

# HORACE

## NEWSLETTER OF THE COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS

Co-sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Independent Schools

Volume I, No.1

March 1985

### GETTING STARTED Molly Schen

The central staff of the Coalition of Essential Schools has been busy talking with prospective partners in these first six months. Frequent plane flights, meetings in Providence, and untold telephone conversations and letters have swirled about. A chronological description of our activities follows.

Early in September, Thayer High School in Winchester, New Hampshire and Adelphi Academy in Brooklyn, New York joined the Coalition. Both schools had been in close communication with Ted Sizer for some time, and they were ready and eager formally to announce their partnership with the Coalition.

The press that followed close on the heels of Thayer and Adelphi's announcement gave rise to a flurry of inquiries about the Coalition. To date, more than 300 schools have requested information about the Coalition--from 42 states and 2 foreign countries (Canada and Yemen!). Ted Sizer and Holly Houston, as the "travelers" of the central staff, had visions of being overwhelmed by the geographic distribution of the schools, so a decision was made to begin close to home, to develop a Northeast "cluster" of schools first and then carefully add schools in other regions of the country.

In late October, representatives from 13 schools from New York and New England came to Providence for the first Principals' Council. Folks from Thayer and Adelphi attended, and other school people were invited whose interest ranged from curious to "already planning." The weather was unseasonably warm, shirtsleeves were rolled up, and the hard work began. What do the Common Principles really mean, and how can you adapt them to local situations? What are some of the implications of the Common Principles? What problems were being encountered in the schools? Wrestling with these questions occupied hours of time, but proved fruitful. It became clear, once again, that individual schools have unique concerns. The concerns can be generalized (politics, staff, finances, defining mastery, etc.) but each school has to formulate solutions locally--while gleaning ideas from others. A particularly intriguing session was spent discussing "good teaching" with Sizer's Brown University students.

A second Principals' Council took place in December. Three schools--all from Texas--were represented. Again the weather was balmy, a disappointment for snow-starved southwesterners. The schools (United Day School in Laredo, R. L. Paschal Senior School in Fort Worth, and Westbury High School in Houston) discussed state legislation,

exhibitions, entry level requirements, summer workshops and more. In the Council's final hour, Sizer warmly invited the three schools to join the Coalition once their governing boards approved. By the end of February, United Day School and R. L. Paschal Senior High School were officially on board, and Westbury Senior High School was finalizing discussions with Houston's school board.

In early February the central staff hosted the third Principals' Council. School people from the Baltimore, Maryland area and Portland, Maine attended. After the schools were introduced, vigorous discussion ensued on coaching, the four curriculum areas, recruiting, and college admissions. The complexity of the Coalition's enterprise began to surface when exhibitions of mastery came under discussion. What will exhibitions look like? How will they be administered? How can you personalize exhibitions to get the most out of the students without losing standards? These issues are knotty--and for some, they are important to resolve when planning an Essential School as they affect the curriculum, pedagogy, and structure of the school day.

As is apparent, school selection has been an important part of the early work of the Coalition. The central staff has also begun to commission papers on several critical aspects of the Coalition's work, and Arthur Powell has been asked to take on a study of "Exhibitions" for graduation. Holly Houston will be leading the Coaching Workshop for Essential Schools this summer. In addition, the "Portrait" (the baseline narrative report) of Thayer High School is presently being written by Helen Eccles.

Coalition funding has been substantial, but because as many as thirty schools could eventually join the partnership (twenty to be served directly from Brown's central staff; perhaps ten or more in regional "clusters") and the original Prospectus planned for 5-12 schools, the central staff is still actively seeking funds. To date, the following foundations have given generously: Carnegie Corporation, Danforth Foundation, Charles E. Culpeper Foundation, Exxon Education Foundation, and the Edward John Noble Foundation. Some schools have been successful in raising funds for their own planning efforts as well.

The time is fast approaching when the Coalition will be ready to look at schools farther afield, specifically in the Midwest and California. By September, the Coalition could well have a dozen schools in its family.

Molly Schen is Coordinator of the Coalition of Essential Schools and Editor of this newsletter.

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**STUDENTS AT THAYER ASK:  
WHAT'S IMPORTANT IN A HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION?**  
Robby Fried and Jimmy Karlan

As a new year begins, students at Thayer High School are compiling several lists in addition to their New Year's resolutions. They're asking other students and members of the community to determine which skills in life are important to them--and which seem to be missing from Thayer.

The survey was prompted by faculty concern for more student input into the planning for a new performance-based curriculum. About 150 students helped with the survey, and two students (Lori Freyenhagen and Tammy Foster) tabulated the wide range of responses.

Students feel they are learning many essential skills in high school: speech, foreign language, and math were most often listed; study skills, stress management and business savvy were also mentioned.

Students say they do not learn the following: how to handle money, how to raise a family, and how to engage in a variety of subjects/careers from carpentry to counseling, automotive repair to astronomy.

Community members who were surveyed tended to merge the concept of "skill" with the traditional compartmentalization of subjects offered in high school. They identified math, English, typing and home economics as "skills" solidly acquired; physics, grammar, logic, and technical training were only faintly understood in high school, they said.

Student survey results have been referred to by faculty in determining exit level skills for Thayer in the future. The faculty has paid particular attention to the students' concern over "survival skills" such as running a family and raising children.

Robby Fried is a consultant to Thayer High School. Jimmy Karlan is Director of the Apprenticeship Program and Coordinator of a 2-week school-community project at the school.

**GOING FOR ACTIVE LEARNERS**  
Valerie Cole

Mine is not a success story, at least not in the traditional sense. In my English class at Thayer High School, I want to encourage self-motivation, self-direction, creativity, and time management in my students. A tall order!

This year I began by asking my high level 11-12th grade students to choose a subject of interest to them. In eight weeks' time, they were to present a seminar to the rest of the class about their explorations and discoveries. "Use 35mm cameras, A-V equipment--anything to capture the spirit of your work (and increase your knowledge)," I advised them.

Students were required to turn in a time card every Monday. There were also two formal progress checks and lots of informal conferencing. As projects got underway, time cards showed that more time was being spent than was evidenced in the progress checks. But when the students realized that I was checking their time cards (as any employer would) the situation more or less righted itself.

When the results were in eight weeks later, I was frankly disappointed. 90% of the presentations lacked imagination, content or even evidence of hard work. Perhaps I was expecting too much too soon.

In the students' project evaluations, criticisms were interesting and helpful. The students mentioned the frustration of not being able to perform certain skills (from narrowing topics to self-motivation). But all of the students thought the project was worthwhile and wanted another chance to do it again in the spring.

In my own assessment, I wonder if I have the necessary information and training to sponsor this kind of complex project. I definitely need better training in coaching. Maybe the Coalition could consider providing on-site workshops.

As a follow-up to the project, I am asking students to submit an addendum which will entail review of the material, reorganization and resubmission. One student remarked, "I don't need you on my case. I'm already disgusted enough with myself, so I don't need your criticisms, too." A second chance will help that student and me. We're all "learning by doing."

Valerie Cole, an English teacher, has been at Thayer High School for twelve years.

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## START-UP AT ADELPHI ACADEMY Janet Birnkrant

Adelphi's faculty looked at opening days in September 1984 with optimism and a bit of caution. The new "Adelphi Plan" was due to be instituted after careful planning on the part of the Administration. When a three-day faculty orientation session was over, however, many questions remained--both theoretical and organizational.

How do you "coach" a student? How can lectures and seminars be integrated when they're taught by two teachers? Who will cover when teachers are absent? In this start-up phase, what happens to students who perform above or below their "grade" level? Will after-school coaching periods help the recalcitrant learner?

Now, towards trimester's end, we are wrestling with these queries, and reaching some conclusions, compromises and pitfalls.

Coaching is a slowly evolving behavioral change for most of Adelphi's teachers. Gradually, we're learning to place a premium on listening to students, instead of talking at them. We're planning more workshops, and we plan to send some teachers to the summer institute on coaching at Brown University in July.

Integrating seminar and lecture formats has been tricky. Sometimes a seminar precedes a lecture period--a scheduling inevitability. Some teachers grumble because their classes meet only once a week, while others often ignore the "coaching" pedagogy appropriate in a seminar and continue to teach by lecturing. Faculty communication has proved absolutely essential in confronting these problems. We have outlined the week's lectures in the English/History office, for example, so that teachers can see and discuss the material. Frequent department meetings air feelings and underscore the importance of the seminar teacher as the primary student evaluator.

Teacher absenteeism poses a few problems--none insurmountable. Lectures can be picked up by other "generalists" who have a firm grasp of the subject content. Seminars can be distributed among other seminar sessions meeting the same period (actually an advantage over the traditional isolated-classroom structure).

Those few (10-15) students who do not "fit in" some aspect of Adelphi's curriculum are using the University of Nebraska's high school courses. Eventually all students will follow the same curriculum within their ability grouping, but for now we must meet the needs of the existing student body. This stop-gap seems to be working well.

We have yet to see if the after-school coaching periods will help our students. We need to be better coaches, and our students are just beginning to grasp the significance of our emphasis on having them demonstrate what they know.

The Adelphi Plan is young and still has its jagged edges. However, this faculty is united in its will to graduate students who can use knowledge as a thinking process rather than as a compendium of useless data soon to be forgotten upon graduation. With our individual approach, our coaching and teamwork, we hope to promote more enthusiastic learning.

Janet Birnkrant attended the first Principals' Council last October. She is the Preparatory School Coordinator at Adelphi Academy this year and was the Upper School Coordinator for the previous two years.

## PROBLEM SOLVING IN HOME ECONOMICS Erica Miner

I believe very strongly that we do not teach our students to think for themselves--or not nearly as much as we should. In an attempt to help students think independently, I began with a straightforward outline on decision making in my eighth grade home economics class.

1. State the problem. What decision must I make?
2. Identify three ways I might handle this problem.
3. Choose the best of these three options and list two positive and two negative possibilities that might come from it.
4. Ask if I'm comfortable with the possibilities. If "no," I go back to Step #2. If "yes," I act.

We applied the process to dilemmas that my students might realistically be facing. Example: "I am at a party with my best friend. We've come in his parent's car, although I'm not far from my home. He has been drinking at the party, and I'm a bit worried about his ability to drive. I can drive just fine, only I don't have my license yet. My friend will be in trouble if he doesn't get the family car back home..."

Students offered "answers" quickly-- illustrating how we often make decisions on impulse rather than with logic. As class discussion proceeded, we talked about other ways to make a decision: finding the easiest way out of a problem situation, determining what's best for me, or considering long range consequences.

In subsequent class sessions, we tried the problem solving method in small groups. I have also asked each student to fold up the problem solving outline and keep it in their pocket to help them work through the next real life problem they encounter.

Some of my eighth graders have reported that they've found the method useful. They're thinking--and doing it independently. This is but a beginning, but it is a good one.

Erica Miner is a home economics teacher in her fourth year at Thayer High School.

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## COMMON PRINCIPLES (revised January 1985)

Local adaptation of common, general principles is the essence of the Coalition's plan:

1. **AN INTELLECTUAL FOCUS.** The school should focus on helping adolescents to learn to use their minds well. Schools should not attempt to be "comprehensive" if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.

2. **SIMPLE GOALS.** The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that students need, rather than necessarily by "subjects" as conventionally defined. The aphorism "Less is More" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort merely to "cover content."

3. **UNIVERSAL GOALS.** The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of adolescents.

4. **PERSONALIZATION.** Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than eighty students. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teacher's time, and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.

5. **STUDENT-AS-WORKER.** The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker, rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn, and thus to teach themselves.

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6. **DIPLOMA BY EXHIBITION.** Students entering secondary school studies are those who are committed to the school's purposes and who can show competence in language, elementary mathematics, and basic civics. Students of traditional high school age but not yet at appropriate levels of competence to enter secondary school studies will be provided intensive remedial work to assist them quickly to meet these standards. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation--an "exhibition." This exhibition by the student of his or her grasp of the central skills and knowledge of the school's program may be jointly administered by the faculty and by higher authorities. As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of "credits earned" by "time spent" in class. The emphasis is on the students' demonstration that they can do important things.

7. **ATTITUDE.** The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you but I expect much of you"), of trust (until abused), and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school's particular students and teachers should be emphasized, and parents should be treated as essential collaborators.

8. **STAFF.** The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.

9. **BUDGET.** Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of eighty or fewer pupils, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than ten percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional comprehensive secondary schools.

Any list of such brevity and specificity begs for elaboration, and it is this elaboration which will first engage the energies of each of the Coalition schools. The process of designing programs and putting them into place will take several years, and the inevitable adjustments then required will consume some years after that. Due to its complexity, school redesign is a slow and often costly business. And due to the need to adapt each design to its own constituency of students, teachers, parents and neighborhoods and to create a strong sense of ownership of it by those who are involved, this redesign must be largely done at the level of the individual school--even as that school adheres to principles and standards common among the Coalition schools.

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## FEATURE

### The Logic of Curriculum Planning: One Approach Holly Houston

In each of the Principals' Councils that were convened this fall (Northeast Principals' Council, October 21-23; Texas Principals' Council, December 17-18; Baltimore Principals' Council, February 11-12) there was discussion of the problems and promises of the exhibitions of mastery which are intended to punctuate periods of study in Essential Schools. There was also some very useful exchange on the subject of coaching as one of several teaching strategies appropriate in secondary education. These subjects are but two in the wide range of discussion topics that were addressed formally and informally in each meeting.

The importance of "exhibitions" and "coaching" has become more apparent in our continuing conversations with principals and teachers across the country as more schools begin to plan for eventual partnership with the Coalition. We have found, however, that as we talk about exhibitions of mastery and coaching, it is necessary to address the tough questions of curricular content and design, which lead to further speculation about compatible teaching strategies, which requires considerations of class size, and so on. Precisely because these matters are interconnected, and because each one requires and deserves a good deal of attention and analysis, it has been useful and sensible to make the logical connections more obvious for those who are embarking on curricular and instructional change with the common principles of the Coalition in mind. Toward this end, we have found that discussion around the following six elements may be helpful: educational aims, content, teaching strategies, student's work and play, settings, and exhibitions of mastery. The value of these six elements is primarily heuristic: they represent a range of interwoven "questions" which are best considered in relation to one another.

It may be that principals and teachers in particular schools have begun to find their own ways into this labyrinth of curricular, organizational, and instructional concerns. Our hope is that the following scheme will be useful in assisting those involved in local planning to conceptualize the process broadly and thematically. Please note that because of our particular interest in coaching, the pattern of questions one might pose around these six elements will begin with the teaching strategy (coaching) as a given. One could enter this discussion from any number of points; this represents but one.

If "coaching" is to be employed, what is the teacher actually doing?

The teacher or coach is involved in some combination of the following activities: setting standards, describing, demonstrating, motivating, diagnosing, correcting, and reinforcing.

What are appropriate purposes or objectives of "coaching"?; or, put another way, "coaching" is an instructional means to what end?

Just as coaches of athletes have in mind rather specific objectives for skill development involving the athlete's mind and body, academic coaches are in a position to teach with specific skill development in mind. The purpose of coaching might be stated simply: mastery of basic intellectual skills. These skills include reading, writing, speaking, listening, measuring, estimating, calculating, and seeing.

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If mastery of these basic intellectual skills is the "purpose," and coaching is the instructional means, how do we know what constitutes the end, or success?

This is where the exhibitions of mastery come in, and the development of exhibitions requires that the responsible adults identify criteria or standards against which student achievement can be measured. Some exhibitions of mastery of basic intellectual skills could come in the form of standardized achievement tests; some might need to be developed locally. In either case, educators need to have a solid and shared understanding of the standards that they intend to uphold, and they need to provide students with multiple and appropriate means for displaying their knowledge and skill development.

But can you talk about mastery of basic intellectual skills without talking about subject matter?

With an educational purpose or aim stated in broad terms as we have just done, the question of "curriculum" or subject matter does become secondary. The eight intellectual skills we have identified are in the province of any number of "subjects"--whether they are taught by specialists or generalists. Therefore, the question of curriculum design could be approached from a number of angles: coaching of specific intellectual skills could be the responsibility of all teachers of all subjects, or coaching for intellectual skill development could be the responsibility of teachers in designated courses. The curriculum, in either case, would follow from the consideration of broad educational goals rather than from narrow, content-specific objectives.

But what makes "coaching" toward the mastery of intellectual skills any different from the teaching methods we now use?

Coaching may be synonymous with what many able teachers call teaching. We have isolated it as a special kind of teaching because it differs from the more common lecture or lecture/discussion in two important ways. These have to do with the "student's work" and the "settings" within which this particular kind of teacher-student exchange occurs. When the teacher is "coaching," the implication is that the student is practicing. This practice is active and this activity is central. The student is working and the coach is diagnosing problems of particular students, analysing the work of particular students, and encouraging particular students to rework or revise or rethink what they have done. Attention of this kind requires that the teacher have responsibility for fifteen or fewer students at any one time, and it also implies a sufficiently long period of time for concentration, work revisions, and exchange. Thus the "student's work" and the "settings" appropriate for certain teaching strategies and certain educational purposes require careful consideration.

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The reference list below is intended to tie together these "six elements" and provide resources for further analysis and discussion. It seems prudent to emphasize that these references and categories do not represent a planning methodology or a temporal sequence. Instead they represent one logical approach to curriculum building.

Educational Aims: General statements regarding the development of concepts, skills, attitudes, behaviors, and creative capacities.

Adler (1982), pp. 15-20  
College Board, pp. 7-12  
Eisner, pp. 93-107  
Sizer, pp. 84-98

Description of Content: Discussion of activities, subjects, areas, or disciplines with reference to objectives of a course or lesson.

Adler (1982), pp. 21-36  
Phenix, pp. 53-264  
Sizer, pp. 132-33

Teaching Strategy: Methods appropriate to aims, content, and setting--to include coaching, questioning, lecture, immersion, etc.

Adler, (1982), pp. 49-56; (1984), pp. 15-55  
Boyer, pp. 141-149  
Sizer, pp. 99-119

Student Work and Play: Mental and physical activity of students--to include supervised practice, discussion, listening, observing, creating, etc.

Adler (1982), pp. 49-56; (1984), pp. 15-55  
Sizer, pp. 99-119

Setting: Consideration of teacher-to-student ratio, length of class, type of physical setting, materials to be employed.

Adler, (1982), pp. 49-56  
Sizer, pp. 99-119

Exhibitions: Development of varied and appropriate means for measuring and judging student achievement and learning processes.

Boyer, pp. 132-135  
Sizer, pp. 222-237 (Afterword to 1985 edition)

## SOURCES

Adler, Mortimer J. The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto. New York: Macmillan Company, 1982.

Adler, Mortimer J. The Paideia Program: An Educational Syllabus. New York: Macmillan Company, 1984.

Boyer, Ernest. High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America. New York: Harper & Row, 1983.

The College Board. Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do. New York: The College Board, 1983.

Eisner, Elliot W. The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs. New York: Macmillan Company, 1979.

Phenix, Philip H. Realms of Meaning: A Philosophy of the Curriculum for General Education. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.

Sizer, Theodore R. Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the the American High School. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985 (includes the Afterword).



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In recent weeks we have discussed other general educational aims or purposes that seem to call for different configurations of the six elements described above. The more we work with these elements, the more apparent it is that the distinctions between them should not be considered absolute. Rather, each element can be seen as a point of reference for the consideration of other elements. In other words, the clear-cut categories on the reference list give us a degree of needed conceptual clarity, but common sense tells us that sound educational practice is the result of weaving through categories whose boundaries are grayer than the list above can reveal.

In a future edition of "Horace" we will feature a discussion of the actual process of planning for improved educational practice from the perspectives of teachers, administrators, and "outside observers." The question we will be looking for answers to is: How can the "logical process" of planning be used to enhance the practice of discussing and deliberating over organizational and curricular problems and priorities?

Holly Houston is Executive Officer of the Coalition of Essential Schools and will be leading the Coaching Workshop this summer.

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## CALENDAR

### March 8-11

American Association of School Administrators,  
Dallas, Texas (703)528-0700.

### March 11

New York Association of Independent Schools,  
Adelphi Academy, Brooklyn, New York  
(718)238-3308.

### April 8-11

National Catholic Educational Association,  
St. Louis, Ohio (202)293-5954.

### June 24-July 12

Providence-Brown Teaching Institutes:  
(1) Shakespeare: New Readings of Old Plays  
(2) Industrialization: Focus on Rhode Island  
(3) Latin America: Culture and Literature  
Providence, Rhode Island (401)863-2407.

### July 8-12

Coalition of Essential Schools  
Coaching Workshop (Essential Schools only),  
Providence, Rhode Island (401)863-3384.

### July 17-19

Coalition of Essential Schools  
Summer Symposium: Planning an Essential  
School. Join 200 educators for discussion of  
mastery exhibitions, coaching and developing  
an "essential" school.  
Providence, Rhode Island (401)863-3384.

### October 6-8

Coalition of Essential Schools  
Advisory Committee meeting,  
Providence, Rhode Island (401)863-3384.

### October 7-11

Coalition of Essential Schools  
Principals' Council,  
Providence, Rhode Island (401)863-3384.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Adelphi Academy (Brooklyn, NY) and Thayer High School (Winchester, NH) joined the Coalition of Essential Schools in September, 1984.

R.L. Paschal Senior High School (Fort Worth, TX) and United Day School (Laredo, TX) came on board in February; Westbury Senior High School (Houston, TX) is finalizing discussions with its school board.

Central Park East School (New York, NY) joined on the last day of February.

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Start-Up at Adelphi Academy. Janet Birnkrant.

### Central Staff

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Getting Started. Molly Schen.  
Common Principles (1/85).

### Announcements Calendar

Theodore R. Sizer, Chairman  
Molly M. Houston, Executive Officer

Molly Schen, Editor  
Jon Gluckman, Editorial Assistant

**HORACE** is a quarterly publication of the Coalition of Essential Schools,  
Education Department, Box 1938, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island 02912

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Education Department, Box 1938  
Brown University  
Providence, RI 02912

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