to develop the skills and convictions for creating just communities. GCS promotes personal growth in an atmosphere of warmth and mutual respect. The school's practices are built upon an integration of social and academic learning. Children and adults create equitable and compassionate communities through active participation in their classroom, school, and the world beyond.

first graders) create story boards to show the beginning, middle and end of a story. After reading stories together and being taught the parts of a story, students work in pairs to record the story's components. They use rolls of paper so that they can have as much space as they need to draw and write the summaries.

As part of their literature work, third and fourth graders have focused on understanding character. After reading books in literature groups and discussing character traits and how they are evident in literature, each student was assigned to read a book independently and create a "character mobile" to describe the main characters. One student used a Lego



bed as a symbol for "patient," a play on words for the quality of "patience." In addition, a Band-Aid was suspended from the hanger because the character fixed things, and a ripped piece of paper with a round hole in it was used to note that "the character was running in circles with so many more options around him." Representing helps students leave concrete ways of thinking to explore more abstractly.

Social studies and science themes always end with representing knowledge. Students build a village in the Colonial era, or make a replica of a period home. Middle school grades represent their notion of the earth's formation by making three dimensional reproductions or terrariums. Students often create poster presentations that have an artistic rendering of what they have learned. They might create videos, claymation productions, plays, or mosaics.

### Sharing

The process of representing is not complete until students share their work. Presentations can occur in the context of the classroom, or to peers in other classrooms. They can take place during the weekly All School Meeting, to parent and school community audiences and to other audiences authentically interested in the students' work.

Presentations to peers can be either the final venue of sharing or practice for a more daunting audience. Author's circles are a common way of sharing writing with peers and receiving feedback. Students must be taught how to provide feedback that is both helpful and positive. They learn to make comments like, "I loved the way you described the feelings of the character. It would have helped me if you talked a little bit about the place in which it occurred." Again, at GCS, kindergarteners begin this type of sharing with peers about their writing, the books that they choose to read, or the constructions they make during independent project time. Students learn how to think about their work, how to explain it, and how to provide feedback.

Often, when students complete a piece of work they know will go to an audience of great import, they first will share it with their peers for critique. In order to provide the best feedback, students return to the requirements of the assignment and the manner in which it is to be presented. For instance, when students completed their math fair projects, they presented to their peers several days before the actual fair. Each student gave feedback to three peers using an evaluation sheet, the same sheet that parents would use the night of the fair. Presenting to peers allowed for honest feedback in time to make changes before the event. Polished exhibitions are performances; good performers rehearse.

The GCS mission has evolved over the last 26 years, and this is reflected in the learning that is exhibited. Initially, the school focused on building a community in which individuals would grow in an atmosphere of warmth and mutual respect. There was a daily All School meeting which consisted of singing together. Four years later, the mission reflected an expanded notion of the social context of the school; sharings were created to learn everyone's names, to put low status students in high status situations, and to celebrate birthdays and accomplishments. At this time, All School took place once a week and morning meetings were held daily in the classroom to build community.

Several years later, the mission of the school evolved to include the integration of academic and social learning. Academic sharing was added to All School, and parent nights began. Within the last decade, continued refinement of the mission brought an explicit dedication to ethical decision-making, and the creation of "equitable and compassionate communities through active participation in their classroom, school, and the world beyond." This clarified the desire for authentic audiences to which student work could be presented. Taking our work into the community followed naturally.

### All School Meeting

All School Meeting is a weekly gathering of the entire school, led by students, comprised predominantly of their sharing of work. Students exhibit finished pieces, talk about the process of creating the work, explicitly acknowledge the many drafts that have gone into good work, and take questions and comments. All School is a time when students share their "representations." However, not all representations are shared at All School Meeting, and not all sharings are representations. All School is also a time to read student writing or to raise important issues. For instance, during the All School Meeting on December 8, 2006, a variety of sharings occurred:

- Primes (kindergarten and first grades), read two books they had created as part of their literature study of George and Martha. They showed the "Story Grammar Marker" rope they used to deconstruct the parts of the story and explained all the components. Then they read and displayed their illustrated pages of each of those components. Of course, as is expected, the entire school celebrated their success and murmurs of appreciation permeated the room. Many students remembered their own experience as Primes and what it felt like to share this kind of learning.
- Two students from Upper Primes and Middles (second and third grades) read their published books,

comprised of stories they wrote and took to final draft, along with illustrations. These books are based on the students' experiences, such as one book about a pet dog named Mozart.

- Upper Middles students (fifth and sixth grades) shared projects that they had created as part of their EcoFair. The three projects exhibited at All School Meeting were created in quite different media. One was a poster board which explained the plight of the Florida Everglades and the actions that can be taken to protect it. A second project showcased a professional looking calendar with original photography that is being sold locally to raise money for endangered species. The third featured a large sand and water table that replicated local rivers and the erosion that has taken place.
- Uppers (seventh and eighth grades) offered a skit showing the issues related to fair trade chocolate. After that, they taught the school about fair trade practices, discussed how to look for fair trade symbols, and took a pledge to eat only fair trade chocolate.

Each presentation ended with questions and comments, a practice students use each day at morning meeting. The questions are usually about the process students underwent as they completed their work: "How long did it take you? How many drafts did you do? How much did you practice? What did you like best in this process? Did you learn anything surprising?" The comments are appreciative, empathetic, and offer thoughtful insights and critiques, reflecting common practices of the classrooms.

### To Parents and the School's Community

The Eco Fair is just one example of presentations to parents. This fair was the culminating piece for the Upper Middles' three month study of ecology. Each project needed to show "Awareness, Interconnectedness, and Responsibility." Parents came during the afternoon or the evening to look at the presentations and to ask questions of the students. A list of questions was supplied by the students as a guide for this process. Upper Middles had taken advantage of a peer critique prior to the parent event. Such exhibitions of work to parents and others in our school community occur regularly. Seventh graders act out *Romeo and Juliet* each year using Elizabethan modern language. Seventh and eighth graders lead debates that include their parents about issues relating to fair trade or child labor.

### To a Community Group

Some of the most authentic audiences for our presentations are community groups interested in the results of our students' work. Each year, as part of their data study, our fifth and sixth graders conduct a survey

for the town and analyze the data graphically and in writing. The survey results are presented at town meetings and, this year, in a private meeting with the mayor. Not only do the students take their work very seriously when there is an audience like this, but our work provides a real service and saves the town from expending money to conduct this research. In 2006, students surveyed over 400 people in the town about actions they have taken or would undertake to conserve energy. In collaboration with the Greenfield Energy Commission, students collected, collated and analyzed the data and presented it at a town forum and in a special meeting with Mayor Forgey. They were able to answer all questions and were asked to leave their findings with the commission to use as part of the official report.

In addition, each year middle school students present to aspiring teachers at a local college. They evaluate the importance of project based instruction and long term studies, bring evidence of their thoughts, and create a presentation that lasts one hour. Each year this class gets feedback that is incredibly supportive.

### To an Evaluative Panel

Having an outside jurist motivates Uppers to invest even more fully in their work. It also opens doors that are sometimes closed at this developmental stage for self reflection and insight. For Ambitious Projects, students are given wide latitude and asked to explain how their project shows ambition, passion, and perseverance. Projects must be prepared using both an artistic medium and writing. Some students explore mathematical concepts and theories that stretch them. Others study a particular type of music and write a symphony. Two years ago a student rebuilt a Model T, documented the process with film, and drove the vehicle in the school parking lot. Murals have been painted to represent the poetry of Maya Angelou, dramatic monographs have been written and acted to show the point of view of historical characters. Students are judged on their presentation as well as the evidence of ambition, passion, and perseverance. Members of the community, parents of students who have graduated from the school, and teachers from high schools which the students will attend are the "judges." There is a time for these evaluators to give verbal feedback at the exhibition, and all students are given written feedback as well.

### Accountability, Preparation, and Feedback

In order for student project work to be most effective, we, as educators, must be very clear about what characteristics the students are to exhibit. It is easy to do an Eco Fair project. It is harder to do one that shows "awareness, interconnectedness and responsibility." It is harder still to have students articulate what they

have demonstrated in another medium. One fifth grade student designed a web site with four pages: global warming, energy conservation, waste reduction, and better fuel economy. Each page contained three sections. When asked to reflect on the three areas in ecology that had to be addressed he said, "The 'What is it' is the awareness of the issues; 'How is it affecting the earth?' describes the interconnectedness of the issue, and 'What can you do?' is our responsibilities."

For years, GCS students have represented work as part of their learning. Whether completing a literature book or culminating social studies and science themes, they have struggled to make choices, translating their knowledge into an artistic medium. Students reflect upon the elements they were to show, the process they went through to do this work, and the products they created. They participate in classroom sharings, learn to critique and receive feedback, and witness weekly exhibitions at All School. These presentations offer examples of good work and are built upon habits of persistence, ambition, service, and care. Clearly, they raise the standards at the school.

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**Laura Baker** is the Executive Director of Greenfield Center School.

*(continued from page 3)*

connected to every intentional action in a school community. If systems that assess performance through authentic, public demonstrations of mastery are used on a much wider scale—and the "tiny cracks" that Darling-Hammond discusses in this issue indicate that this is a possibility—many more students will enjoy the benefits of Essential education. The stories in this issue and the capacity for exhibitions work throughout the CES network are serving as powerful examples of practice and possibility.

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# Presenting Themselves with Power and Passion

by Heidi Lyne, Parker Charter Essential School

## From the CES Common Principles:

Students should have opportunities to exhibit their expertise before family and community. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation—an “Exhibition.”

The school should honor diversity and build on the strength of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity.

An “Exhibition” is a demonstration of mastery on many levels. When students prepare and present portfolios of their own work to a public audience, they are demonstrating mastery of more than the traditional academic skills. The process that culminates in the exhibition teaches students to present themselves articulately and powerfully and to work independently to a high standard.

These skills can provide access to the stratum of our society inhabited by those who have the social and financial means to live in comfort. Children who are raised in families of privilege have the positioning and opportunities to acquire these abilities, but for others, they are too often acquired only by chance. People who know how to work and present themselves well are likely to be accepted—into a good college, a well-paying job, an important conversation. These skills, then, are at least equally important to what are more usually thought of as school skills such as reading, writing, and computation. Thus schools that teach children to be articulate and self-motivated are “deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity.”

Exhibitions are a product of a lengthy process on the part of both teacher and student. When students are asked to create a body of work for a portfolio that demonstrates their intellectual ability and work habits, they learn the patience and tenacity required to produce excellent work. Because students must create

and revise enough portfolio pieces to meet the standard, they are coached by teachers to learn to work efficiently. Teachers help them learn how to work to high standards, and how to recognize when a high standard has been reached. They learn what they are capable of, what it means to do their very best. They learn what it means to work hard, to revise until they are satisfied. As they practice, these skills become habits.

When students are asked to present this evidence to a public audience, again and again, they learn something at least equally important: the ability to present themselves to others with power and passion.

## Different Settings, Similar Results

For the past ten years, I have been involved with schools in which students must present work as a demonstration that they are ready to move on. At the Mission Hill School, a public school for kindergartners through eighth graders in Boston, I helped to plan and put into place the requirements and procedures for portfolio presentations, taught students how to prepare and show their work, and sat on judging committees. In 2006, I became the director of the Theodore R. Sizer Teachers Center at the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School in Devens, Massachusetts, which serves seventh through twelfth graders, another school with an innovative portfolio assessment system. There are a growing number of





schools in the country using public demonstrations of readiness to move on, but I believe these two are among the few in which students are expected to present their work publicly not once but several times, in several different domains.

Though the settings and demographics of Mission Hill and Parker are very different, graduates from both schools tend to be similar kinds of students: articulate, independent, and poised young people. These students appear self-confident in public arenas. They are comfortable in their bodies, they use words easily, and they are unafraid. Both Parker and Mission Hill value students and expect a lot from them both academically and personally; students are given more power and voice than in most schools.

It is possible that these students would present themselves well regardless of their school assessment requirements. But I don't think so. I am convinced that much of the self-possession of the students stems from the demands of the public portfolio presentation. The expectation that students will stand in front of a group of adults to present convincing evidence that they are ready to move on in the form of their own work and words forces them to learn to present themselves well. Because this requirement is repeated several times, their ability to do this grows.

Of course, the exhibition processes at Mission Hill and Parker are not perfect. There are always questions about these kinds of assessment processes, as there are and should be about anything we ask of our students. One major question, particularly at Mission Hill, which serves younger students, is around timing and level of difficulty. Exhibitions are still uncharted territory; there are neither written standards nor scope and sequence. Given that most students do not come from early school environments where independence and presentation skills are valued, how do we decide what expectations are age-appropriate? When is the right time for kids to be asked to present—and at what level of difficulty? At what age should children be asked to be self-motivated learners? How do we provide scaffolding? How important is it to push children beyond their comfort levels—and how far? When are we asking too much and when are we not asking enough?

And both schools struggle with the reality of creating standards for a group of individuals. How do we decide what to ask of special education students? What do we do when students do not reach the standard year after year, when research and common sense tell us that holding them indefinitely in eighth or tenth grade will not be helpful to them in the future? How do we assess mastery of skills of presentation and work habits? What does mastery look like, and does it look the same for all students?

### Mission Hill School Habits of Mind

**Viewpoint:** Taking different viewpoints, perspectives. How might someone else see this?

**Evidence:** Seeking and weighing evidence. Is it convincing? Credible?

**Connections:** Looking for patterns and connections. Have I seen this before?

**Supposition:** Hypothesizing, asking "what if" questions. Could it have been different?

**Relevance:** Looking for relevance, asking "so what" questions. Does it matter and how?

### Reflections from Mission Hill Graduate Ayanna Michel-Lord

I think doing portfolios was really helpful—especially at Mission Hill because I was still so young. I didn't like talking in groups when I was little. I didn't ever talk in class. At Mission Hill, starting in kindergarten, you have to present at assemblies—that helped prepare me. Presenting is really nerve-racking. The worst part is that you are by yourself and you have to talk for a half an hour or more just by yourself. You worry about how to make it last. I went to [another student's] first, so I knew what to do. I got a chance to see how it was done. That made it a little easier.

Once you do a portfolio presentation and are successful, you feel like you can go places and you have nothing to worry about. It grows your self-confidence. I had a summer job interview and it was easy—I knew how to present myself. It's like basketball. You go to practice and you learn how to play the game. If you didn't have practice and just went out on the court, you wouldn't know what to do.

After I presented, I got asked to go to Fall Forum and present, and then I got even better. Portfolios opened opportunities for me. I've had great experiences because of it.

*Ayanna Michel-Lord is currently a tenth grader at Fenway High School in Boston.*

These questions and many others continue to be asked in both schools. But here I am going to focus not on the questions, but on what I believe to be already a success in both schools, a success that is still too rarely mentioned when the benefits of exhibitions are touted.

### Parker Charter Criteria of Excellence

*Parker has rigorous performance standards in:*

Reading  
Writing  
Listening  
Oral Presentation  
Research  
Artistic Expression  
Scientific investigation  
Mathematical Problem-Solving and Communication  
Systems Thinking  
Technology  
Wellness  
Spanish

### Parker Charter Habits of Learning

*These are the habits that the Parker community expects its students to develop and exhibit in their academic work and in daily life.*

Inquiry  
Expression  
Critical Thinking  
Collaboration  
Organization  
Attentiveness  
Involvement  
Reflection

### Exhibitions as Rites of Passage

Something wondrous happens as students move through a multiyear public performance assessment process. At the end of the eighth grade year at Mission Hill, students have presented in at least three hour-long sessions covering six domains. At the end of the senior year at Parker, students have presented at least six times. These students emanate a presence when they are in a public arena talking with visitors, presenting on panels, visiting high schools, running assemblies, etc. This poise develops in students for whom we might otherwise not expect it: students who struggle in class, students who in their everyday lives answer questions with monosyllabic grunts, students with hefty IEPs, students for whom standard English is not a first language. They don't become different people. Rather, they learn to project the person they are with ease, confidence, and grace—and often with humor and remarkable insight about themselves.

Because I see these qualities at varied age levels in these two schools, I am convinced of the link to the demands that the schools' assessment systems make on them as they proceed through each school. The students at Mission Hill are in eighth grade when they

graduate, and the students at Parker are in twelfth grade. At Parker, a student's first presentation, or Gateway, usually takes place at the end of what would at Mission Hill be the eighth grade year. Parker and Mission Hill students—of all ages—are treated with deep respect, given similar amounts of personal attention and are held to similar daily expectations. And Parker Division One students (seventh and eighth graders) are wonderful: generally polite, earnest and happy in school. But that extra thing, the presence, the development of a public persona that one sees in Mission Hill eighth graders and Parker twelfth graders, is not evident, because those Parker students have not yet had enough time. It is true that some self-confidence and maturity comes with being a member of the most senior class, but students in these two schools seem to have something more. I have seen these same qualities in children of varying ages who are expected to present themselves publicly, using their own words to speak and defend their thoughts: Jehovah's Witnesses, Bat and Bar Mitzvah students, members of debating clubs etc. And I hear similar stories from other schools that ask their students to present their work publicly.

### Articulate Self-confidence

When I began to work with students at Parker, asking them to talk with visitors, present in panels, and give tours, I asked teachers to give me names of students—not the best, most articulate students, but anyone who they thought might like or benefit from the work for whatever reason. I have learned that it is often the students from whom we expect the least that are the most impressive to visitors, for it is possible to see simultaneously both the struggles and great strengths of these children. And always, no matter who the students are, the hour spent with them has been what most stays with visitors.

The feedback from visitors to both schools is consistent, and the same words come up again and again: particularly "powerful" and "articulate." Parker visitors say things like, "The ability of students to speak with great articulation about their learning, their work, themselves and the school was VERY powerful," and "How well the students carry themselves and how articulate they are!!"

Mission Hill visitors echo these comments: "Your student tour guides were STUPENDOUS!" "All of the students presented themselves so very well." Imagine these same young people in job or college admittance interviews. The value of good self-presentation skills cannot be underestimated.

The anecdotal evidence of the continuing success of these students to voice their thoughts also serves to bolster my belief in the power of the exhibition. Though neither school yet has hard data, the feedback

from high schools attended by Mission Hill students and colleges enrolling Parker students is consistent. Again and again, educators at receiving schools mention voice and self-awareness when speaking of these students.

### Independent Learning

Students at Mission Hill and Parker must demonstrate the ability to be independent learners. Because the expectation at both schools is that students will continually create, revise and collect work for the portfolio, students have much more practice in organizing and managing their time and work than students in more traditional schools, who tend to be given an in-class assignment due that period or a homework assignment due the next day. At both Mission Hill and Parker, many students choose to use their free time to work on portfolios, alone or with a teacher. Students come to school early and leave late. They opt to work.

Students at both schools know what the portfolio expectations are and know they have a long time to prepare; they also know they must work hard and manage their time well or they will not be ready. Of course, there are students who take longer than others, those at Parker who do not Gateway after the usual two-year period, or, at Mission Hill, those who are not prepared to present or are asked to re-present. And, of course, there are questions and problems, as there are with any process designed for large groups of people. Individual human beings can manage to circumvent the best intentions and designs. But in schools that assess through portfolios and exhibition of mastery, all students at least have the option of learning the life skills and habits that these assessments demand, and all improve as a result to some extent.

Portfolio assessment and exhibitions are vehicles for teaching all of our students to be powerful people, to know themselves as learners, to work to their own high standards, to interview easily and well, and to hold their own in intellectual and social arenas. We speak often of equity and access; surely, the skills demanded by the process of creating, revising, editing, and finally presenting one's own work would help our most vulnerable children to have power in the world. There are many highly esteemed reasons to use portfolios of work and performance assessments in schools. Equity of opportunity should be added to the list.

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Heidi Lyne is the Director of the Theodore R.Sizer Teachers Center at the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School in Devens, Massachusetts. On the web, visit [www.parker.org/stc](http://www.parker.org/stc) for more information about the Sizer Teachers Center.

### Reflection from Parker Senior Evan Hayward

I remember my first class presentations. I was shaking the entire time. When I had to lift up my hand to point to something, it was shaking really hard. It was really embarrassing. And my voice changed—you know how your voice changes when you are really nervous? But I learned how to do it. A lot of kids stay after to work with the teachers to practice, but I worked on it myself. I started to develop internal ways to deal with it. I knew how to psych up for it. I trained myself to be calm. You get better and better; it gets easier psychologically. Each year, you stress about less and less and you know how to use your tricks and practice. You think "I've done this before, it's going to be okay."

Parker kids become so comfortable with themselves. They have lots of confidence.

Every time alumni come back, they say we have no idea how nervous most kids are when they have to present and how good at it Parker kids are. One kid said he and another Parker student were in a college class together and it was really easy to tell who was from Parker—they were the only two kids who talked. My college interviews were fine. But I think if I'd been in a school that didn't do presentations I would have been shaking like I was at my first one.

A Gateway is like a job interview—this is who I am and this is what I do. We do a lot of class presentations that get us ready for the Gateways, and then the Gateways prepare us for the senior project presentation. If you asked most parents if they could get up in front of a group of their peers, they would be petrified. But we have to do it until we are comfortable with it. I know that just the act of getting up is going to make things much easier in life. I think you have to learn and practice how to be in front of people. If you don't, it's like being thrown into a pool after hearing about what swimming is. Someone has to teach you what to do or you will drown.



# The Coalition of Essential Schools: Common Principles

Demonstration  
of mastery



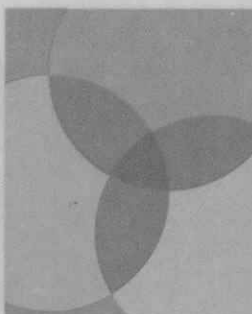
Commitment  
to the entire  
school

A tone of  
decency  
and trust



Goals apply to  
all students

Resources  
dedicated to  
teaching and  
learning



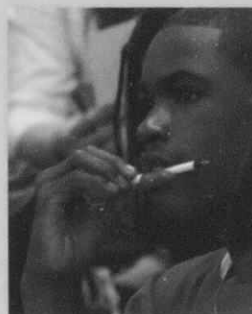
Less is more,  
depth over  
coverage

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 over twenty 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 personalize, equitable, and intellectually challenging schools.

The CES network includes hundreds of schools and 25 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](http://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](http://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 [jddavidson@essentialschools.org](mailto:jddavidson@essentialschools.org).

Lewis Cohen  
Executive Director

Jill Davidson  
Publications Director

### How Exhibitions Work at Mission Hill School and Parker Charter Essential School

The exhibition process differs at these two schools, reflecting the values and structures of each. At Mission Hill, students begin working on creating a portfolio when they enter sixth grade. As they move through the three year process, they are given more and more independent working time to prepare their portfolios. In spring of the seventh grade year, students present two portfolios, History and Beyond the Classroom (a portfolio honoring the strengths and interests of the child outside of the school environment). In the winter of the eighth grade year, students present two more portfolios: Literacy and Art. In spring of the eighth grade year, they present the final two portfolios: Math and Science. These are long presentations: each domain presentation, including questions, takes about an hour, followed by a half-hour of judging by committee members (using rubrics developed by the school). Students must have specific numbers and kinds of work for each domain. Each piece created in the year the student presents is assessed; students reflect verbally and in writing on work done in previous years as a barometer of how far they have come. Assessment is based on the standard of their work, presentation skills, habits of mind, and ability to self-reflect as a learner. Judging committees consist of the subject teacher, the advisor, one or more family members, a community member and two apprentice students from sixth and seventh grades, who act as helpers to the presenter as they learn how to do this themselves.

Parker does not have grade levels; instead students spend the approximately six years they are at Parker in Divisions, roughly comparable to what in another school would be seventh and eighth grades, ninth and tenth grades, and eleventh and twelfth grades. Students move, or "Gateway," from Division to Division when they can demonstrate they are ready; though most take two years, some move in less than two years and some take longer. All students in Division One and again in Division Two have the same curriculum in four blocks: a two hour block of Arts and Humanities (AH), two hours for Math, Science and Technology (MST), and one hour each for Spanish and Wellness. Division Three students choose electives in hour-long blocks. Students demonstrate their readiness to move to the next Division by collecting a portfolio of work that shows they have met the expectations for skill levels of that Division. Each piece of work they do is held against the Parker "Criteria of Excellence" and students revise work until it is judged by themselves and their teachers to have met the standard of the Division. Again, students have a great deal of control over their own learning; the expectation is that they will revise their work for their portfolio until they and the teacher are satisfied—or they will choose to stop and move onto a new piece if they feel they are no longer learning from the revising they are doing. In order to move on, students at Parker create a finished portfolio for each domain in each division. They also present work to an audience of teachers, peers and family members in "Gateway" exhibitions in AH, MST and Spanish. The Division One Gateways are presentations of portfolios, Division Two students present six-week projects, and Division Three seniors present a Senior Project, one major project that they have worked on for the entire year.

## Exhibitions: Facing Outward, Pointing Inward

*by Joseph P. McDonald, originally published in 1992 by the Coalition of Essential Schools*

The CES Exhibitions Project of the early 1990s produced a range of work that continues to inform the practice of using exhibitions as a "360 degree" method of transforming teaching and learning, community connections, school design, and assessment. Among that work was this paper coupling the origins of exhibitions with an analysis of how they create outward accountability, providing evidence of what students know and are able to do, and inward accountability, holding schools responsible for planning backwards to create the systems that scaffold and support students as they prepare for graduation by exhibition. This excerpt from "Exhibitions: Facing Outward, Pointing Inward" focuses on the motivation for integrating exhibitions into all aspects of Essential school practice. Its take on how the strategy of public demonstration of mastery via exhibitions is more meaningful, authentic and persuasive than data yielded by the "quick instruments" encouraged by policymakers remains startlingly relevant.

Author Joe McDonald wrote this while working at CES National as Director of the Exhibitions Project. McDonald now serves as Professor of Teaching and Learning and Associate Dean at New York University's Steinhart School of Education.

For the full text of this article, along with complete references and footnotes, please visit the CES National website:  
[http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces\\_res/227](http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/227)

It is an old American habit to imagine utopia in the abstract, then search for the instrument—the policy, the remedy, the technology—that might yield it up quickly. But it is just as old an American habit to start more concretely—with images of a Black man voting, of an Appalachian child eating, of a woman fire-fighter working—then strive, over the long haul, to connect these images and bring them to life.

When it comes to the utopian prospect of creating new schools for the twenty-first century, we in the Coalition of Essential Schools try hard to stick to the second path. Our reason is as pragmatic as it is principled: in school reform, the first path generally

offers a fool's journey. So, for example, the quick instruments of the 1980s—longer school days and years, more testing of teachers and kids, more course requirements for high schools—seem to have made things worse. Meanwhile, the patient striving of some of the original members of the Coalition of Essential Schools—a creature as well of the 1980s—has turned scanty images of possibility into remarkable schools. These are schools that scout the future—schools like Deborah Meier's Central Park East Secondary School in New York City and Dennis Littky's Thayer High School in Winchester, New Hampshire.

Now, at the start of the 1990s, the lure of the quicker path again threatens the capacity of policymakers to focus on the long haul. Thus our schools face a number of proposals that mean to drive instruction. These proposals all involve assessment, and sometimes what is called alternative or authentic assessment. Their proponents suggest that clever instruments might be capable of directing schools toward worthy ends—yielding in a stroke the utopia of excellence and equity that many of us seek. Give schools the right test, so the argument goes, and the other elements of new school design will align like metal filaments to a magnet.

Unfortunately, the argument is more attractive than persuasive. It ignores the fact that schools are exceedingly complex organisms, responsive only in perverse ways to outside driving. This is especially true when the driver aims to enhance accountability. Real accountability depends in the end on the resolution of school people to awaken to the effects of regularities that suppress their own best instincts, to come to terms with what Theodore R.Sizer has called the "essential dailiness of school"—its numbing habit of self-absorption and its preoccupation with simply churning on. One cannot be driven to such mindfulness; one can only be coached into it. Assessment can play an important role in the effort, but only if it aims to point out continually what schools might otherwise overlook to the detriment of their real mission. What is wanted is an assessment system perched powerfully within the school itself and just above the school's other systems—one that from its perch might direct these other systems toward kids rather than toward their own smooth running. This is what the Coalition of Essential Schools means by exhibitions.

Ted Sizer reached all the way back to the eighteenth century in search of an assessment mechanism that might function in this way. He found at least the possibility of it in a ubiquitous feature of the early American academies and of the common schools that shared their era. The exhibition, as practiced then, was an occasion of public inspection when some substantial portion of a school's constituency might show up to hear students recite, declaim, or otherwise perform.

The constituency might thereby satisfy itself that the year's public funds or tuitions had been well spent and that some cohort of young scholars was now ready to move on or out. There is evidence that this satisfaction came cheap. Arthur Powell, who has studied the matter, once told me that the exhibition as practiced in its own time was frequently little more than public entertainment, the equivalent of Friday night football in Odessa, Texas.

For his part, Sizer imagined this old design in something more contemporary than kerosene light; still, he prized its history and aimed to use it to help displace more recent historical influences on the design of the American high school. These are especially the ones that have lent the high school its division of knowledge into subjects, time into Carnegie units, and kids into tracks. Features of the exhibition, as Sizer projected them, run counter to these powerful norms: a suggestion that high school kids, like doctoral students, might qualify for graduation on the basis of some integrative performance; that they might attempt this performance when they were well enough prepared to attempt it, rather than on some fixed schedule; and that they might all be required to do it well, without regard to someone's perception of their abilities, career prospects, or socio-economic status. Together with a number of imaginative school people—like Meier, Littky, and Samuel Billups (of Walbrook High School, Baltimore, Maryland), to name a few of the pioneers of the mid-1980s—and scholars like Arthur Powell and Grant Wiggins, Sizer launched a theoretical and practical adventure with exhibitions that continues today in the Coalition of Essential Schools.



## Frameworks for Making Science Research Assessable for All

by Annie Chien and Lisa Karlich,  
*School of the Future*

Imagine a classroom of constructive chaos: a group of students is busy as they monitor their work. Another team of students is on the other side of the room redesigning their experiment. They seem frustrated, but are motivated to make their third trial work. In another corner, a student is explaining an article to his research partners that can really bring out the significance of their work. The partners take notes vigorously, asking questions along the way to make sure they understand the article.

As science teachers, we embrace environments that foster inquiry, discovery and critical thinking. Our students do authentic independent research projects that put students in the role of scientists. At School of the Future (SOF), students must do four research projects, also known as exhibitions, as a part of our graduation requirements. Students need to do one exhibition for each subject: two in the humanities, one in math and one in science. Students are expected to do one of the required four exhibitions each year. Each student is assigned to a sponsor, a School of the Future teacher who acts as the high school equivalent of a research advisor, providing support throughout the process. Much like a college thesis, the students are expected to produce a paper documenting their research as well as present their work in front of a committee of teachers, peers and community members. The student's work is evaluated based on an established rubric.

For more on School of the Future's science exhibitions, including samples of completed science exhibitions and exhibitions process guidelines, please visit CES Chang-eLab at [www.ceschangelab.org](http://www.ceschangelab.org). You'll find School of the Future's science exhibition material when you click on School of the Future and follow the assessment links.

Because science embraces hands-on experiences, students are usually fascinated and motivated by the subject. But despite the instant engagement and buy-in that science research offers, students aren't always ready for it. Science research requires a set of specific skills and aptitudes. Science exhibitions demand that students have research skills: they should be able to know how to find resources, take notes, read critically, and analyze information. In addition, they need to know how to read and write scientific language.

Ultimately, science exhibitions demonstrate that students have the ability to design experiments, carry them out, and analyze the results. Students should be able to pose a testable question, form a workable hypothesis, design an experiment, and be able to collect data. After all this, students have to make sense of their data and critically examine its validity in order to improve the experiment. Being able to accomplish this is a difficult feat, and we are teaching these skills in a heterogeneous classroom that requires us to differentiate students' topics according to their skills and aptitude. How can we create a supportive and challenging exhibition experience without overwhelming our students?

**Developing a School Culture of Research and Rigor**  
The most crucial factor to successful exhibitions is having a staff that buys in to the process and the



teaching styles necessary to support independent exhibition work. At School of the Future, exhibitions are a central topic of conversation during the interview phase for new staff. We often ask what types of projects potential applicants have done in the past that might be useful to our students' exhibition process. New staff members then participate in Summer Institute, a summer orientation program during which significant time is dedicated to curriculum development. We use Grant Wiggins' backwards planning process from *Understanding by Design* with an emphasis on projects that can be extended to meet exhibition requirements. Veteran SOF staff act as "in-house" professional development leaders facilitating workshops in the Habits of Mind, coaching new teachers on how to utilize these critical thinking skills in everyday lessons so that students have constant exposure to and experience with the skills that the exhibition rubrics make explicit.

We use the School of the Future Habits of Mind with our students in order to develop critical thinking throughout all of our classes. The Habits of Mind are represented by a list of five aspects of critical thinking:

- using evidence
- making connections
- examining alternatives
- seeing a problem from different points of view
- understanding the significance of an issue

In addition to Habits of Mind professional development, SOF's high school division has a Faculty Exhibition Committee comprised of master exhibition sponsors who design and lead professional development for the whole school throughout the year. From previous years, certain exhibitions are identified as "anchor papers" that have the student initiative and demonstration of mastery of the skills the exhibition is designed to highlight. Anchor papers are read by faculty members and graded using the established rubrics so that we can establish inter-rater reliability. A key component of sponsor development comes directly from the administrative staff. They are mindful of the time they set aside throughout the year to assist new and existing staff with the issues that arise from this deep work.

### Building Structure Throughout the Exhibition Process

Because of our commitment to the exhibition process, SOF designed a weekly exhibition class. At the ninth grade level, the focus is on orienting the students into

### Related Resource

For more on School of the Future's science curriculum and pedagogy, please see "Scientific Literacy through Inquiry: Practicing Scientific Process through Pinhole Photography" by Annie Chien and Allison Godshall in "Teaching and Learning Essential Literacy Skills: CES Teacher Voices," *Horace* volume 22, issue #2. It's online at [www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces\\_docs/resources/horace/v22/22\\_2\\_toc.html](http://www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/resources/horace/v22/22_2_toc.html).

the exhibition culture. They learn to understand the rubrics, examine anchor papers, and learn about the role of committee members. Throughout the later grades, exhibition class is focused on the content's specific skills and understanding. In addition to the class, students are mandated to meet periodically with their exhibition sponsors. Sponsors are expected to keep records of student progress detailing meeting dates (since many meetings happen after the regular hours of the school day), assignments, and contact with parents when significant issues arise.

One of the fundamental structures that guide students' exhibition process is the exhibition rubric. Our rubric explicitly organizes the criteria by which students' exhibitions will be judged according to the Habits of Mind. This rubric is used throughout the process of the exhibition to help students check their own thinking on their project. For example, during the topic brainstorming part of the exhibition, students must examine the significance of their project. What real life applications do their ideas connect to? What are some current science and math developments in their topic area? We refer them to the significance portion of the rubric. This discussion helps students weed out any project ideas that lack substance and meaning, as well as maintain rigor through critical thinking in the research process. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the project through the rubric, it can be also seen as a great differentiation tool.

As tools to help focus on skills proficiency, we created templates that support students to organize their exhibition papers while maintaining the standards of our exhibition rubric. These templates are highly structured, presented in a graphic organizer format that reflects a lab report. Under each section, students are given specific questions to tackle. These questions are designed so that they address the standards of the rubric. Students use the template like a workbook, working on sections of it throughout different phases of their exhibition process. The students do not have to respond to each question in complete sentences. Students who struggle with organization, writing and critical thinking find the templates worthwhile.

We love using these templates as the focal point of our one-on-one meetings with our students: the structure of the template allows us to identify students' needs and work with them. After the template is completed, students can then focus on their writing by putting their bullet points in essay format. By chunking the process, we have seen more progress with our struggling kids toward successful completion of the exhibition. We mandate the use of the template at the beginning, but as students find their own individual systems that are successful, we allow them to create and maintain their own writing and thinking processes.

Our classrooms are designed to be equipped with resources to help students become independent with their exhibition projects. Sections of the room are dedicated to exhibition experiments. We find that giving students space to work offers them more ownership of their research. Classroom libraries are stocked with reference material, with a variety of books and journals that best suit the needs of our learners. For example, we keep multiple copies of science dictionaries in all reading levels as quick references. In addition, the science department has print and online subscriptions to popular journals, such as *Scientific American* and *Popular Science*. We find that most of these resources are sufficient for our student population.

However, when we need to find higher level reading materials for our students, we seek support from community organizations. For example, our work with the Science Teachers Research Program in New York City, one of the largest teacher research programs in the United States, has assisted us in identifying and obtaining journal articles to support authentic student research. We feel that our partnerships with the program played a huge role in offering the funds, expert personnel and professional development to create a strong science exhibition program at SOF.

### Tinkering with Student Curiosity

In order to help kids jump start their research engines, and explore their interests, the tenth grade exhibition research course, Advanced Placement biology lab, serves as a launching pad. For two months, our classroom was very much like a real research lab. We divided our science exhibition class into groups of four students, with each team doing one of the AP Biology labs. As real research teams would, we had a class meeting on each lab as the teams reported on their background research, design, results, struggles and conclusion. On the pedagogical level, all students are able to be exposed to five to six different research experiments in addition to conducting a full length experiment within their own teams.

The great thing about using the AP lab curriculum is that it contains advanced experiments outside

The primary aim of the Science Research Program for Science Teachers is to provide New York metropolitan area middle and high school science teachers with sustained hands-on experience in scientific research so they can better understand the practice of science and better transmit to their students and fellow teachers a feeling for its practice. Each teacher spends two consecutive summers working as a laboratory research assistant under the supervision of a Columbia faculty mentor. To learn more, go to [www.scienceteacherprogram.org](http://www.scienceteacherprogram.org).

of students' course work that play around with a variety of variables to bring out the complexity of an investigation. Therefore, if students are interested in taking on one of the labs as their exhibition, they have multiple points of entry. For example, one of our students was so interested in the physiology lab that she decided to make it into her exhibition project. Her research is on examining the effect of nicotine on daphnia heart rate. Another team examined the perfect "recipe" for bacterial transformation.

Of course, students are more than welcome to examine topics outside of the AP labs for their exhibitions. As we write, a group of students intrigued with research on sound and its effects on proteins took on examining the effect of different sound tones on plant growth. Another student wants to extend her pinhole camera project, a lab that was conducted in our vision unit. For these students, the AP labs helped them refine their research interests. Thus, we have found that using these AP biology labs as anchor eliminated the "creativity gap" we experienced before when helping students find topics for their exhibitions. They provide the perfect environment and structure for students to explore, reflect and refine their research interests. Because of the high availability of AP lab kits and their defined experiments, the teacher planning and prep time for this experience was relatively simple.

However, a two month experience is only a part of what we do to guide students toward their science exhibition topics. We make an effort to point out possible extensions of short experiments done in class. Students usually take on an old lab, perhaps working on a different variable they might be interested in or working on redesigns that can improve on the class experiment. We keep a list of successful past exhibition topics for students to revisit.

### Using Collaboration at All Levels

Managing 25 to 30 students as they work on science exhibitions can be a logistical nightmare, especially if each student is conducting an experiment. We encourage students to team up on their exhibition projects. Together, they design the experiment and implement it.



However, students are responsible for producing their own exhibition paper and presentation. The only aspect of the exhibition paper they share is their experiment data. This allows students to work together, yet assures that each student produces her or his own work that demonstrates effort and understanding. Collaboration on exhibition experiments helps maintain a real lab-like atmosphere. It is also a differentiation tactic—long term experiments have multiple layers, from research to implementation to interpretation. While some students can work independently to produce a successful exhibition, others work best with friends or partners that complement their thoughts and work habits. Finally, managing groups of two or three students increases the teacher's support time for students.

The calendar for exhibitions is established prior to the start of the school year. In addition to the school-wide deadlines, a first draft due date is established for each grade. These drafts are assigned to members of the Faculty Exhibition Committee who act as a second set of eyes assessing the state of the research and writing. This reader serves two purposes. The first purpose is to ensure that the sponsor receives additional feedback during the process. The second purpose is to give the student additional motivation to work with his or her sponsor. It is assumed that the student is working closely with his or her sponsor from the beginning stages. The Exhibition Committee reader serves as a second adult voice to stress the importance of the collaborative effort between student and sponsor. This reader is often a stop-gap for students who are in critical danger of not completing their exhibitions. It bears noting, however, that members of the Faculty Exhibition Committee are, for the most part, full-time teachers who are volunteering their time because of their deep dedication to the philosophy of the school, further reinforcing the need to hire committed personnel.

Over the past few years, the science department has put extensive time and energy into identifying spiraling content and skills, establishing not just rubrics by which teachers assess skill development, but also a living content document complete with anchor experiments that the department has deemed essential to science education. The plan is that even with the flux of personnel, there are certain activities that are such rich learning experiences that SOF would like to see them in curricula year after year. In this way, there is continuity in the department, as well as expectations for learning. The senior year science teacher knows that no matter who taught ninth grade science, certain activities were covered and can be referenced in her class. This is valuable as a pre-assessment tool, and can be used to identify students who will need extra scaffolding during the exhibition process.

We hope that we have given you some frameworks to refine your research exhibition program with your students and colleagues. Because SOF's culture of sharing and collaboration between colleagues, classroom observations (which we call "intervisits") are frequent, and reading student work is commonplace. However, the exhibitions process allows staff members that might not see each other on a regular basis to open a dialogue about skill development and teaching strategies. We encourage you to visit School of the Future and other schools that have been successful in implementing research projects for heterogeneous communities. Talking to students, sitting in on student presentations, reading sample papers—these experiences can help you examine ways to perfect your exhibition program.

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**Annie Chien** has been a science teacher at School of the Future for eight years. Annie loves science as a hobby and is a lifelong science student herself. Visit her class website at [www.mschien.com](http://www.mschien.com).

**Lisa Karlich** has been teaching physics and working with seniors on their exhibitions at School of the Future for six years. For the last three years, she has also been Exhibition Coordinator for the high school which includes working with new sponsors one on one, developing rubrics, and scheduling.

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If you would like to visit School of the Future, contact **Caron Pinkus** at [caronpink@yahoo.com](mailto:caronpink@yahoo.com).

## National Exhibition Month—May 2007!

Join the Coalition of Essential Schools in a nation-wide campaign to promote and celebrate exhibitions as a preferred form of student assessment.

CES National has designated the month of May as "National Exhibition Month." Essential schools and support organizations are urged to participate in activities that make their exhibition work public.

National Exhibition Month is an annual campaign, launched in 2006 with the intent to scale up the number and intensity of activities and to draw in additional participants every year. The long range goals for National Exhibition Month are:

- Bring to the public a new awareness of exhibitions as a compelling form of assessment
- Reshape opinion about the assessments that should be used to measure and support the skills and knowledge of our young people, what it means to be educated, and what kind of student demonstration of mastery is most educationally appropriate
- Build on the existing strengths of the CES network to increase schools' capacity to do exhibitions well
- Build and strengthen a coalition of organizations supporting performance-based assessment

### How You Can Participate

We hope you're inspired to join in! Here's how:

- Schools can schedule exhibitions during the month of May and hold a public event after the fact to recognize the exhibitions that have occurred and celebrate student achievements with community members
- Schools can invite neighboring educators, community leaders, parents, legislators, city officials, or other thought leaders to sit on juries and experience exhibitions first-hand

- Schools can educate media, parents, and community members by inviting them to take part in the exhibition process

- Schools can invite local media to cover an exhibition, interview students and staff, and write/produce a story

- Schools and organizations can document their exhibition practices and achievements and send reports to CES National to disseminate via the CES website and In Common, our affiliate newsletter

- Schools and organizations can post a summary of their activities on their own websites or describe them in newsletters, blogs, or reports to community audiences

- Schools, organizations, or individuals can issue a local press release describing their involvement in the national campaign, interface with media, write a letter to the editor, or submit an Op/Ed piece to the local newspaper

CES National will promote and document activities throughout the month of May, and will provide supporting materials such as an exhibitions fact sheet, tips and checklists for using exhibitions, and an advocacy kit for interacting with the public and the media.

### Join Us!

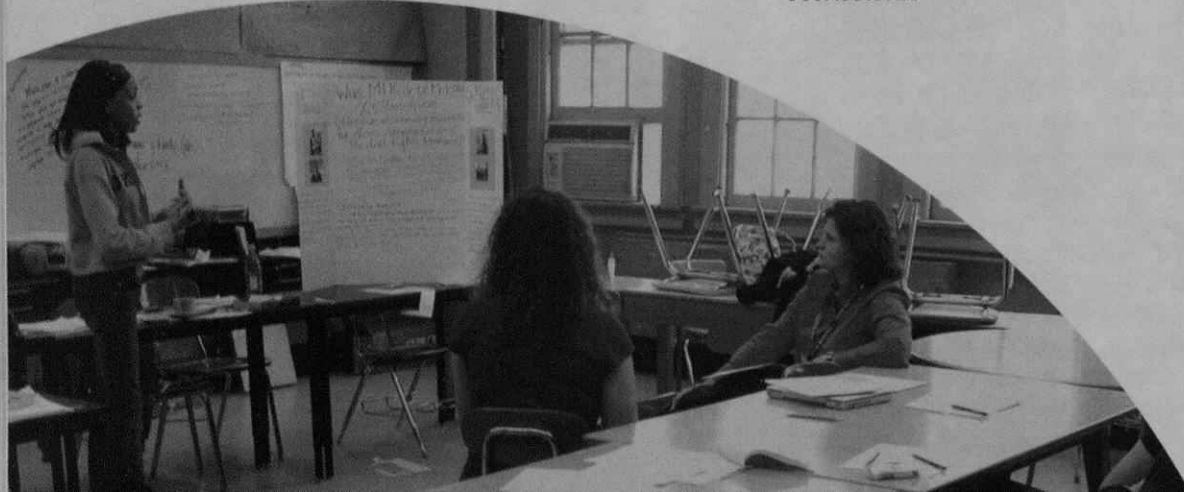
If you are interested in joining us in this campaign, we ask that you begin by sharing this document with your colleagues and initiating discussions about the form your participation might take.

Check the CES National website for more information about the campaign, including an online survey in which you can tell us about your plans and materials that will help you plan your participation.

[www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org)

For more information about National Exhibition Month, contact:

Brett Bradshaw  
CES National  
[bbradshaw@essentialschools.org](mailto:bbradshaw@essentialschools.org)  
510.433.1926



# Where's Your School on the Exhibitions Continuum?

CES has identified four phases of exhibitions implementation among Essential schools. The schools represented in this issue of *Horace* are implementing exhibitions systemically; their stories provide insight into their efforts to construct and continuously improve exhibitions as a "final product" and a whole-school process.

- **Beginning Implementation** Student learning is regularly assessed at the school, but exhibitions as an authentic assessment strategy are not currently being used. The school has plans to begin or has shown interest in developing structures.
- **Partial Implementation** Exhibitions are implemented by a select number of faculty members as an authentic assessment strategy in some grades and disciplines. Exhibitions are completed by some students; some structures are in place.
- **Demonstrating Implementation** Exhibitions are implemented by a majority of the faculty in most grades and disciplines as an authentic assessment strategy. Exhibitions are completed by many students; a majority of structures are in place.
- **Systemic Implementation** Exhibitions are an integral part of the program school-wide using authentic assessment strategies in all grades and disciplines. Exhibitions are completed by all students; the school has developed the capacity to be self-sustaining and continuously improving.

Use the expertise of the CES Network to systemically implement exhibitions at your school. CES National, CES Mentor Schools, and the CES Affiliate Centers offer opportunities throughout the year to develop your school's capacity to use exhibitions as an impetus for restructuring or as a key goal for new school design and backward planning. Here's how to find resources, support, and inspiration:

- Check out our CES Small School Network Professional Development Catalog online at [www.essentialschools.org/pdfs/PDguide2006-2007web.pdf](http://www.essentialschools.org/pdfs/PDguide2006-2007web.pdf)
- Join us July 9-13, 2007 in Miami Beach for the annual CES Small Schools Network Summer Institute! For more, visit [www.essentialschools.org/events.html](http://www.essentialschools.org/events.html)
- Save the date for Fall Forum! Fall Forum 2007 will be held November 8-10 in Denver. Visit [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org) for more information on leading a Fall Forum workshop or organizing attendance for a team from your school community.

The CES network has a long history of developing and refining exhibitions and supportive school designs, cultures, and systems. These resources, compiled to support CES's National Exhibition month, represent tremendously useful artifacts of the practice of using exhibitions in a variety of school settings. CES's exhibition resources also include links to CES research efforts that document the effectiveness of performance based demonstration of mastery. CES's exhibition resources are available online at [www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces\\_docs/schools/nem/nem\\_moreex.html](http://www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/schools/nem/nem_moreex.html)

## And there's more...

*Student Achievement*, Disc 2 of the CES **EssentialVisions** DVD series, focuses on exhibitions and other forms of demonstrations of mastery in Essential schools. Beginning with a detailed description of what it means to ask students to share what they know and can do with their community, the DVD offers two additional segments that bring exhibitions to life. In "Senior Exhibition Project," a group of Quest High School twelfth graders and two advisors prepare for the senior exhibitions that are both a graduation requirement and the culmination of their high school careers. This segment serves as a stellar example of how all of the systems and commitments of a CES Mentor School visibly culminate in senior exhibitions. "Getting Started" shows how a new small Essential school, Empowerment College Preparatory School, partners with Quest High School as it plans backwards to weave preparation for exhibitions through its curriculum and practices and how those exhibitions manifest among students at the beginning of their high school careers. Providing an exemplary look at scaffolding, this segment shows a school in action building an academic program centered on the exhibitions process.

The CES **EssentialVisions** DVDs are available directly through CES National. Visit us on the web at [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org) or call 510.433-1451.

**CES ChangeLab** is an expanding collection of resources from the CES Mentor Schools, a group of exemplary Essential schools collaborating with new Essential schools as part of the CES Small Schools Project. The assessment section of CES ChangeLab provides links to documents, descriptions, tools, and other material that demonstrates how exhibitions are used now in a variety of Essential schools. In significant ways, the Exhibitions resources on CES ChangeLab are a direct complement to the articles in this issue of *Horace*, with links to exhibitions information from School of the Future, Francis W. Parker Essential Charter School, and Leadership High School.

CES ChangeLab is online at [www.ceschangelab.org](http://www.ceschangelab.org)



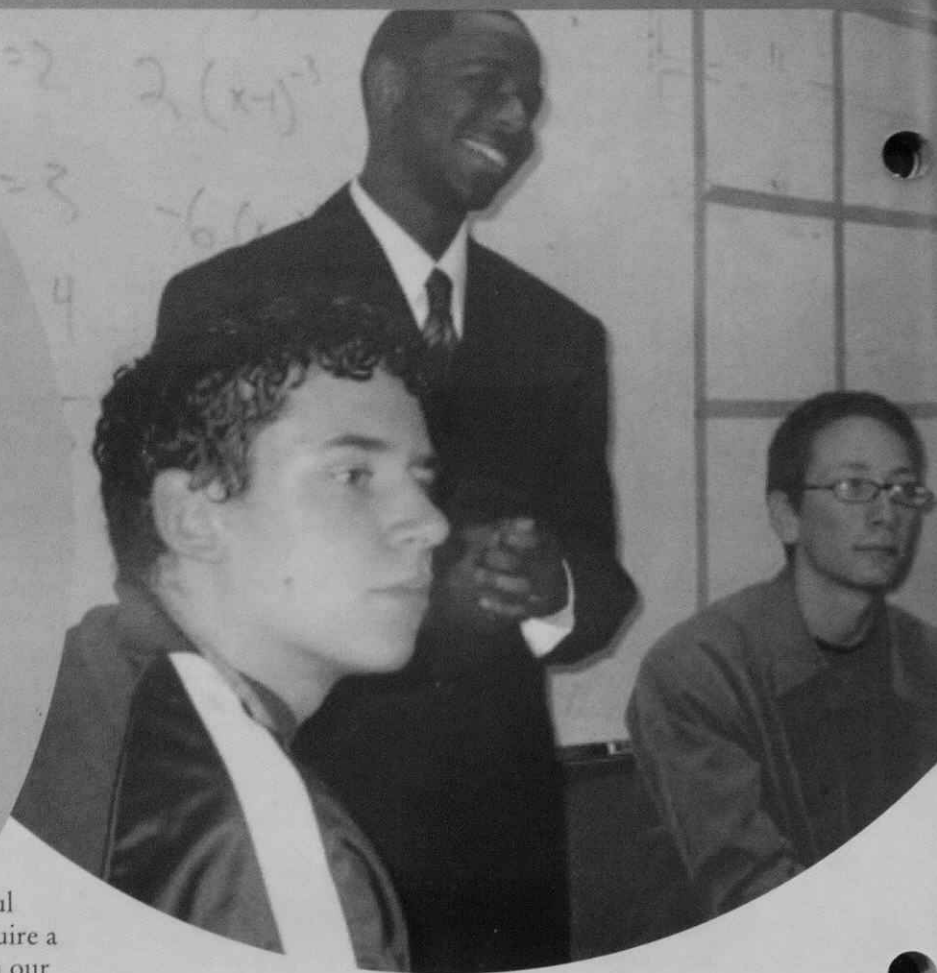
## Structural and Curricular Design: What Changes When an Essential School Commits to Exhibitions

by Greg Peters, Leadership High School and San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools, School of the Future

If equitable achievement is our goal, we must have authentic assessments that are reflective of our community's expectations and meaningful to our students and to us. Such assessments require a systemic commitment from which we start with our school's mission and plan backwards to support and rethink curriculum, structures, support systems, tools, and day-to-day decisions. We need to be prepared to consider multiple perspectives and to create new approaches. We must commit to reflect on our processes and progresses, react, and reflect again.

In 1999, I joined Leadership High School (LHS) as its instructional leader. At this time, in its third year, LHS was beginning to prepare for its first senior class the following year. Like the two CES schools at which I previously worked, and like so many other CES schools I had visited, LHS wanted its graduates to demonstrate mastery of specified skills and knowledge beyond standardized tests, course requirements and GPAs through the authentic assessment methods of exhibitions and portfolios.

Leadership High School is one of the only non-segregated high schools in San Francisco. 95% students of color attend LHS and our students represent wide ranges of socio-economics and ability. Though most of our students come to us significantly below grade level in reading and math, LHS has been commended by an independent audit as one of the only high schools in San Francisco to make progress in closing the achievement gap. 100% of our graduates are prepared to attend the UC system. On average, 95% of LHS's graduates attend two and four-year colleges.



Influenced by my past experiences, I wanted our use of authentic assessments to be transformative for both students and the school, but feared that without a strong vision, we would reproduce what I had seen and experienced elsewhere: eager families, anxious advisors, and underprepared students. I envisioned exhibition days marked by confusion, emotional outbursts and last minute decisions made to try not to punish students unfairly for a program that was not fully designed.

The LHS staff planned to have seniors present their portfolios at the end of their senior year. Our seniors-to-be didn't know what was expected and therefore had not yet begun to prepare for this event. Students would use the junior year to plan, and teachers would provide specific instruction and support during senior year. As the planning unfolded, the portfolio project developed into a broad (more is less) catchall of ideas and, predictably, unconnected pieces of student work, rather than a deep, focused and clear assessment of well-established and supported expectations in which connections would be made explicitly and directly. Our school community—educators, students and families—needed to discuss why we valued and therefore required authentic assessments.

I challenged some of our status quo thinking—in particular, why LHS held its graduation requirement exhibitions in the final weeks of a senior's time with

us. It seemed unfair and unreasonable to hold such a high-stakes assessment, often with little formal scaffolding, at a time when there is limited opportunity for students to revisit if warranted and that truly should be geared toward a well-deserved graduation celebration.

As a result, we made one major structural redesign before moving forward. We split our authentic assessment graduation requirement into two parts:

1. The Graduation Portfolio Defense: a live defense of a portfolio, already completed to standard and assessed by the Advisor. This assessment takes place in the first weeks of the second semester and seniors **MUST** pass it in order to graduate. If a student does not pass this assessment, there are three opportunities for students to retry.
2. The Senior Exhibition: a presentation of a senior's researched response to the Essential Question (EQ) "How will I best lead?" By this date in mid-May, we should be able to assume that our seniors will have the skills and knowledge to demonstrate their ability to serve their communities as citizens

Our exhibitions-driven planning backwards process led to the development of grade-level developmental Essential Questions (EQs) designed to serve as a focus for entire grade levels. Together with our SWOs, these EQs served as the major entry points to developing a set of expectations for our authentic assessments. The EQs are:

- Freshmen: What Skills Do I Need to Lead My Life?
- Sophomores: How Do I Lead in My Family?
- Juniors: How Can I Lead in My Community?
- Seniors: How Will I Best Lead?

Even though the expectation is to provide numerous and varied opportunities for students to engage in and practice authentic assessments, Advisory—with its emphasis on personalization—became the primary place for instruction, coaching and support toward the skills needed for our authentic assessments.

Some of the strategic structures and scaffolding:

- **Rubrics:** Because we were designing *authentic* assessments, we realized that we had to start communicating our expectations on day one of the freshman year. We designed a rubric that was progressive, identifying not only the standards of work needed to pass

#### Leadership High School's School Wide Outcomes (SWOs)

**Communication:** To understand and clearly and confidently express ideas, opinions, information, attitudes and feelings to and from diverse audiences, through a variety of media.

**Critical Thinking:** To draw conclusions, solve problems or create through analysis, reflection, interpretation, reasoning and evaluation.

**Personal Responsibility:** To be self-aware; to identify, access and utilize skills, knowledge and resources towards development as a life-long learner, and to be accountable to one's self.

**Social Responsibility:** To effectively work and lead in groups, families and communities by actively demonstrating respect and accountability to others and their differences.

their senior year exhibitions, but also the expected benchmarks of a student developing towards these standards across the years. These rubrics are used throughout their four years for any portfolio/exhibition work they do. Additionally, this rubric model has become the standard for other continuums within a course of study including the four years of Advisory.

- **Portfolios:** Students begin to build their Graduation Portfolios in their freshman year. Each year, Advisors progressively introduce a few new components and provide opportunities and support to revise and further develop previous work. By the time they are seniors, students spend most of their time finalizing their work and refining their defense of the SWOs.
- **Exhibitions:** Students must do exhibitions each year. Presentation and preparation expectations are scaffolded: younger students present in teams or use fewer research methods. Here's how exhibitions work at the various grade levels:

- Freshmen collaborate to present to small groups of next year's incoming freshmen. Topics include school culture, academic expectations, activities, etc.
- Sophomores research and consider current "family" needs and collaborate to develop responsive "Family Projects," such as a fair to promote job opportunities. Students self-identify their families; past sophomores organized job and health outreach fairs.
- Juniors develop and initiate projects to address local community issues or needs identified through research. Juniors have developed tutorial programs and have advocated for local environmental and transportation causes.

The San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools (SF-CESS) and Leadership High School offer workshops on developing authentic assessments during their Teaching for Equity Summer Sessions. Please visit <http://sfcess.org/events.html> for more information.

23.1 WINTER 2007

## Exhibitions: Demonstrations of Mastery in Essential Schools

02 Exhibitions: Demonstrations of Mastery in Essential Schools, by Jill Davidson

04 Closing the Gaps of No Child Left Behind: The Assessment Debate for Essential Schools, by Lisa Hirsch, Sedona-Oak Creek School District

08 The Deep Irony of No Child Left Behind: Lisa Hirsch Interviews Linda Darling-Hammond

10 Representing: Elementary to the Exhibition of Learning, by Laura Baker, Greenfield Center School

14 Presenting Themselves with Power and Passion, by Heidi Lyne, Parker Charter Essential School

18 Exhibitions: Facing Outward, Pointing Inward, adapted from text by Joseph P. McDonald

20 Frameworks for Making Science Research Assessable for All, by Annie Chien and Lisa Karlich, School of the Future

26 Structural and Curricular Design: What Changes When an Essential School Commits to Exhibitions, by Gregory Peters, Leadership High School and San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools

29 Review: *Reclaiming Assessment: A Better Alternative to the Accountability Agenda* by Chris W. Gallagher, reviewed by Frank Honts

29 Review: *Widening the Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms* by Mara Sapon-Shevin, reviewed by Jill Davidson

30 Review: *Making Art Together: How Collaborative Art-Making Can Transform Kids, Classroom and Communities* by Mark Cooper and Lisa Sjostrom, reviewed by Denise McLean

30 Review: *And Still We Rise: The Trials and Triumphs of Twelve Gifted Inner-City Students* by Miles Corwin, reviewed by Eva Frank

31 Where to Go for More on Exhibitions and Demonstrations of Mastery

32 Go to the Source: More about the Schools and Organizations Featured in this Issue

### Notes on This Issue

This issue of *Horace* benefited tremendously from the contributions of Denise McLean, Bennington College student and graduate of CES Mentor School Quest High School in Humble, Texas. In early 2007, Denise worked with CES National as an intern; her thoughtful, thorough research, informed by her own Senior Exhibition experience, added depth and focus to these pages. CES alumni like Denise know best the power of Essential schools. We're grateful to all of you who work in many ways to pass it on to the next generation.

Jill Davidson  
Editor, *Horace*



- **Seniors research, make plans, take actions, and present their next and independent steps towards their future leadership roles.** It is here that they answer their EQ, "How will I best lead?" Seniors have focused on leadership roles within the colleges they will attend or the fields they will work in, such as immigrant advocacy.

- **Essential Questions:** Students practice developing and sharing answers to their grade level EQs each year. By the time of their Senior Exhibitions, they are well practiced, understanding both the meaning and purpose behind EQs.

- **Professional Development:** This work requires support for the staff as well as the students. LHS commits tremendous time and resources to professional development for advisors and teachers to develop, execute and refine a program in which authentic assessment is valued and prioritized. This includes planning days focused on authentic assessment, developing the regular practice of looking at adult and student work, and communication and calibration across grade levels.

- **Scaffold...Scaffold... Scaffold:** LHS's designs and decisions consistently consider how to scaffold our students to success. One example is in the design of the exhibition schedule. During these days, classes are suspended and seniors present not to their own Advisory but rather to underclass Advisories. The underclass students themselves present to partner Advisories. All students assess the exhibitions that others present to them. Starting in the students' ninth grade year, the mixture of modeling and critical thinking of Portfolio Defenses and Graduation Exhibitions leads to continuous development of understanding that benefits all students' own exhibitions throughout their LHS careers.

An authentic exhibition is public. Still, bringing the public into our assessments is a difficult task; public demonstrations of mastery may not fully capture the complete context of our school. It's our job, therefore, to share the expectations being assessed and understand the meaning behind such standards. As our exhibitions became more public, our experiences surfaced the need to support participating community members, who are often parents, funders, and neighbors. We now provide them with instruction and scaffolding in order to empower them and their voices in this work. Some of this work includes:

- **Introductory Letter and Overview:** The intention of this letter is to share the vision and purpose of our authentic assessment system and to invite community members to participate either by being present and helping to celebrate our students or by being trained to assess those exhibitions they witness.

- **Training:** Those community members who wish to partake in the assessment of our seniors attend a 45-60 minute in-service outlining our school mission and vision, the specific work students and teachers have done to get to the point of these exhibitions, and the logistics of the actual day. This is guided by a PowerPoint presentation to ensure a common message.

- **Rubric Anchoring:** As the rubric is the key student assessment tool, our entire staff and community evaluators partake in a rubric anchoring activity. During this 60-90 minute in-service, a senior presents her or his actual exhibition after which a facilitator guides the group to a common assessment "score" in order to increase consistency of assessments across exhibitions and evaluators. This activity is repeated early on exhibition days for community evaluators who cannot attend earlier trainings.

To see a sample letter and PowerPoint presentation used to introduce and train community evaluators, go to CES ChangeLab at [www.ceschangelab.org](http://www.ceschangelab.org). Use the Assessment tab to navigate to Leadership High School's contributions.

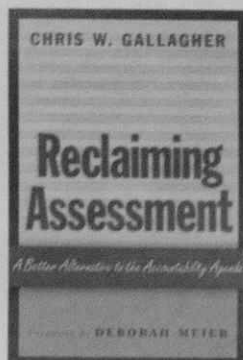
At the end of the year, the LHS leadership team engages in a formal Data Based Inquiry Cycle using the data collected from these rubrics to identify the gaps and needs of our students and to determine a professional development focus and EQ for the following year. Previous foci have led to efforts improving scaffolding for our Critical Thinking SWO and better supporting our ELL students.

We are only at the beginning of our journey to develop and use authentic assessment towards the equitable achievement of the high expectations we hold for our students. Even at this early stage, we are seeing results in which our students are able to connect their ongoing educational experiences and achievement to a clear and personalized purpose—and as a result, to expect, prepare for and celebrate success.

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**Gregory Peters** has served the community of Leadership High School for the past eight years. After serving as Principal for six years, Gregory has taken on the role of Co-Principal in order to open and direct SF-CES (San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools), a CES regional center.

*Reclaiming Assessment: A Better Alternative to the Accountability Agenda* by Chris W. Gallagher, reviewed by Frank Honts (Henemann, 160 pages, \$18.50)



*Reclaiming Assessment: A Better Alternative to the Accountability Agenda* argues that centralized accountability mandates have stifled local schools from designing context-appropriate assessments for their own students. The "Nebraska Story," the centerpiece of Chris Gallagher's provocative book, offers a portrait of one state's decision to decentralize its assessment

system and place decision-making power in the hands of teachers and districts.

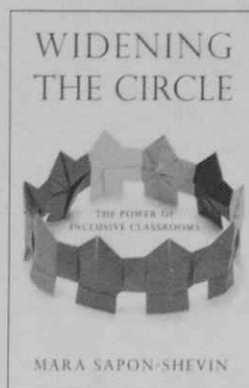
Gallagher contends that systems need to approach accountability through engagement, a term that hinges on relationships between teachers and students as much as on the evaluation of student work tasks, rather than assessment, which implies impersonal, standardized measurement of student performance. In Nebraska, the School-based, Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) frames the state's commitment to crafting fundamentally different approaches to accountability: "...meaningful, sustainable school improvement is possible only by empowering schools to build their capacity," through setting appropriate standards and developing multiple ways to evaluate student progress toward those standards and "not by attempting to control them from the outside."

As an evaluator of the STARS program, Gallagher shows how Nebraska's grass-roots approach has actually produced enthusiasm among participating teachers. Especially interesting are chapters on professional development, which describe how STARS motivates teachers to approach their work by fostering collegial environments where "they feel free to support and critique each other's and their own practice," and community engagement, in which Gallagher claims that STARS has provided an opportunity to re-engage parents who have been excluded from meaningful investment in schools for decades. Indeed, STARS has worked best in schools where professional conversations allow teachers to focus on developing contextually appropriate ways for students' learning demonstrations—a process that necessitates engagement with the community. In this sense, STARS has required Nebraska's teachers to see themselves as activists on behalf of their students: when teachers are empowered to make policy decisions at the local level, they are also obligated to make sure their accountability systems work on behalf of, rather than against, students.

For teachers who continue to work in "high stakes" testing environments, *Reclaiming Assessment* provides a glimpse of how things might be different if only their states would follow Nebraska's lead in developing an "engagement" approach to student assessment. Yet this book implicitly calls on teachers to mobilize against unfair testing practices and advocate for different approaches to assessing students. When teachers outside Nebraska begin to take up that charge, *Reclaiming Assessment* will provide them an example of how their states might approach assessment in a more student-focused, engagement-driven manner.

Formerly on staff at the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School, Frank Honts is a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

*Widening the Circle: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms* by Mara Sapon-Shevin, reviewed by Jill Davidson (Beacon, 184 pages, \$16.00)



*Widening the Circle* argues that all learners—and teachers—contain multitudes. On that basis, inclusion of all students is fundamentally equitable, educationally beneficial, and morally imperative. Inclusion reinforces our democratic commitments, commitments that Essential schools in particular are poised to make or have made already. Fundamentally, an Essential school must be fully inclusive.

Whether a school's mission is sparked by the Common Principles or by a belief in inclusion, the result—a personalized, equitable school with high standards for all and meaningful teaching and learning—will be the same.

The first section describes a persuasive vision of inclusion in which "everybody plays and everybody wins," employing personal and school-based insights to define and make the case for inclusion. The book's second part portrays challenges and opposition to inclusion as failures of imagination. Part three discusses how to get inclusion right and how to do it well, focusing on community building, safety, communication, and more.

Sapon-Shevin promotes an expansive vision of inclusion that's more than a benefit solely for people with unusual physical or learning abilities. Inclusion is a universal practice of accommodating individual needs through personalized relationships, unwavering commitments to equity, and practices such as personal learning plans. Sapon-Shevin concludes by describing how "teaching for all and to all" works when it's done with respect, commitment to social justice, trust, and unwavering resolve.

**Making Art Together: How Collaborative Art-Making Can Transform Kids, Classrooms, and Communities** by Mark Cooper and Lisa Sjostrom, reviewed by Denise McLean (Beacon Press, 208 pages, \$26.95)



As a senior at Quest High School in Humble, Texas, my final exhibition was on the arts and education. While my presentation was geared towards policy and finance, research on how art programs help kids develop and grow was an integral part of the process. That's why I was so excited to read *Making Art Together*.

We always talk about the importance of working collaboratively and the value of teamwork. Combined with the benefits of art for kids, the idea of collaborative art can come together very organically in a school setting. However, despite the extensive planning and preparation that go into creating large scale projects, they often fall apart easily due to lack of support, financial or otherwise.

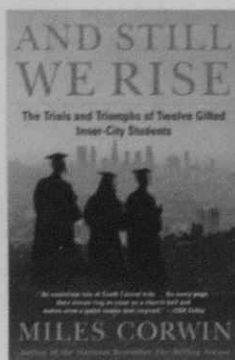
This book provides a great resource for schools and teachers to implement and maintain collaborative art projects in their community. With examples of successful projects done in many different environments and step-by-step help for the process, *Making Art Together* will be useful to schools with established art programs, and it's invaluable for areas that have been forced to cut art budgets. The book takes you from the planning stages (what are you going to create, and who is going to create it?), through funding and collecting support from the community, the creation process, and to a project's conclusion, discussing how to throw a closing ceremony. A handy appendix explains how to create collages, masks, murals, and sculptures—it will help any teacher, principal, or volunteer become a “master artist.”

*Making Art Together* is not just a glorification of collaborative art. Some teachers fear losing control of their classrooms, or the school board or parent association might not support the project. The book suggests ways to anticipate, face, and solve these sorts of problems.

My favorite part of this book was the emphasis on democratic leadership throughout the collaborative process. This idea correlates well with the Common Principles. Providing students with a say in the creation of their work gives them a chance to express themselves nonverbally along with ownership and pride.

I recommend *Making Art Together* not only to arts educators but to any teacher, parent, or community member looking to teach about collaboration, expression, and art.

**And Still We Rise: The Trials and Triumphs of Twelve Gifted Inner-City Students** by Miles Corwin, reviewed by Eva Frank (Harper Perennial, 432 pages, \$14.00)



Miles Corwin was moved to write *And Still We Rise* when he heard about a 15 year old boy splayed out on a South-Central Los Angeles street corner with several gunshot wounds. The boy had no identification other than a neatly printed exam on the French Revolution with a large “A” on the front page. This child had the misfortune to be on the wrong street corner at the wrong time.

“I had written many stories about gangbangers,” writes Corwin. “I decided I wanted to write about the other children of South-Central, the students who avoid the temptations of the street, who strive for success, who, against all odds, in one of America’s most impoverished, crime-ridden neighborhoods, manage to endure, to prevail, to succeed.”

If you are reading this book with an educator’s lens, do not expect to hear of innovative teachers who, through their practice, empower students to choose books, not gangs. In this book, it is the students who are remarkable, not the teachers. The real story here is the students who struggle through life mostly spent on the streets, but find refuge and personal success in Advanced Placement classes in a gifted program at Crenshaw High School.

As educators with a bent toward the progressive, it is important to be reminded that there is not just one way to encourage success, even with the most disenfranchised youth. The students in *And Still We Rise* find refuge from their harsh worlds in the analysis of Hamlet, comfort in the trials of *The Great Gatsby*, and personal enlightenment in *Portrait of an Artist*. While many educators may claim these books have no relevance to these student’s lives, these students would argue these books are what saved their lives. The book serves as a reminder to think broadly, rather than narrowly about how curriculum can be relevant and engaging.

If the students are at the forefront of the story, then the backdrop is the passing of Proposition 209, which ended most affirmative action in California. *And Still We Rise* takes the diametrically opposed teaching approaches of the two AP English teachers at Crenshaw High. One might argue that this book is as compelling as any fiction, but I would argue it is better, because it is the authentic, gritty account of the lives of real inner-city youth.

Eva Frank is the Director of CES National’s EssentialVisions DVD project.



## Where to Go for More

### FairTest

The National Center for Fair and Open Testing (FairTest) is among the nation's leading opponents of high stakes standardized testing and its current (mis)use. In addition to leading the charge to influence local, state, and national policy to support more humane and educationally sound environments for teaching and learning, FairTest also features documentation of alternatives to high-stakes testing, mostly within its Assessment Reform Network (ARN) section. A state-by-state guide to groups that are advocating for authentic performance-based assessment, the ARN provides useful connections to like-minded educators, parents, and other local activists. Other FairTest resources, such as its list of institutions of higher education that are opting out of requiring SATs and other standardized assessments, will also prove useful to Essential school educators.

FairTest  
342 Broadway  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
phone: 617.864.4810  
[www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org)

### The New York Performance Standards Consortium

The New York Performance Standards Consortium (NYPSC) is a group of nearly 30 New York state schools that has won the legal right to use performance based measures to assess students and their schools. The NYPSC website explains how the group used advocacy and activism to win this battle and offers a range of practical tools to support authentic assessment. NYPSC's work is particularly useful to those in the CES network that want to find ways to make Exhibitions work not only in individual schools but as a widespread system of assessment, with reliable, standards-aligned expectations for student work that are consistent not only from student to student but from school to school across a diverse spectrum. Other resources, such as links to parent and student advocacy groups, make the NYPSC's work an indispensable asset.

The New York Performance Standards Consortium  
phone: 212.570.5394  
email: [info@performanceassessment.org](mailto:info@performanceassessment.org)  
[www.performanceassessment.org](http://www.performanceassessment.org)

### The Learning Record

The Learning Record is a classroom-based, standards-referenced approach to assessment which supports meaningful teaching and learning while providing public accountability for student progress and educator effectiveness. Looking at evidence of learning across

five dimensions—confidence and independence, knowledge and understanding, skills and strategies, use of prior and emerging experience, and critical reflection—the Learning Record provides a way for teachers and students themselves to deal with the nuanced, complex world of work that represents student learning and growth. Teachers download the Learning Record for use with tracking student work and their assessments; the web site functions as a comprehensive guide to the Learning Record system. The Learning Record has the potential to be a powerful, valuable tool for Essential school educators and students—indeed, it is built on the very “CES” premise that students need to take an active role in evaluating their own growth and development.

The Learning Record  
Peg Syverson, Ph.D.  
Division of Rhetoric and Writing  
University of Texas at Austin  
1 University Station, B5500  
Austin, TX 78705  
phone: 512.471.8734  
email: [syverson@uts.cc.utexas.edu](mailto:syverson@uts.cc.utexas.edu)  
[www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~syverson/olr](http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~syverson/olr)

### Authentic Education

Authentic Education is the organization founded by former CES staffer Grant Wiggins and associates to support Understanding by Design (UbD). UbD—also a book by Wiggins and Jay McTighe, published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)—is well known within and outside of the CES network for the practice of collaborative “backward planning” to develop curriculum and assessment methods to deepen student understanding. The Authentic Education website is a useful port of entry into the UbD empire, with links to the organization's online journal *Big Ideas* and the Understanding by Design Exchange. Both fee-for-service sites, *Big Ideas* and the UbD Exchange are emphatically practitioner-based, using educators' experience and classroom wisdom to suggest new practices across the curriculum and among different kinds of learners. The Authentic Education site also provides information about UbD professional development opportunities. It's useful both to old UbD hands and those that are new to the idea that comprehensive collaborative planning is essential for effective authentic assessment and other practices associated with locally-controlled, student-centered, standards-based teaching and learning.

Authentic Education  
P.O. Box 148  
Hopewell, NJ 08525-0148  
phone: 732.329.0641  
[www.authenticeducation.org](http://www.authenticeducation.org)  
Big Ideas: [www.bigideas.org](http://www.bigideas.org)  
Understanding by Design Exchange:  
[www.ubdexchange.org](http://www.ubdexchange.org)

## Go To The Source: More about the Schools and Other Organizations Featured in this Issue

### Schools

**Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School**  
49 Antietam Street  
Devens, Massachusetts 01434  
phone: 978.772.3293  
[www.parker.org](http://www.parker.org)

**Greenfield Center School**  
71 Montague City Road  
Greenfield, Massachusetts 01301  
phone: 413.773.1700  
[www.centerschool.net](http://www.centerschool.net)

**Leadership High School**  
400 Mansell Street, Suite 136  
San Francisco, California 94134  
phone: 415.841.8910  
[www.leadershiphigh.org](http://www.leadershiphigh.org)

**Mission Hill School**  
67 Alleghany Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02120  
phone: 617.635.6384  
[www.missionhillschool.org](http://www.missionhillschool.org)

**School of the Future**  
127 East 22nd Street  
New York, New York 10010  
phone: 212.475.8086  
[www.sof.edu](http://www.sof.edu)

**Sedona Red Rock High School**  
995 Upper Red Rock Loop Road  
Sedona, Arizona 86336  
phone: 928.204.6700  
[www.sedona.k12.az.us/socusd/highschool/srrhs.html](http://www.sedona.k12.az.us/socusd/highschool/srrhs.html)

### Other Organizations

**Forum for Education and Democracy**  
P.O. Box 216  
Amesville, Ohio 45711  
phone: 740.448.3402  
[www.forumforeducation.org](http://www.forumforeducation.org)

**Sedona-Red Rock School District**  
221 Brewer Road  
Sedona, Arizona 86336  
phone: 928.204.6800  
[www.sedona.k12.az.us](http://www.sedona.k12.az.us)

**San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools**  
1095 Market Street, Suite 504  
San Francisco, CA 94103  
phone: 415.992.5007  
[www.sfcass.org](http://www.sfcass.org)

**Stanford School Redesign Network**  
Stanford University  
505 Lasuen Mall  
Stanford, CA 94305-3084  
phone: 650.725.0703  
email: [schoolredesign@stanford.edu](mailto:schoolredesign@stanford.edu)  
[www.schoolredesign.net](http://www.schoolredesign.net)

**Theodore R. Sizer Teachers Center**  
49 Antietam Street  
Devens, MA 01434  
phone: 978.772.2687  
[www.parker.org/stc](http://www.parker.org/stc)

## Affiliate with CES National

If CES stands for what you believe in—personalized, equitable, intellectually vibrant schools—we invite you to affiliate with CES National. Affiliating with the CES network as a school, organization, or individual gives you a number of benefits, including subscriptions to *Horace* and our newsletter *In Common*, discounted fees and waivers to our annual Fall Forum, and eligibility to apply for research and professional development grants, and more. For more information about CES National Affiliation, visit [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org)

# CES Announcements

## National Exhibitions Month— May 2007!

Join with Essential schools nationwide to show the world what students know and can do during National Exhibition Month! See page 25 or visit [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org) for more!

## CES Congratulates Sizer Scholar Recipient!

The Theodore R. Sizer Dissertation Scholars Grant Program awarded the Winter 2007 grant to Bethany Plett of Texas A&M University. Plett is completing her Ph.D. with a research emphasis on English language learners in conversion high schools. She has taught secondary English language learners in a conversion small school for four years. Congratulations!

The deadline for the next round of Sizer Scholar grants is April 20, 2007. For more information about the Theodore R. Sizer Dissertation Scholars Grant Program, please visit the CES National website at [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org) or contact CES Director of Research Jay Feldman at [jfeldman@essentialschools.org](mailto:jfeldman@essentialschools.org) or 510.433-1914.

## Award for EssentialVisions!

The CES EssentialVisions DVD series recently won an AEGIS video and film production award in the category of training/education. The series is also being considered for the Association of Educational Publishers' Excellence in Educational Publishing Golden Lamp Award and Distinguished Achievement Award.

Look for the third and final DVD, Disc 3: School Culture coming November 2007.

### Photo Information

Cover: A Greenfield Center School student practices with a story grammar marker rope in a literature circle in her class before sharing the parts of the story at All School Meeting.

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

**But what do the Common Principles really look like in action? How do they sound? What does it *feel* like when students are using their minds well?**

The CES EssentialVisions DVD series is the perfect way to complete your understanding. Go inside today's most successful schools and *experience* the Principles at work.



### Disc1: Classroom Practice Introduces:

- Less Is More,  
Depth Over Coverage
- Student-as-Worker,  
Teacher-as-Coach



### Disc2: Student Achievement Brings to life:

- Personalization
- Demonstration of  
Mastery
- Commitment to the  
Entire School

Order Your Copy of EssentialVisions Discs 1 and 2  
Online at [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org) (click "CES Store")  
Or call us at 510 433 1451







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## This Year in Horace

### 23.1: Exhibitions: Demonstrations of Mastery in Essential Schools

*Horace* focuses on how Essential schools use exhibitions, examining what is needed to implement an exhibition-based curriculum, analyzing exhibitions at various grade levels and within various disciplines, and discussing the impact of No Child Left Behind on exhibitions and vice versa.

### 23.2: Essential Mathematics Education

Essential school mathematics educators debate the advantages and challenges of responding to "less is more" and other CES Common Principles in mathematics, addressing what's happening now in Essential school math instruction.

### 23.3: What's Essential about Elementary Schools?

*Horace* looks at the latest thinking in the CES network about what defines CES elementary schools, inviting practitioners to discuss how elementary schools express the CES Common Principles.

### 23.4: Beyond Reform: Transformations

*Horace* explores how communities interrupt the status quo and create the conditions for transformed schools. How do transformed schools—and their larger environments—sustain and evolve as student-centered, collaborative, academically challenging and equitable places of learning?

*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

# Exhibitions: Demonstrations of Mastery in Essential Schools

by Jill Davidson

What is an exhibition? This issue of *Horace* features reflection, analysis, critique, description, and arguments from six Essential school educators. Their work provides compelling examples of how diverse schools—elementary and secondary, rural and urban, public, charter, and independent—employ exhibitions for four key purposes:

- to ensure engagement among students, staff, and the larger community
- to assess student learning and, therefore, school effectiveness authentically
- to raise the stakes for students and a school in ways that support and advance an Essential school's goals
- to create schools that express the Common Principles in everything that they do

## Exhibitions Ensure Internal and External Engagement

Exhibitions are not synonymous with performance based assessment, which happens in myriad ongoing formal and informal ways and settings. Exhibitions are performance based assessments made visible, public demonstrations of mastery that depend on participation of people from outside the school community as mentors and evaluators. This public dimension assures engagement both within and outside the school community.

In *Reclaiming Assessment: A Better Alternative to the Accountability Agenda*, Chris W. Gallagher asserts that engagement, not accountability, should both be the means to and end of school improvement. Public demonstrations of mastery constitute an engagement system for the entire school and serve a higher purpose as demonstrations of what's possible to communities, policy makers, government officials, district personnel, other schools, and the media.

## Exhibitions Assess Student Learning and School Effectiveness Authentically

Authentic achievement is “intellectual accomplishments that are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful, such as those undertaken by successful adults,” writes researcher Fred Newmann. “For children, we define authentic academic achievement through three criteria critical to significant intellectual accomplishment: construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and the value of achievement beyond school.” Exhibitions make each aspect of that definition happen because they properly reflect the complexity of schooling. When a school is structured around the goal of promotion and graduation by exhibition, it provides personalized challenge, celebration and most important, choice.

Recently exhibitions have been described by some Essential school educators as “360-degree exams,”

## Related Resource

*Horace* 18.2, “Personalized Assessment and Standards,” looks at how various assessment methods employed by CES schools, including exhibitions, align with local and state standards. Available online at:

[www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces\\_docs/resources/horace/18\\_2/18\\_2\\_toc.html](http://www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/resources/horace/18_2/18_2_toc.html).



providing a comprehensive view rather than a limited slice of student achievement. Driven by and always responding to essential questions and individual student interests, exhibitions demonstrate that real intellectual work has no “right answers” that trump other responses. While demonstrating competence according to state, local, school, and personal standards, exhibitions are unique, personalized work products, representing each individual’s growth, interest, capacities, response to challenge, and effort.

Exhibitions authentically prepare young people for democratic participation, citizenship, and lifelong learning. They function as rites of passage that help students become poised self-advocates able to present themselves to the world. Exhibitions require that students develop the capacity to become intellectually curious independent learners. And exhibitions have the power to connect students to their callings as they develop essential skills for lifelong success. As former CES researcher Jodi Brown Podl wrote in “Anatomy of an Exhibition,” “Students must assume responsibility for their own learning. A well-structured exhibition often depends on a student-directed classroom. The students must be willing to find the answers themselves (even if the teacher already knows them). Discovering meaning takes persistence and patience. So much of high school feels like an intellectual charade to the students. When they are given the chance to do difficult work, students are surprised at the pleasure that comes from real intellectual achievement.”

### Related Resource

*Horace 6.3, “Performance and Exhibitions: The Demonstration of Mastery”* provides perspective on exhibitions from Ted Sizer and other early CES leaders, along with examples from the first generation of schools that consciously planned backwards to make graduation by exhibition possible. Available online at:

[www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces\\_res/138](http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/138)

### Exhibitions Raise the Stakes

Just as an exhibition is an authentic piece of work from a particular student, exhibitions at a school are an authentic reflection of that school, dependent on a school culture, not just the product of a particular class. Schools that do this work successfully know that they need to devote time for the effort and habits of mind that exhibitions demand, provide suitable professional development, and use assessment methods that provide information that fuels continuous opportunities for reflection and improvement.

### Exhibitions Project

As the Coalition of Essential Schools developed as an organization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, we focused on understanding, encouraging, and analyzing how exhibitions had the potential to transform all aspects of a school. From 1990-1993, the Exhibitions Project, funded by IBM, studied exhibitions within CES, focusing on six schools in particular. Among its work products, still available in various forms from CES National, were a series of “Studies on Exhibitions” papers and an electronically-based Digital Portfolio project, a set of course and exit-level exhibitions and samples of student work with accompanying commentary on vision, setting, standards, and reflections. The Exhibitions Project, the first in-depth effort to understand the transformative effect of high stakes public demonstrations of mastery, made exhibitions practices widespread and public and continues to have a powerful influence on our understanding of such assessments.

Real tasks that are linked to real outcomes comprise exhibitions. Students and educators identify and agree in advance on what constitutes success in ways that are reliable and valid. Rubrics and detailed feedback tell students that a wide variety of evaluators agree that they’ve met their goals and have created meaningful, relevant work. Such measures turn what could be a low-stakes recital into powerful experiences for learning and growth.

Because exhibitions are high stakes assessments, aligned with standards and reliable and valid ways of assessing student performance, they do not work when an alternative system such as high stakes standardized tests is superimposed. Essential schools with fully articulate exhibitions programs are forced to shoe-horn obligations created by state and federal assessment systems into the structures and systems. Linda Darling-Hammond’s comments on page eight’s “The Deep Irony of No Child Left Behind” offers insight into the crucial role Essential school educators and students have to play as advocates of and examples of better ways of assessing teaching and learning.

### Exhibitions Create Schools that Express the Common Principles

Over time, one of the Common Principles, usually referred to in its short form as “Demonstration of Mastery,” has become most closely associated with the practice of exhibitions. As the essays that follow reveal, however, schools that have been designed for exhibitions express the ideas of the Common Principles in everything that they do.

Because exhibitions are not meaningless exercises sprung on students in their senior year, they are

*(continued on page 13)*



## Closing the Gaps of No Child Left Behind: The Assessment Debate for Essential Schools

by Lisa Hirsch, Sedona-Oak Creek School District

Recently, a local reporter asked me if No Child Left Behind did more good than bad. I was sitting at my desk with a reporting folder for our district's upcoming NCLB audit. We had already spent countless hours putting together data to illustrate our decisions. In fact, we hired a consultant to strategize ways to "make the grade" with the state auditors. As the district's curriculum and instruction director, I was assigned to report on what we are doing about low test scores among specific populations in all grade levels. I looked up from the data to the local reporter and said, "There is no good in spending a disproportionate amount of time and money on reporting when the money and my time could be spent in classrooms. Nor is it a good thing to make decisions based solely on test scores, because soon enough, our decisions will translate more and more into teaching to the test, cutting out what is truly vital and essential for meaningful learning."

For the most part, our NCLB academic reporting reflects standardized test scores. Neither the report nor any NCLB funds link to our high school exhibitions. Unfortunately, the reporting and remedy structure that's been imposed on us forces us to commit to quick fixes implemented with little turnaround time. The word "curriculum" is being altered to mean programs—scripted and lackluster programs. We fear that the assessment systems in our district schools will look more and more like the specific tests that the students take annually in the spring. Especially in the early grades, teachers agonize over dumping meaningful, robust lessons that are not "scientifically" proven. As of late, the high school also has a Reading Recovery program. Teachers and kids do see improvement on their reading, but to what end?



Sedona Red Rock High School (SRRHS) serves a distinctly diverse community of learners. Within a five mile radius from the high school, there are five million dollar mansions, mobile home parks where two or more families share a trailer, and lots of other types of housing in between. The English Language Learner population is at least 20% and growing. Though some Sedona Red Rock students have lived in town all their lives, most have come from other parts of the country and from outside the United States.

To graduate from the high school, each student must earn 30.5 credits and successfully execute a senior exhibition. Most of our classes are project based and are aimed at preparing students for their exhibitions. This high stakes assessment is required for everyone, even our foreign exchange students. As in most CES schools, the level of scaffolding varies from student to student, yet everyone's work is judged with the same rubric. Since our first graduating class in 1997, four students have not graduated because they did not complete their exhibitions. In 1999, the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) was introduced as the standardized state graduation test, and in 2006, students were required to pass the AIMS Reading, Writing and Math tests in order to graduate. Our students now have four high stakes graduation exams, three at the state level and one exhibition, and more are on the way.

Though SRRHS has preserved exhibitions as a graduation requirement, six years ago we reduced the number of graduation exhibitions because of the imminent tests. The decision was made despite incredible debates among the faculty. The conclusion was that the faculty was worn thin mentoring exhibitions and that time at school would soon be consumed by the state tests. And in fact, more than ever, the state tests threaten to eradicate the CES practices we've worked so long to create, such as integrated curriculum, mixed age level courses, and heterogeneous grouping.

Holding on to CES practices at our high school and progressive practices at our elementary schools has been difficult. Over the past few years, the district has spent money on test prep materials at all of the schools, and most teachers use these materials for two weeks prior to the test. This time eclipses time for hands-on math and exciting science, and sometimes, it cuts recess short.

Even though all of our schools are doing well according to Arizona's NCLB classification system, the students who do not meet the standard are assigned to remediate with Reading Recovery programs and other materials that have little connection to the content of the curriculum. Because struggling students are pulled out of class while their counterparts get enriched reading lessons, the testing structure is destroying our heterogeneous classes as well. And the situation is going to get even more difficult: in 2008, Arizona will institute a state science test in fourth and eighth grades, a social studies test in fifth and seventh grades, and end of course testing in science and social studies at the high school level by 2010.

I do appreciate the fact that NCLB has woken us up out of our sleepy resistance to truly educating English Language Learners (ELL) and other struggling children. As Ted Sizer observed, I like the fact that "NCLB does not permit warehousing students until graduation day." Since the implementation of NCLB, our district has hired more ELL-endorsed teachers and hired more certified ELL teachers and aides specifically to work with teachers and students. We have also restructured our ELL reporting system to track individual ELL students' achievement in their course work and test scores. All teachers in Arizona are required to take sheltered English immersion instruction. However, at this time, there seems to be more pull out than push in. But the goal remains to have more people and other resources focused on this population.

But what I dislike the most about NCLB is that it flies in the face of what we know in our hearts and through research to be true: that no single decision should be made using test scores alone, especially for the purpose of graduation. In fact, on just about every

Three years ago, I was teaching humanities at Sedona Red Rock High School and writing my doctoral dissertation, in which I asked, "What's happening to graduation by exhibition programs and practices with the growing imposition of high stakes tests under No Child Left Behind?" My findings, which follow, show that even in NCLB's early days, it was having a detrimental effect on some students, particularly in schools that serve students of color at which the standardized tests determined graduation or were otherwise high-stakes.

### **Perceived Effects of High Stakes Testing on the Internal Assessment Systems in Coalition of Essential Schools**

This mixed methods study examined the perception of 184 Coalition high school teachers and administrators from 46 schools in 21 states regarding the impact of NCLB on school designed performance based assessment systems. The respondents answered a survey regarding their level of agreement with NCLB's influence on curriculum and instruction, assessment, staff development, course offerings and student groupings.

The study also examined the results across four conditions: high stakes, high minority schools; high stakes, low minority schools; low stakes, high minority schools; and low stakes, low minority schools.

Key findings indicate that teachers and principals only perceive a slight shift in priorities in student groupings toward homogeneity, reduction in performance assessments and alignment of these assessments to state standards. There was a bit more of a shift in course offerings, aligning curriculum to the test and, test prep time taking away from innovation and an increase in staff development focusing on testing.

The most significant shifts came in high stakes, high minority schools, with the exception that at low stakes, high minority schools, staff development time regarding tests exceeded that of schools in the other groups.

The qualitative data indicated more frustration with NCLB than statistical data indicated across all of the conditions. The qualitative findings indicated that respondents from high stakes, high minority conditions reported more hostility and anger and philosophical opposition to the changes prompted by the tests.

educational test is a warning label addressing this fact. However, basing progress on test scores—specifically on a single form of one test—is the premise of the interpretation of the No Child Left behind Act of 2001. Researchers have known for years that instruction and assessment are closely tied. Now we all know this. We know it so well that we fear the tests will take over our dominion as free thinking teachers.

### Marisol and Julie: Beyond Assessment

Julie and Marisol represent two ends of Sedona's economic and cultural spectrum. Julie was born and raised in a wealthy family. Her parents are college educated, and she always knew she would attend college.

Marisol walked to Sedona from Mexico to join her older brothers after the death of her father. Marisol had a relatively good life in Mexico, but after her father's death, her mother abused alcohol, and the desperate situation forced Marisol, her sister and her mother to seek a new life. Marisol entered high school with a sub-par education and not one word of English. She tells us now, four and a half years later, her dream was to make some friends and try to graduate. Marisol also wanted to find a place where she could go to ride a horse; she loved horses and had a place to ride in Mexico.

Julie's dream in ninth grade was to also make some true friends. She was born with a deformity of her jaw which affected her appearance and her ability to chew and swallow properly. She was slated for orthognathic surgery when she turned 16. She had faced incredible ridicule from her peer group and could not wait for a new face.

In March of their junior year, Julie and Marisol had to write their senior exhibition proposals. Marisol chose to study the food and nutrition needed to keep horses healthy, as well as the physical grooming needed for a healthy horse. She also wanted to learn what it would take to become a trainer or a veterinarian. Julie had undergone successful surgery. She wanted to chronicle her medical and emotional experience and create an educational video and handbook for future patients whom she would counsel as part of her project and her possible future career. All students need to write a substantial research paper addressing all or part of their thesis statement.

As one of her committee members, Marisol's proposal process was incredibly difficult for me. We pantomimed, drew pictures, and worked with two other committee members and the ELL teacher until we had something polished. She wrote 14 drafts before we were able to sign off on the project. We also needed to find a mentor with a horse for her.

Julie's proposal was intense as well because of the wide range of what she wanted to cover. She also was emotionally attached to the project and still overcoming the enormous physical change of her looks, her new relationship to her peer group, and her ability to chew and to swallow.

The proposal writing process is infamous at SRRHS. Past graduates moan about 25 drafts, controversial topics, and nitpicky teachers. Though Julie and Marisol's proposal processes were exhausting for me, I found myself boasting about both of them when the committee finally signed off!

The proposal work was just the tip of the iceberg. Teachers also spend oodles of time with the kids coaching their required research paper. The exhibition process for our students, although uniform on paper, is completely customized for each student because they come to the work with such a wide range of skills, attitudes and natures of their studies.

Julie's stumbling blocks were surprisingly similar to Marisol's in many regards and expectantly different in others.

Julie and Marisol had to rely heavily on other people for interviews, resources, and encouragement. They both faced a lot of emotional stress: Marisol's language barrier, and Julie's experience of the tension between some people who did not understand the difference between cosmetic surgery and required surgery for better health as well as continued adjustment from her experience. The girls each had more than one caring adult by their side. They both worked several hours after school in spa industry related jobs, and they both were retaking the high stakes standardized tests. Marisol was trying to pass and Julie was trying to exceed the standards.

Julie's final product was incredible. Her ability to write about the medical and emotional aspect of the procedure flowed from her pen. Her doctors in California, and Sedona consistently supplied her with interviews. She had medical books, editing equipment for her film, and transportation at her disposal. She was also applying to several colleges during the process. Her presentation was riveting. She invited nearly 50 people to her exhibition in addition to her three judges, one of which is always a trained community member.

Marisol, along with three other SRRHS students, got permission to delay her exhibition presentation because she was also working intensely on receiving tutoring for the AIMS tests in reading, writing and math. Midway through her senior year, the Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction sued the prosecutor and our district court in a 10 year trial on ELL funding, and overturned the decision of state exams, resulting in the fact that all ELLs had to pass AIMS to graduate. Marisol passed the math test and the writing test after five attempts, and though she struggled mightily with the reading test, her score improved, but she did not pass. She was able to receive an augmentation score from her grades in order to graduate, but the entire process was bittersweet for her as she was also diagnosed with a learning disability two weeks before the results came back. This diagnoses, had it come earlier, would have excused her from passing the tests at all!

Marisol's exhibition was a triumph. She befriended our school resource officer who owned a police horse. Rena, the officer, shared many hours with Marisol of riding and caring for the horse. The librarian of our school who tutored her on the AIMS reading and writing tests was also her exhibition sponsor and taught Marisol how to make a Power Point presentation on feeding and caring for the horse. She also helped Marisol structure her ten page research paper that exceeded the typical number of five drafts by five!

She presented the entire project in English. Her Power Point was professional, and Dr. Suzy Ort, a former teaching colleague from our days at New York City's University Heights High School, attended the presentation. Marisol's mother and sister were also there, along with her sponsor. We went outside for a demonstration with the horse, and when it was over, there were tears of joy. The level of learning and demonstration of knowledge and skills blew the lid off any state exam.



At the start of this school year, I was asked to recommend several young women to a very prestigious group in town called Sedona Women, better known as Dames who make a Difference. They wanted to recognize damsels who made a difference and they wanted to feature them in a talk show based on "The View." Each damsel would share from her past. The nominating committee came to my office and already had damsels in mind based on recommendations from our community judges. It was no surprise that Julie and Marisol were two out of the five that were chosen.

During the Dames' version of "The View," Julie presented a segment of her exhibition. She spoke candidly about the process and how it changed her life to be able to present and truly examine her journey. Marisol spoke about her journey from Mexico to her exhibition and passing the state exams in reading and writing. She let us know that she had started classes at our nearby community college and was promoted to manager at her job in a hotel restaurant. The two young women shared so much more than any state test score could ever demonstrate.

At the 2006 CES Fall Forum, representing the Forum for Democracy and Education, Stanford University education professor Linda Darling-Hammond spoke about the national testing craze in ways that I found inspiring. She commented that "tiny cracks" in the current testing system were motivating her desire to get involved with NCLB's upcoming reauthorization. These cracks, in states like Nebraska, give her hope regarding changing the nature and the stakes of the states' assessment systems. Darling-Hammond also shared information about the 2006 Florida gubernatorial election, which had educational testing as its central argument. She believed we needed to capitalize on these cracks and bust them open. Darling-Hammond spoke frankly about the deep ironies that are resulting from NCLB. Sensible teachers are making nonsense decisions, such as putting a letter grade on diagnostic tests or excluding low performing students from time with an artist in the classroom so they can practice reading.

Many educational researchers and even more educators will stand by the knowledge that performance based assessment should be valued at least as much as standardized multiple choice tests. It's clear that many schools like Sedona Red Rock High School are persevering, but not thriving like they could. What is needed at the school level are meaningful conversations about all of the CES Common Principles. School people need to take action and be conscious of keeping a healthy balance between real teaching and test preparation. Meanwhile, teachers and principals need to take every opportunity to showcase publicly their performance based work and invite local and state lawmakers, community members, and local media to take part. For the sake of our students, we need to leverage demonstrations of mastery to find the tiny cracks in our local settings in order to create real change that will benefit all students.

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**Lisa Hirsch** is the Sedona-Oak Creek School District Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator. She taught at Sedona Red Rock High School for 11 years, spent five years teaching at New York City's University Heights High School, and is currently a member of the CES National Executive Board.

A note to readers: Ted Sizer relayed his thoughts about No Child Left Behind in the course of an interview with Lisa Hirsch.