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**Working for Equity through
Community Collaboration**

Community Connections

Liz Sullivan recalls, "Because the big resistance at Jefferson had come initially from teachers, we thought that we didn't understand the reluctance of teachers and that we need to do more work with them. No reform that would work could happen without them. So starting in June 1999, I did outreach, really listening to teachers and trying to figure out what was going on with them. I did a lot of one-on-ones with teachers and started having monthly meetings with them, and I found a great deal of interest among the teachers in this sort of a reform." Later in the summer of 1999, the union, understanding that it had been taking a stance opposed to the wishes of its membership, became a partner in the small schools planning work, working with BayCES and the district to design the request for proposals process and participating in reviewing submitted proposals.

ACTIONS TO END INEQUITY

In order to advance their case to the district and funders for smaller, better schools, OCO used "agitational data," stark statistical presentations that reinforced the need for systemic change. Matt Hammer illustrates one such effort: "We put together a little booklet comparing test scores from schools in the flatlands and schools in the hills. It was as plain as day, a skyscraper bar graph from the hills schools and flat lines in the flatlands. This was just after the time that Proposition 209 striking down affirmative action had passed, and we were talking about how our kids were going to have to be competing head to head with other kids to get into college. Were our kids, scoring way down at bottom, likely to do well on the SAT? Everyone talked about wanting to get their kids into college – well, what that was going to take?"

As OCO pushed, support among Oakland school board members for the community's demand for system-wide school improvement through new small schools picked up strength. Liz Sullivan says, "We ended up linking the overcrowding problem with the policy of smallness. It was a good marriage. We had a demand that they end multi-track year-round schools, and we went to action on it. In November 1999, we had over 2,000 people in the St. Elizabeth gymnasium, parents and church folk from all over the city. We asked that the district end multi-track year-round practices and we claimed three sites for new schools. We asked that they pass a policy to provide a mechanism for parents and teachers to come together and propose new small schools."

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The school board accepted the community's challenge. In the winter of 1999, the school board approved the first new small school, Woodland Elementary, to be opened on a defunct school site in cooperation with Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), a national community organizing operation. In September 2000, Woodland Elementary was the first school to open in Oakland in thirty years; it's now part of BayCES and working with the Small Schools Initiative. In Fall 2000, the school board committed to end year-round multi-track schooling by 2002. And in March, 2000, Oakland voters responded to the needs of the schools by passing Measure A, a \$300 million Oakland school bond to build new schools and improve existing schools to rectify overcrowding. Measure A passed with 85% of the vote.

This progress happened in the midst of rapid superintendent turnover and turmoil. Though individuals within the Oakland central administration had reached out to the small schools proponents and the school board became an ally, there was no advocacy for small schools from Superintendent Carole Quan, who announced her resignation in April 1999, or from Assistant City Manager George Musgrove, her interim replacement, who was named to the superintendent post by Mayor Jerry Brown. Brown was attempting to assert increased control over the city's struggling schools and succeeded in part by winning Measure D in the same election that funded the Measure A school bond. Measure D allowed Brown to appoint three members to the seven-member elected school board. But just prior to the Measure D vote, the school board chose Dennis Chaconas as Oakland's Superintendent of Schools over Musgrove, Brown's choice. Chaconas proved to be a force for rapid change across the district, and quickly committed to supporting the New Small Autonomous Schools Policy, which the school board—including Mayor Brown's appointees—passed unanimously in May 2000.

NEW, SMALL AUTONOMOUS SCHOOLS BECOME A REALITY

The New Small Autonomous Schools Policy—the product of BayCES-led consensus-seeking and revision—was both a shining victory and the propelling force into new arenas of challenge for Oakland. Among the most significant was finding space for the new schools. Emma Paulino sums up this challenge succinctly: "The problem in Oakland is that we don't have sites." Recognizing this problem, OCO had been lobbying the city since the mid-1990s to convert an old Montgomery Ward department store site on Fruitvale's International

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Boulevard into space for schools. David Montes de Oca, teacher leader at Urban Promise Academy, one of the new small schools that opened in 2001, acknowledges OCO's effort to find locations for the schools. "We are the beneficiaries of much work long before the time that brought us here. We have heard many stories and know a brief history about what has gone into getting this space available for our kids. OCO and members of the city worked to make sure that an old building gave way for a new one." Permanent construction on the Ward's site is ongoing as Urban Promise and International Community School, a new small elementary school, share a fleet of portables there.



Urban Promise Academy students watch visiting artists at work

As the small schools effort coalesced, Small School Initiative leaders began seeking funding to propel their vision and commitment. In November 2000, BayCES received a fifteen million dollar grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to support its small schools work in Oakland and across the Bay Area. The Gates grant had the effect of sending the SSI work into warp speed, focusing national attention, creating tremendous opportunity and raising expectations even higher. In addition, other private funders have sustained the SSI partnership. The William H. Donner Foundation sponsored a consultant to develop a business plan for the SSI. The Annie E. Casey Foundation underwrote a visit for parents, teachers and OUSD staff to small schools in Chicago in October 2000. The San Francisco Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Walter S. Johnson Foundation have also been key supporters of the Small Schools initiative. (Full lists of OCO and BayCES supporters appear on the organizations' web sites; see the Resources section, page 24.)



ACENDS's Larissa Adam and Emma Paulino

During the course of the 2000–2001 academic year, ASCEND, International Community School, Life Academy, Melrose Leadership Academy and Urban Promise Academy (along with several other as yet unopened schools), submitted proposals and entered into their design and planning processes, identifying teachers, forming planning teams with parent and outside community partnerships, collaborating with BayCES school coaches, working with OUSD to find space and recruiting students. All five opened their doors at the start of the 2001–2002 school year.

Also in 2001, the small schools work extended to Oakland's existing high schools with a focus on remaking overcrowded Castlemont and Fremont High Schools. Building on Oakland's long-standing vocational academies, Castlemont and Fremont are creating small schools within their existing buildings. Castlemont, working with Chicago Vocational Career Academy's former principal Betty Despenza-Green, plans to divide ninth and tenth graders into four houses and juniors and seniors into four themed small schools (see *Horace* 18.1 for more about Despenza-Green's work at Chicago Vocational Career Academy). Castlemont's Ninth Grade House, with 20-student family groups, opened in the fall of 2001. At Fremont, six design teams have submitted proposals to the district's New Small Autonomous Interconnected Schools RFP process. With two of those proposed school scheduled to open in September 2002, Fremont eventually will become a collection of small schools that serve the school's current population. In addition to this high school restructuring, the Small Schools Incubator

has supported four school design teams during 2001-2002, and twelve other design teams submitted New Small Autonomous School proposals in May 2002. These schools hope to open by September 2003, though questions about site availability for some and readiness for others remain unanswered.

OCO parents, district administrators and teachers, and BayCES staff members, along with funders and other outside critical friends, agree that progress on creating small schools in Oakland depends on Small School Initiative's three-part collaboration. Considering each partner's contribution, UPA's David Montes de Oca observes, "I can't imagine it being without any of the three parts and yet I realize it tries to happen without that in many places. So you get a school district that wants to change, families that want to change and no one knows how to do it. Or you have families that want to change, people who want to do it and the district says no. Or you have district that wants to change and brings in expertise to do it, but folks in the community don't see that change needs to happen, that something better can be had." Lisa Kane, Program Associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, thinks that the equal three-way partnership creates the potential for real change in the city. "In Oakland, we are not only struck by the level of need but also, on the positive side, by the capacity and commitment at the community and system levels, by the fact that there were strong community-based organizations, an intermediary and a superintendent and system that were honestly taking a look at themselves and embracing the notion of small schools."



Life Academy Principal Laura Flaxman, teacher Carmelita Reyes and student Jose Martin

COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS AND EDUCATORS:
LEARNING TO WORK TOGETHER

OCO's brand of organized community activism builds on one-to-one relationships to understand civic problems and then mobilizes people on a grand scale to raise the profile of those problems, demanding solutions constructively and forcefully. These methods, applied to overcrowded, dysfunctional schools, have stimulated Oakland's Small Schools Movement. For BayCES and the district, working with community activists was a new experience and resulted in occasional cultural clashes. OCO Executive Director Ron Snyder says, "The capacity for school districts to absorb the pace of change and respond to the need and pressure from an organization for change is a strain. It's our job to keep that kind of tension high so things keep moving but also be reasonable and help find resources so the district can move as fast as it can. There's an immense well of need and passion in the parent community, and this tension is not going to go away. If this were an intellectual exercise, the community organization wouldn't be needed. But that's not the way change happens. Even with a good superintendent with good intentions, the public work of politics is integral to life of public schools. It's not something to be managed internally. We need to find ways of organizing and creating pressure and tension to move it in the right directions." Thinking about the effect of that tension, OCO's Liz Sullivan comments, "When you've got community organizing involved, it really changes the pace and you can't plan and predict. It's not like a planning process where you lay out how you'll roll it out. When you get the community involved you don't know exactly how it will go. There's eddies and currents and you have to be able to live with more ambiguity."

Lisa Lasky describes how BayCES occupies an intermediary role between OCO's passionate and persistent demands for change and the district's need to promote change while completely retooling itself, overcoming years of entrenchment and outmoded personnel and site policies. Lasky says, "The BayCES role is to bring people to the table and build alliances across different groups so people can get on with the business of building equitable schools. We go into conflict and stay there for as long as it takes to sort it out. That position seems neutral. But we're not neutral about sixty percent of the kids in this city failing." Acting as a bridge in times of stress and, at other points, as a critical friend, pushing and questioning when needed, BayCES has kept communication flowing among the Small Schools Initiative schools and partners.

The community's organized and sustained involvement emerges as a unique element in Oakland's creation of opportunities for the growth of small, academically rigorous, nurturing schools. Steve Jubb, BayCES Executive Director, says, "If parents hadn't organized and we hadn't been ready to support them, we would not have those schools. Initial credit and ultimately final credit needs to be given to communities of Oakland. If they don't push, we're never going to get there despite our best intentions. If we're going to get at long-term perplexing issues of inequity, we're going to have to think about the role of communities and the district system in creating supports for change so that the system doesn't fall back into old patterns."

Oakland Superintendent Dennis Chaconas agrees and demonstrates the receptiveness to community demand that lets him take the lead to create the conditions for the district to find its place in the partnership. "In the community, there was huge frustration about the lack of schools that meet their kids' needs. I've always believed in using the community to push school reform. Kids do not have advocates to get what they need. Advocates are behind successful kids. Here, the community is advocating better education." Emma Paulino demonstrates that advocacy, observing, "The system wasn't working. We're helping the district to face that. Not all of them are willing, but I can tell the difference between now and when we started. Some of them have changed their minds and say yes, this is something that works for the kids."

PRESSURES AND CHALLENGES: SITES, CAPACITY, BACKBREAKING WORK

The development and proliferation of small schools in Oakland does not solve the systemic space shortage that precipitated the disastrously overcrowded schools problem. Parents, BayCES staff, and teachers and administrators agree that the lack of facilities in East Oakland for current and future small school growth is their most formidable challenge. Larissa Adam, fourth and fifth grade teacher at ASCEND, comments, "Facilities are a huge problem here, especially in the Fruitvale district. You can't ask families to go over to West Oakland, even if there's space there. They're all working at least one job if not two jobs and they cannot be shuttling their kids back and forth. We absolutely need more facilities and there's just nothing here. It really feels like we're stuck between a rock and a hard place there." In its current building, an old high school, ASCEND's growth is capped until it finds additional space. Its current fourth graders can move with Ms. Adam to fifth grade, but there

is no room for new fourth graders next year. Emma Paulino adds, "Right now at ASCEND we have more than a hundred kids on the sixth grade waiting list. There are only forty-seven kids in the sixth grade! For kindergarten, every day six families come in here and check for space."

Most of the new small schools face similar limits on growth. Similarly, Melrose Leadership Academy, currently housed in two portables, has no growth space, and Urban Promise Academy and International Community School, in line for new buildings, will expand minimally next year. OCO's Lillian Lopez says, "I am always looking for space. I'm always out there with an antenna. Anything that seems like it might help, I'll get engaged

with." While not all of the schools in the Small Schools Incubator and the teams that submitted proposals in May 2002 are East Oakland-based, many are, intensifying the facilities dilemma.

The restructuring of the current high schools within their existing buildings presents other challenges. Superintendent Dennis Chaconas notes, "Small doesn't mean separate, even though that's easier and more autonomous. Realistically, on the taxpayer side, we can't take a school built for 3,000 and not use it and waste taxpayer money. Tear down in urban areas? We can't do that. The challenge is getting people to share and be autonomous yet cohabitate. To be a small school, one of several schools cohabiting the same site, is difficult, but it's the path we have ahead."

Tom Vander Ark, the Gates Foundation's Executive Director of Education, poses a challenge that nags at many school change advocates in Oakland.

"In the past fifteen years, we've figured out how to create a good school, but what about success at scale and systems that work for all kids?" Oakland's schools work with 54,000 students; the current crop of six small, autonomous schools serve 1,500 students. Weighing hugely on the minds of Oakland's

WHAT'S SMALL?

*Definitions of small school population from
the Oakland Unified School District's
New Small Autonomous School District Policy:*

GRADE LEVEL	IDEAL SIZE RANGE up to:
K-5	250
K-8	400
K-12	500
6-8	400
6-12	500
9-12	400

school change advocates and critics is whether these small schools—and whatever additional schools find the space, strength and support to open in 2003 and beyond—will serve to extend quality and equity to every classroom in the district. Will they influence and transform the entire district? Victor Cary, BayCES' Community Partnership Academy Director, emphasizes that the Small Schools Initiative takes aim at the heart of the system. "The unit of change is the district, not the school. Schools can't do it alone. It's not enough to create a wonderful school if the district in which it resides does not support it. We're working on a parallel track, creating the schools and changing the environment. We don't see these as boutique schools, but as elements in a tipping point strategy."

To OCO's Ron Snyder, disruption of the way the district does business is at the heart of transforming district-wide practice. "This is about changing the way the district operates, so its capacity is altered." While aware of his own delicate position between welcoming the forces of change and dealing with an entrenched bureaucracy, Superintendent Dennis Chaconas agrees, observing that the muscles the district uses to open new schools, accommodate changed personnel policies and absorb other changes are weak from disuse. Chaconas says, "The system is shot. It's so hard to learn new habits. So we're building the capacity of the building and grounds departments as we go. Many in Oakland's central administration are not advocates that small is better. The challenge is to build a system that sees new endeavors without fear, to change the mindset about how to interact and relate to schools." Chaconas is the district's lightning rod, and even as change transpires, hostility toward the district among community members persists. But the overall consensus is that progress thus far could not have been made without him. "He's been a dream," says Lillian Lopez. "He is the guardian angel that we were looking for. He believes in the small schools policy. He's not perfect, no one is, but I love him."

Thus far, the thrill of the new and the satisfaction of seeing loving, high-quality schools appear has sustained the schools' founders and the small school movement advocates' drive and enthusiasm. But everyone says that the work is incredibly hard, and that admission forces supporters to ask if there's enough momentum and energy in the district to take the idea of small schools for equity to all of the district's students. UPA's David Montes de Oca says, "We are here twelve to thirteen hours a day. That's a reality, and some of our deeper work has to be about changing that reality so we can sustain ourselves." Larissa Adam agrees, "There are a finite number of people who are willing to

do that, spend that much time. If you want school reform to be spread everywhere—and that's what we're shooting for, right? We're shooting for equity and equity is not having one small school or five small schools. Equity is for everybody to have this chance. You're not going to be able to get everybody to put in that amount of time. That has to be built in more into the system. We happen to have a lot of people on staff who have no kids or their kids are grown up, so they don't need to go home and feed a six year old. That's how we're able to stay here eleven, twelve hours a day. Not too many people can really do that. It's one of my greatest concerns because I feel like unless this is spread to all kids, it's still inequitable."

Expressing his belief that Oakland is in the midst of unavoidable creative chaos, BayCES's Steve Jubb observes, "In Oakland, it's a wild time now. Parents are hammering away at the facilities issue and the district is feeling beleaguered. All of these old behaviors are being interrupted. Everyone has to change; no one gets to be the same. There's a whole range of new competencies that have to be learned. Teachers want autonomy, get it, and find they don't have collaborative skills. The district wants these changes but doesn't have the organizational capacity to deliver on expectations. We have to dismantle what exists and put new systems in place. All of this is happening in the context of intense distrust tied to race and ethnicity in this city. It takes clear and bold leadership on the part of everybody to stay in the heat long enough to get to the other side. The way forward is through, not around, conflict."

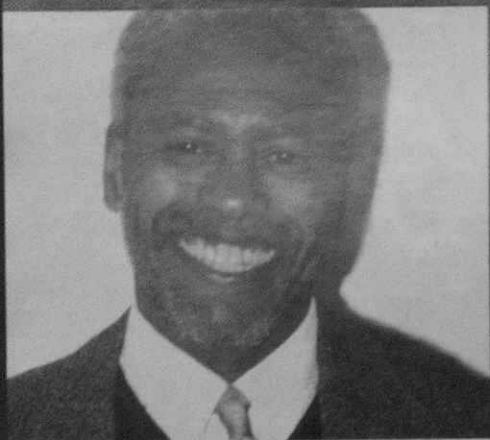
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dear readers



In Oakland, we are enacting a bold vision: the creation of a system of equitable small schools is well under way. This citywide effort is being driven by the community, implemented by Oakland Unified School District, and supported by the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools. The small schools movement begun here has required a commitment to establishing the kind of sustained relationships among school people, parents, and the community that lead first to mutual understanding and respect and then to collaboration in educating each child fully.

As of September 2001, six new small autonomous schools have opened in Oakland. Each school represents a solid teacher-parent-child partnership from its inception. Meanwhile, educators, parents, and community activists are designing plans for more new schools to be developed throughout the city in collaboration with community-based organizations, educational support providers, and city officials. This strategy has potential for activating authentic and deep community-school partnerships. When community organizing groups like Oakland Community Organizations (a faith-based community organization affiliated with 35,000 families) are deeply involved in starting new schools, powerful alliances to support change become possible. Building relationships among teachers and families across race, class, language, and culture can also bring dramatic results.

Ultimately, achieving system-wide change will require not only creating new schools, but also converting our large high schools into equitable, small schools. This work has begun. Two of Oakland's six comprehensive high schools have started the conversion process into smaller learning communities. I believe our ultimate success or failure in this complex endeavor is directly linked to continuing the community leadership and involvement in the visioning, designing, and creating of small equitable schools.

VICTOR CARY

Director, Community Partnership Academy
Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools

Sometimes, when I'm in a school for just a few moments, the thought flashes through my mind, "I wish my kid could go to this school!" I try to push it aside, eager to keep my mind open and ask questions, not wanting to jump to conclusions. But each time, experience bears out intuition—by the end of the day, I'll have a list of specific, palpable examples of how the school in which I've had the honor to be a guest engages kids' minds and hearts, lifting them up as they grow and learn.

High expectations, security, hope, respect, and pride imbue these schools. Thousands of social interactions that happen in school buildings every day demonstrate the quality of the relationships between adults and children, and within a few moments, visitors intuit that flash of vitality and feel a powerful desire to stay for as long as possible.

Such was my experience in Oakland's new small schools, born out of a community's fierce love for its children, immeasurably hard work, and sustained cooperation among families, political activists, the school district and advocates for personalized, rigorous education. I am so happy to thank the staff of Oakland Community Organizations, the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, and the Oakland Unified School District. I am deeply grateful to all of the students, teachers, school leaders, parents, community organizers, district officials, school coaches, and funders who so thoughtfully told me about their schools and who are striving to ensure that every family in Oakland can know—with pride, relief, and excitement—that their kids can go to these schools.

JILL DAVIDSON
Horace Editor

BayCES's Director of Development Madeleine Clarke believes that conflicts and challenges demonstrate progress as Oakland's schools take on the requirement for system-wide equity. "The change process is conflict-ridden. Problems don't mean that it's not working. If you're not doing anything, you won't get resistance." That progress is measurable by the SSI partnership's capacity to continue to open new small schools. BayCES staff members estimate that based on planned enrollments for current schools and schools slated to open or reconfigure in the next two years, their network schools in Oakland will serve 7,120 students—almost five times the current number, and 13% of the district's enrollment.

As Oakland simultaneously celebrates its success thus far and digs in to take on its serious challenges, Lillian Lopez promises that OCO and Oakland's parents will keep the pressure on. "You have to be persistent and don't let it go. I am always talking with people. I keep in touch with school board members, with any power player, try always to be talking about small schools and how great our schools are and keep them engaged. I try to talk with parents a lot about it. We have a long way to go."

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ELEVEN STRUCTURAL
GUIDELINES FOR SMALL SCHOOLS CONCERNED
WITH EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE (AND ONE WARNING)

*Schools in the Small Schools Incubator, sponsored by Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools,
Oakland Community Organizations and the Oakland Unified School District, use these
guidelines as touchstones throughout the proposal and planning processes.*

Simple structures work best: a cohort of students, a team of teachers with full responsibility for student learning within a block of time and/or over a span of years.

Personalize the school to the maximum extent feasible. For middle and high school teachers, a total student load of 80:1 or less, with the lowest class sizes you can afford in elementary school.

Establish a physical place identifiable as the small school. Contiguous time, space and a distinctive physical learning environment are critical to creating a sense of safety and community.

Create structures and practices that ensure multi-year relationships with students and families.

Establish clear leadership and participatory governance with substantial power over the six autonomies* and rigorous use of data to set goals and make decisions.

Use heterogeneous grouping with differentiated supports for students with special needs (supporting these students should not require segregating them).

Provide and protect dedicated time for teacher collaboration: with each other, with students, with families.

Think through and establish equitable admissions policies: make sure that choice is aligned with advocacy for those who need assistance making choices—recruit to your demographic targets.

Ensure that each student has a school-based advocate; preferably one that is consistent over all the years the student is in the school.

Create frequent, scheduled opportunities for families, students and teachers to look at student work together, define standards and goals, and build strategies for supporting student learning.

A deep commitment to continuous professional development for school professionals should be reflected in time, calendar and budget.

And remember this warning, the devil is in the details! Start simply and prioritize. Think your ideas through to the nuts and the bolts. Don't try to do everything all at once. If a design feature doesn't have dedicated time, leadership, resources, and expertise, you won't get the outcomes you want.

* The Six Autonomies: Based on work done by Boston's Center for Collaborative Education, BayCES staff identified six areas that schools should be able to control for themselves: staffing, budget, curriculum and assessment, governance and policies, school calendar and schedule, and contiguous space identifiable as "our school." For the entire text of the Six Autonomies, see www.bayces.org/small_schools/creating/six-autonomies.htm.

*For more information on the Small Schools Incubator and these guidelines, please contact
Madeleine Clarke, Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools Director of Development,
510/208-0160 or madeleine@bayces.org*

❁ Small Is Not Enough: ❁
Daily Connections Among Children and Adults
in Oakland's New Small Schools

Oakland's new scaled-down schools allow the people who work and learn in them to focus on creating environments where it's likely that strong relationships among adults and children will develop and rigorous academic standards will flourish. While the Oakland Unified School District, the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools and Oakland Community Organizations identify and break through barriers to bringing small, strong schools and high standards to all of Oakland's schoolchildren, adults in the cohort of existing new small schools are aware that even within their own schools, smallness doesn't guarantee equity. Larissa Adam, fourth and fifth grade teacher at ASCEND worries, "Small schools are wonderful, but just being small is not going to make for better education for our kids. We've got to keep the focus on equity and working with the families as our number one goals." To keep that focus, Oakland's new small autonomous schools are building cultures that not only welcome but also depend on connections to family and community.

ASCEND's principal Hae-Sin Kim observes, "The biggest mistake that schools make is believing that they can do it all. What they end up doing is burning out their teachers. Here, it's been an amazing year for me in terms of the power of family partnerships. We have some powerful parent leaders who go the mile for someone else and their kids, and that kind of culture has enabled teachers to really focus on teaching." Born of collaboration between parent Emma Paulino and teacher Larissa Adam, ASCEND uses its autonomy to allocate staffing funds to support the position of a Family Coordinator and two front-office Community Relations Assistants, Fahm Selee and Norma Elias. Fahm Selee speaks Mien, the language of the Fruitvale neighborhood's Laotian community and Norma Elias, a grandmother of an ASCEND student, speaks Spanish. Both are the communications link between families that don't speak English at home and ASCEND staff.

Linda Sierra, ASCEND Kindergarten teacher, says, "Second language parents are often made to feel second-class or shunted aside. It is hard for a parent who has a brain but no English. Here, they see that when they say something, it matters and that gives them more courage." Kim agrees, noting, "If parents are treated in an unfriendly way the first time they come in here, they're not going to come back. Someone is always here to translate. Through Fahm and

Norma, I learn about all kinds of family issues and things going on. A lot of families will go to them knowing that they'll come to me to help solve problems like unemployment, marital problems, issues involving kids that aren't even here but are in other schools." With information about what families are going through, Kim works with ASCEND's Family Coordinator (who, in the coming school year, will be founding parent Emma Paulino) or other parents active in the community. They connect families with social services, assist with translation, and find ways to support the family and their child's academic success.

At Urban Promise Academy middle school, family members are a steady campus presence and their work allows UPA teachers to focus on their students' learning. "We have parents, and a grandparent, too, who come in the mornings and work as safety guards," says teacher Amy Goldberg. "They help supervise during lunch, too. During a Saturday appreciation lunch and training for parents who work on campus, we created a display, a whole wall, of things that teachers were able to do when parents were here—phone messages returned to other parents, papers graded, artifacts that captured us working with kids because of the support of parents."



ASCEND's students sharing culture through dance

Venus Mesui, parent at Life Academy of Health and Bioscience, a new, small 9-12 grade school, was always involved in her three children's education. This year, Life's receptiveness to consistent roles for parents in the school has allowed her to expand her commitment. "Sometimes I help in the office, but most of the time I work with the kids," Mesui describes. "We're having a dance on Friday night. I worked with the kids to plan menus and get food donations. Also, I have a lot of contact with police officers; I handle that for Life and work with the kids and the Oakland problem-solving officer to get recommendations about what can make this school better. The kids were the force behind this. Students here are the force behind a lot of things that happen, and I help them."

Life Academy requires its students to participate in its Beyond Our Walls program, which provides opportunities for students to connect with Oakland community organizations and individuals to work and learn beyond the classroom. In its parental support network and Beyond Our Walls ties, Life students have increased opportunity to form relationships with caring adults. Matt Spengler, founding principal of Met West, a high school scheduled to open in fall 2002, plans to incorporate a similar network of family and community supports and says of the planning process, "It's remarkable how many people are eager to help and contribute. Our parents are fierce supporters and really believe in the values of making schools small, making education relevant and building caring networks of adults around kids."

Anneda Rowe-Sanford, UPA's front office manager, recalls her previous position in a desperately overcrowded middle school. "There's something that you can tell when a child is hurting. And if I can see it as a secretary, what's going on with the administrators? It's because they have so much, 2,000 children, all of these meetings—this little guy has fallen through the cracks. Can he read? Probably not. Can he do math? He's just going through his day hoping no one notices him." With Miss Anneda, as she's called by parents, staff and students, in touch with everyone's comings and goings, UPA is filled with teachers, parents, local artists and other community partner participants. No kids are missed; there aren't any cracks. UPA sixth grader Cameron Johnson says, "The teachers, they are really nice and they treat us like we're a big whole family. You can come to the teachers with anything and get feedback. Everyone knows each other and comes to each other with stuff. Parents, students and teachers are all involved, they're available to you after school." Sixth grader Anna Hartwell agrees. "You get more one-on-one interaction with teachers. You get to learn more."

☼ The Ideas of the Body: ☼ Parents and Teachers Create Urban Promise Academy

During the summer before Urban Promise Academy opened, parents and teachers talked about the goals they had for the children in their care and how they would create a safe, nurturing, academically powerful school culture. With BayCES school coach Joel Baum, UPA teachers used an exercise during Coffee and Conversations planning sessions to document parents' visions of who their children were and would become.

"Parents paired up and told each other what their dreams were about their kids, what they want them to be able to know and be able to do," describes Joel Baum. "They told each other about the things that their kids were good at right now, what they were thinking and doing. We captured those thoughts on post-its, and we put those post-its on huge, life-size bodies drawn on posters. Thoughts went on the head, what they said went on the mouth, and so on. We put all the posters up and did a gallery walk. Parents said, 'Wow, look at what our kids can do.' Now, what do we want them to be able to do in a year? Parents paired up, talked some more, did the post-its and put them on the posters. Then they looked at the hopes they have for their kids."

UPA teacher Amy Goldberg has used the body exercise as a touchstone throughout the year. "It helped us get expectations, helped guide our vision. Our thoughts and feelings were aligned with what parents wanted for their children. I kept it at the back of my mind; this is what I know they want for their children." Sandra Alvarado, parent of an UPA sixth grader, concurred in a discussion following the Coffee and Conversations sessions. "Getting to know us will ensure that our kids will get the knowledge they need."

The Ideas of the Body exemplified the collaboration and understanding that emerged between UPA parents and teachers, says Joel Baum. "It created the space in a for parents to dream about the future of this school and what their kids could experience there. The simple act of inviting parents into the conversation created such a level of trust."



Monthly Family Math Night at Urban Promise Academy

Where to Go for More

Resources for Exploring Community Organizing and Small Schools

If you are interested in visiting the schools associated with Oakland's New Small Autonomous Schools effort, please contact Madeleine Clarke, Director of Development at the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, 510/208-0160 or madeleine@bayces.org and/or Ken Epstein, Public Information Officer at the Oakland Unified School District, 510/879-8582 or kepstein@ousd.k12.ca.us.

BAY AREA COALITION FOR EQUITABLE SCHOOLS

Useful even if you're outside the San Francisco Bay Area, BayCES is a rewarding starting point in the quest to understand the value of small schools and how districts and community organizations can work together to improve equity outcomes for all students. The BayCES web site details small schools research, offers numerous strategies for connecting to the Small Schools movement, including its annual Small School Conference, provides links to the Oakland New Small Autonomous Schools 2002 Request for Proposals in English and Spanish, and is the best contact point if you want to learn more specific information about its network of schools, including Oakland's new small autonomous schools.

web site: www.bayces.org

telephone: 510/208-0160

fax: 510/208-1979

mailing address: 1629 Telegraph Avenue, 5th Floor, Oakland, CA 94612

OAKLAND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Oakland Community Organizations is at the center of community-generated school transformation in Oakland, training neighborhood leaders to organize families, give voice to problems, and work with the city to find solutions. OCO also focuses on community concerns such as health insurance, public safety, and bringing grocery stores and other services to underserved neighborhoods.

web site: www.oaklandcommunity.org

telephone: 510/639-1444

mailing address: Oakland Community Organizations, 7200 Bancroft Avenue, #2,
Eastmont Town Center, Oakland CA 94605-2410

OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

The OUSD website houses the New Small Autonomous Schools District Policy, detailing the agreement among the district, OCO and BayCES for the foundation of Oakland's new small schools, and the Request for Proposals for New Small Autonomous Schools, which describes the process design teams follow to propose new small schools.

web site: www.ousd.k12.ca.us

telephone: 510/879-8582

fax: 510/879-1834

mailing address: 1025 2nd Avenue, Oakland, CA 94606

ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS FOR REFORM NOW (ACORN)

The force behind Oakland's Woodland Elementary School, ACORN is one of the largest national community organizations, with offices in twenty-nine states and over 120,000 member families. ACORN provides detailed information about its accomplishments and community organizing strategy and is a good jumping-off point if you're interested in active civic engagement. ACORN's website's Better Schools section, listed under Campaigns, lists an inspiring set of actions ACORN members have led for improved, more equitable schools.

web site: www.acorn.org

telephone: 877/55ACORN or 718/246-7900

fax: 718/246-7939

mailing address: 88 3rd Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11217

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT: BECOME A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

This section of HUD's website is a good introduction to community organizing generally, with links to national community organizations, leads on funding opportunities, examples of grassroots activism for social justice, and suggestions for starting neighborhood organizations. The site is available in English and Spanish.

web site: www.hud.gov/community/orcomm.html

telephone: 202/708-1112

mailing address: 451 7th Street S.W., Washington, DC 20410

CALIFORNIA SCHOOL REDESIGN NETWORK (CSRN)

Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and associated with Linda Darling-Hammond's school reform work at Stanford University, the CSRN is a learning collaborative that helps school leaders to develop a broader knowledge base about how small learning communities can be created or redesigned to support excellence and equity. The CSRN offers summer professional development opportunities and its website is an excellent resource, providing comprehensive and clearly presented research on creating small schools, redesigning large schools, budget, scheduling, curriculum and essential conditions for success.

web site: www.schoolredesign.net

email: Julie Henderson, julieh@stanford.edu

telephone: 650/724-2932

mailing address: CERAS Building, Room 109-M, 520 Galvez Mall, Stanford, CA 94305

PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK (PEN)

PEN is a national association of seventy Local Education Funds, independent, nonprofit, community-based organizations in twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia. LEFs are dedicated to increasing student achievement in public schools, especially among low-income, underserved students, and building support for high quality public education. LEFs coordinate programs in a wide range of areas, and many focus on community-school partnerships, making PEN's work a good fit with the pursuit of community-school partnerships. The PEN web site is a fascinating and inspiring look at local initiatives to improve schools and the lives of students, families and teachers.

web site: www.publiceducation.org

email: pen@publiceducation.org

telephone: 202/628-7460

fax: 202/628-1893

mailing address: 601 13th Street, N.W., Suite 900 North, Washington, DC 20005

COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS FIELDBOOK—COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

CES National has a tremendous body of resources on school design and community connections, including information on small schools, essential design elements, involving students, parents and other stakeholders, using networks and critical friends, and working with districts and states. Also included are links to relevant Fall Forum sessions from the past three years, so that one can seek out presenters with particular expertise.

web site: www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/resources/cc/community.html

THE LIGHT IN THEIR EYES:
CREATING MULTICULTURAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

by Sonia Nieto (Teachers College Press, 224 pages, \$24.95)



Throughout *The Light in Their Eyes*, I was thrilled by the continuity between Sonia Nieto's description of multicultural education and Coalition educators' focus on personalized, sustained and supportive relationships among teachers and students. Nieto, education professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, explores how teachers, through cultural connection and understanding, promote learning and equity among all students, especially bicultural students who have struggled academically.

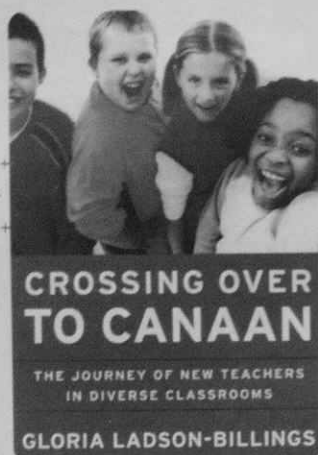
Nieto provides a compelling, concise discussion of learning and inequality. But rather than critiquing how schools are failing students, *The Light in Their Eyes* emphasizes how teachers can use their comprehension of culture and language to create better conditions for learning. Nieto enriches her masterful synthesis of research on culture and learning with recollections of her own school and family experiences. She also includes excerpts of narratives by teachers reflecting on teaching with a focus on cultural competence.

Nieto's prose soars as it creates a vision of the complex but possible task of making school meaningful for all students. In particular, her discussion of teaching and learning as a negotiation among students, families, teachers and schools serves as an eloquent argument for personalized education and the role of family and community in learning. Nieto concludes by noting, "At the core of this book is my powerful belief in the effect, positive or negative, that teachers can have on students through their interactions with them, their families, and their communities." With that power in their hands, teachers will feel it's both possible and imperative to create schools that engage and embrace students.

reviewed by Jill Davidson

CROSSING OVER TO CANAAN:
THE JOURNEY OF NEW TEACHERS IN DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

by Gloria Ladson-Billings (Jossey-Bass, 192 pages, \$24.95)



Multicultural education isn't a specialty; it's how teaching and learning should happen in all schools, with all students. Gloria Ladson-Billings, education professor at the University of Wisconsin, studies the habits of mind required of beginning teachers who are prepared to support diverse classrooms. Drawing on her own memories of her start in teaching and the experiences of eight students participating in Madison's Teach for Diversity program, Ladson-Billings clearly defines multicultural education and forcefully raises expectations for teacher education programs.

Ladson-Billings observes, "Teaching with a sociopolitical consciousness is not easy." Nor is the education that teachers need to become culturally aware, as the final chapter, "A Vision of the Promised Land," reveals, describing the mythical Urban Teacher Academy. Briefly and inspirationally, Ladson-Billings points toward ways to make teacher education more challenging, prestigious and meaningful. Her vision of how teacher education ought to be conducted is tremendously exciting.

Crossing Over to Canaan establishes that multicultural education's goal is to use students' experiences as the foundation for understanding and learning. Excerpting pieces from student teachers' journals and interviews, Ladson-Billings demonstrates that novice teachers need coaching to understand both their own perspectives and their students' cultures. Both new and veteran teachers will empathize with what it feels like when teachers challenge their own assumptions and acknowledge areas of needed growth as they seek to teach for social justice and equity. Ladson-Billings' descriptions of the ways teachers skilled in multicultural education think will be useful to schools as they evaluate prospective teachers and help them embark upon their teaching careers.

reviewed by Jill Davidson

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Horace, the quarterly journal of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), is published by CES National, located in Oakland, California. CES is a national network of schools and centers that are redesigning schools and teaching practices to improve learning and to create more nurturing and humane school communities. Schools are invited to participate in this network by affiliating with CES National. More information about the schools in the network, the CES Common Principles, and affiliation is available on the CES National web site at [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org)

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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Subscriptions to Horace are a benefit of affiliation with CES National. Unaffiliated institutions, schools, and individuals may purchase a subscription for \$35 annually by calling 1-800-62HORACE.

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HORACE

wants to hear about your experiences with community connections.

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Go to [www.essentialschools.com](http://www.essentialschools.com) and join CES Interactive for a follow-up discussion. Or email Horace's editor, Jill Davidson, at [jldavidson@essentialschools.org](mailto:jldavidson@essentialschools.org). We'll be collecting your comments and adding them to the online version of Horace.

Cover: Sixth grade students at Urban Promise Academy, Oakland, California.

## CREATING ASCEND

by Emma Paulino



Emma Paulino, Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) leader, ASCEND (A School Cultivating Excellence, Nurturing Diversity) parent and next year's ASCEND Family Coordinator, describes her experience creating new small schools in Oakland:

At OCO, we started to talk about the largest overcrowded schools. When I visited schools in Chicago, I could tell the difference between the large schools here and the small schools there. Parents there felt like, "This is my school, this is my kid's school, I am part of this place." That wasn't happening with me. When I went to Chicago, it changed everything in my mind.

I didn't know how much it would take to create a new smaller school. I was part of the design team. I spoke out and they listened to me and they wrote it down. I said I wanted for families to be part of the school, not only the kids. I wanted parents to be listened to by the teachers. I wanted the principal to know if something was going on with the kids, if we had a question for the principal, for her to be able to listen. And everything is happening here. We are like a family. When one laughs, everybody laughs. When one cries, everybody cries. Here is something unique, a real gift for the kids.

I had a really bad experience at other schools. They were nice people but I didn't see my kids were improving. Here we make a difference for the families. We will find a way to help you with everything you need in every area, health care, housing, immigration. My kids are blessed with this opportunity to go to this school. Teachers have a lot more time than before. Here, every teacher knows my kids and all the kids. I think this makes the difference for the kids, having relationships with the teachers. It is the same thing with the parents—when they walk in they know the kids. And the communication we have with teachers is excellent.

For thirty years, no one opened a new school in Oakland. OCO did it because we organized the community. If people don't get involved, they can't make the change. We're going to get to the point where all children will get the education that they deserve. This is not a privilege. This is a right. We have to work for that right. And there are a lot of people working for new places. The most exciting thing is the number of parents who want to work to make a difference. When people ask, I always say, "It's hard but it's not impossible." We work very hard, Saturdays, Sundays, nights. It's not easy. For me, it's too much work, but I am so proud that we did it.

### **school design**

*How do we design schools so that all students can learn to use their minds well? Topics include: structures for space and time, teacher collaboration, and data collection and analysis.*

### **classroom practice**

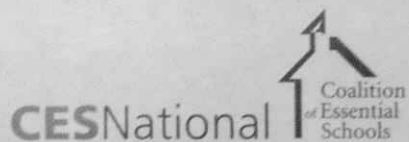
*How do we bring Coalition ideas like *less is more*, *teacher as coach*, and *demonstration of mastery* to life in the classroom? Topics include: curriculum and instruction, assessment, and classroom culture.*

### **leadership**

*What kinds of leadership are necessary to transform schools into more humane and intellectually rigorous environments? How can the change process be sustained? Topics include: governance, distributed leadership, and managing the change process.*

### **community connections**

*How can schools most powerfully engage the community as advocates and partners in the education of its students? Topics include: parental involvement, service learning and internships, and using community members as resources.*



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## **community connections**

*Working for Equity through Community Collaboration*

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Washington Mutual, Wells Fargo, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation*

Oakland's Community  
Propels Change for Equity:  
The Small Schools Initiative's History and Challenges

~

*Anger and bereavement, throughout history, have provided the engine for relentless struggles for change. —Barbara Kingsolver, Small Wonder*

"There were more than 1,400 kids in my daughter's school. And she was going year-round to class. For twenty-eight days she was in class, and for twenty-eight days she'd stop. She had to move from one classroom to another. It was a really terrible experience as a parent, thinking about a babysitter, about her walking home alone. It's really sad. It's a crime. We're not fighting for something because we just want to make a change. It's because we need it." This is how Emma Paulino, Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) leader and incoming Family Coordinator at ASCEND Elementary School, recalls her daughter Fatima's school experience in Oakland, California's Fruitvale neighborhood. Liz Sullivan, OCO's Director of Education agrees, "Teachers and students were horribly oppressed in multitrack year round schools. It was shocking. Teachers were roving from classroom to classroom. It was insane."

Schools overflowed unmanageably, their playgrounds littered with portables. No amount of schedule manipulation could create conditions for sustained learning and academic achievement for the neighborhood's students, trapped in aging schools and coping with the challenges of recent immigration and learning English. A population spike in the 1980s and 1990s—after 1978's Proposition 13 cut off money for school construction—produced overcrowded, tense schools in a city unable to sustain systemic fixes.

The district seemed incapable of creating conditions necessary for student success—safety, coherence, consistency, personal connections between teachers and students. Measures of school performance such as statewide test scores, attendance and graduation rates, and incidences of school violence attested to the dysfunction of flatland Oakland schools. East Oakland citizens didn't need to turn to bordering municipalities to demonstrate comparatively the wreck of their schools; they needed only to consider other schools in their city, the schools that served the Oakland hills. In Oakland, as in so many other urban centers, money rises. The schools in the hills, smaller and less crowded, protected from growth and drawing on a base of native English-speaking, economically-advantaged students, managed to preserve conditions



*Urban Promise Academy students work during a special project day.*

conducive to academic success while the flatland's schools, students, families and teachers suffered. Entrenched experiences of failure and low expectations perpetuated the dysfunction. Many teachers, parents and students were inured to expecting something better from the district, unable to summon outrage because it seemed that nothing would change no matter what emotions were brought to bear.

But some people held onto a different vision. Starting in 1997, first on a school-by-school basis and then district-wide, OCO community activists organized thousands of angry, bewildered, disparate voices into a collective, sustained shout, impossible to ignore, demanding and creating change. And change happened: guided, encouraged and joined by CESNational's affiliate, the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES), OCO and the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) came together to form the Small Schools Initiative (SSI). The district put a New Small Autonomous Schools policy in place, and as the 2001 school year commenced, the neighborhoods of East Oakland sent over a thousand students to six new, small elementary, middle and high schools: ASCEND (K-8), International Community School (K-5), Life Academy (9-12), Melrose Leadership Academy (6-8), Urban Promise Academy (6-8) and Woodland Elementary School (K-5). The SSI sponsors the Small Schools Incubator, which is managed by BayCES staff and designed to support small school proposal creation, future small school design and current small school quality and improvement. An ongoing Request for Proposals process invites more designs for small schools, and the largest high schools in the city are in the process of subdividing.

This issue of *Horace* examines how—in cooperation with BayCES' unwavering, allied source of educational expertise and the district's commitment from within classrooms, school buildings and district offices—OCO's sustained, passionate community pressure tumbled the wall of apathy and despair that blocked the possibility of change and hope in East Oakland's schools. *Horace* also looks at the new Oakland schools, their ongoing connections to family and community, and the ongoing pressures on the whole system in Oakland to redress the condition of its schools.

#### PARENTS TALKING TOGETHER

Lillian Lopez, longtime leader within OCO, a superset of thirty-five religious institutions serving East Oakland's low-income minority families, described her first contact, in 1997, with other parents distressed about their children's schools. "When I was enrolling my son in religious education classes at St. Elizabeth's, an OCO leader said, 'Any parents here who have concerns about Jefferson Elementary, leave your name and phone number because we're going to start talking.'" When the conversation started, Lopez was astounded. "I had been president of the PTA, president of the bilingual advisory committee and I'd never been to a meeting where parents were honest about what was going on in schools and with their children's education. I heard parents say, 'My son is not reading.' You never heard that. It was then I knew we had something. Something was going to happen here because it was so different."

The parents developed three objectives for improvement at Jefferson: academic achievement, cleanliness, and safety. Lopez and other parents worked with school administrators on grade level standards, with school custodians on cleanliness and with local police on safety issues. But, as Lopez recalls, "What we were doing wasn't going to have a huge impact on the school because everything came back to one thing, which was that school was built for 500 students and there were 1,400 students packed in there. The custodians said, 'We can't keep up. When we're cleaning the cafeteria, someone makes a mess in the bathroom.'"

Deborah Meier's *The Power of Their Ideas*, describing the creation, struggles and evolution of the Central Park East small schools in New York, deeply moved the OCO parents and organizers. Liz Sullivan recalls, "Matt Hammer [an OCO organizer] gave anyone who could read English the book. He and

the other parents who read the book led all of the parents through a visioning process. If we could start our own school, what would we really want? We came up with a description of what we would want in schools that had a lot to do with parents being in the center and welcome in a way that was really significant. Then we went and looked for teachers who might like to try something like that. We found some teachers at Jefferson who were willing to work and got excited about the idea—that's how it got going." Meier's book also convinced parents that smaller schools provided better conditions for teaching, learning, and high achievement for all students. In the fall of 1997, the group proposed a plan to create a smaller school within Jefferson.

#### THE DISTRICT AND BAYCES JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Lillian Lopez and other OCO leaders worked flat-out to recruit community support for the new school plan. Lopez recalls with a laugh, "I believed in it so much and after reading Deborah's book I knew we could do it, no doubt in my mind. But some parents would see me and make a u-turn and leave. Some parents would promise me that they'd be in the meeting and never show up. They used to call me the crazy lady. 'Oh, here comes Lillian, what idea does she have now?'" Despite this resistance and apathy, the OCO organizers gathered the support they felt they needed and made their plan public.

Though the OCO parents pulled many Jefferson teachers toward their cause, some Jefferson staff members felt that the new school-within-a-school wasn't a viable solution to the school's overcrowding. The proposal failed a vote of the faculty in the spring of 1998 and again in the spring of 1999. Parents and OCO organizers, who had worked around the clock to garner support and plan with teachers, were devastated. But this defeat sowed the seeds for dramatic progress. During the summer of 1998, some members of the Jefferson/ OCO parent group decided to turn their energy to opening a charter school in an effort do whatever they could to relieve overcrowding in the Fruitvale schools. Five other parent groups from other OCO-affiliated congregations started making similar plans. This initiative had, according to Lillian Lopez, a surprising effect. "When word got out that we were going to go to the school district with six charters for approval, it did something we didn't expect and was not even our intent, which was that the teachers' union and the school district called us back to the table to talk about the small schools."

+++++

OCO parents and leaders and the Oakland school district were finally in a conversation that went beyond the worries and hopes for individual schools; together, they started to seek ways to look at the big picture of what was happening systemically in the Oakland schools. Liz Sullivan says, "We moved from a local issue that a local church had taken on with a local school to something we were thinking about as a whole district in a systematic sort of way. We were stopped at the local level and people were just mad. They were furious about the treatment of their children and wanted to keep pushing on it, so we had to go to the next level." Eventually, in the spring of 1999, OUSD approved these six charter schools.



*Janelle Saetern and Candy Segura, Life Academy students*

As parents and OCO leaders worked to develop the neighborhood charter schools in the autumn of 1998, OCO raised funds to send district officials, parents, community leaders and teachers to New York to see the schools of East Harlem that had so inspired them in *The Power of Their Ideas*. This New York trip is iconic in many people's minds, a turning point that allowed them to see that the kind of schools they wanted for their kids really were possible. The trip also made OCO parents understand that they needed a partner with school design experience, and upon returning from the New York trip, they started meeting with BayCES staff.

Matt Hammer, currently Director of San Jose's People Acting in Community Together, reflected on the value of adding BayCES to the partnership. "They are set up to help teachers design and run schools, and that's not what OCO does. We were working with parents and teachers, but that's not our expertise. During the process of starting charter schools, it became clear how tough it is to design and run a good school. We realized that if we were going to do this district-wide with more than one or two schools, it made sense to hook up with an organization that works with and implements dream schools." *The Power of Their Ideas*, the New York trip, and parents' gut sense that overcrowding was their Goliath—all of these factors pointed to the need for small schools, and BayCES provided specific expertise about how small schools allow better learning, teaching and connection.

Collaborative OCO-BayCES work started in the spring of 1999, focusing on Oakland's New Small Autonomous Schools District Policy, the cornerstone of the district's articulated support and plan for the blossoming of small schools. OCO and BayCES also worked among the ranks of the teachers' union, the Oakland Education Association, jointly hiring Liz Sullivan as a teacher organizer to make manifest the strong support among its members and to reverse the union's stated opposition to small school development. Year after year, the union had been buffeted by proposals for change and took an aggressive stance against small schools in the interests of protecting its teachers from what it feared would be yet another go-nowhere reform proposal.



ASCEND students and OCO's Liz Sullivan