

THE JOURNAL OF THE COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS

Innovation in Education

horace

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



STRENGTHENING BONDS BETWEEN FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS

HORACE VOLUME 19 NO 4 ~ SUMMER 2003

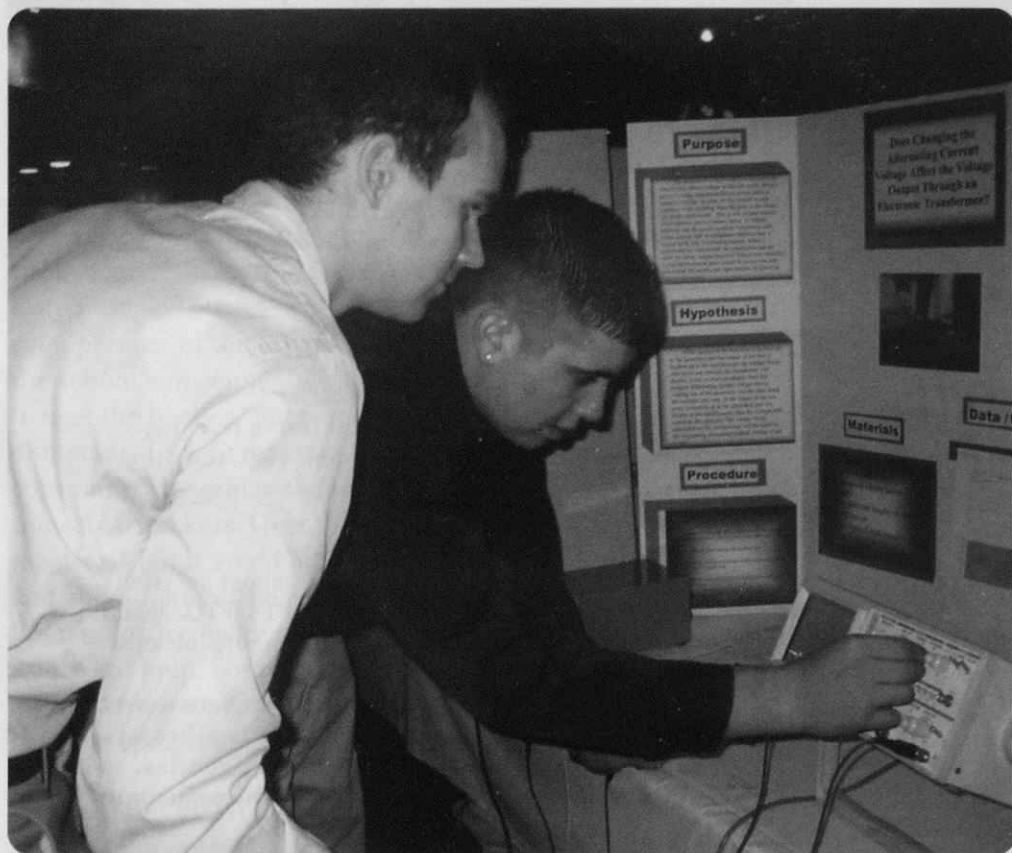


Debera Thompson, math teacher, working with Quest High School students

EMPLOYING MULTIPLE AVENUES FOR COMMUNICATION

Lawrence Kohn teaches English and is the CES Coordinator at the 235-student Quest High School in Humble, Texas, now in its ninth year. Kohn pointed out an unanticipated consequence of creating a school where students thrive: some parents, not feeling the urgent need to fight for a better school for their kids, fade away. Kohn says, "Because we're small and highly personalized, because things appear nice, some parents say, 'Things are fine at my child's school. I don't need to be as involved.' Consequently, we have to work harder to get people involved." Quest principal Cecilia Hawkins added, "To get parents connected, we communicate at every level: email, phone, newsletters. The more we can communicate with families about what students' school days are like – what the expectations are, how learning takes place – the more parents are willing to embrace something very different from what they experienced and what their friends' children are experiencing at other schools. We constantly seek opportunities for clarification."

For all sorts of reasons — transportation limitations, language barriers, family demands, work — many involved, committed parents can't show up at school as often as they would like. Joyce Epstein commends schools that find ways to keep communication flowing without relying solely on face-to-face meetings. "Schools can decide which activities they really want everybody to come to," Epstein said. "And they're going to really work to make that happen by a variety of communications, supports and incentives. We guide schools to look at the planned program for the year and figure out what events are going to be really essential meetings in the school building for everybody. Usually, it would be three or four times a year that you would even think of seeing a large percentage of parents." Epstein's research shows that schools that offer families a variety of ways to get involved experience the most benefit from parental participation in school life. (See "Epstein's Six Types of Involvement" for a range of approaches that characterize successful family-school partnership programs.)



Fenway senior Ryan Ginnetty presenting his science fair project to a judge at Boston's Museum of Science

THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: EPSTEIN'S SIX TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT

Joyce Epstein's work as leader of the National Network of Partnership Schools and the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University has widely influenced research and practice in the area of family-school connections. Epstein's research has shown that schools benefit from using a wide range of family partnership options. When schools incorporate each of these types of involvement into their family connection initiatives, they reach more families and run more successful parent involvement programs.



TYPE ONE—PARENTING

Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

TYPE TWO—COMMUNICATING

Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

TYPE THREE—VOLUNTEERING

Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

TYPE FOUR—LEARNING AT HOME

Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.

TYPE FIVE—DECISION MAKING

Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.

TYPE SIX—COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

*For more about the National Network of Partnership Schools and the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, see *Where to Go for More*, page 17, and visit the National Network of Partnership Schools website, www.partnershipschools.org*

*This information was adapted from Epstein, et al's *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*, second edition (Corwin Press, 2002), page 165.*



Leadership High Parent Liaison Jan Halson at Parent Association fundraiser

Just as schools need to be thoughtful about when and how to include parents, there may be times when parental participation isn't appropriate. Tony Aranella, director of Scarsdale Alternative School, with seventy-five tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders, says he feels lucky. "Our families are great, really involved." Core groups – advisories – meet weekly for lunch at students' homes, and as a rule, parents in the school community deeply understand and actively support the school's mission. "We are unique in this way," says Aranella. "We don't have to beat the bushes. But sometimes we find we have to draw the line. We are a democratic, participatory community, and some student gatherings such as community meetings or fairness committees can be confrontational. We expect honesty from kids. Over the years, we have had parents who want to come to these meetings, but it would be the kiss of death in terms of kids' honesty." Parents can, and should, know the results of decisions made in school community meetings, but it's worth considering that their presence during heated, sensitive discussions might not help. Sometimes, especially at the high school level, a school's core structures depend on confidentiality and trust, and educators need to find a balance between open communication with parents and clear limits on family participation.

CONNECTING FAMILIES TO STUDENT WORK

Perhaps the only true down-side of parental involvement in schools is that it can add to the demands on teachers' time and energy. For this reason, schools have to be judicious about the frequency of after-school, after-work parent-teacher-student programs designed to help parents deepen their understanding of the school's structure, perspective, and goals. Some schools are experimenting with showing rather than telling, finding various opportunities to immerse families in the life of the school.

Many Coalition schools use exhibitions as a way to engage parents – and to add value to the students' intellectual experience. Nancy Diaz, principal of Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center's Public Street Campus, explains how parents get involved not only at the exhibition itself, but in the stages leading up to the exhibition. "Parents are required to come in four times a year to talk with the advisor about their kid's work. We discuss what they want their kid to work on, and the teacher talks about what we want the kid to work on. We give them suggestions for resources and ways that they can help. We show them the material that their kid will be using. In these meetings parents, students, and advisors create a learning plan. Then the kids present work at exhibitions. Parents should be aware of what their kid will present; it's in the learning plan. The work shouldn't be foreign."

When the Met's students present their exhibitions, their families feel the joy of watching their child succeed or the pain of her missing the mark. Public exhibitions of what students know and can do provide strong incentive for families to help their kids succeed, and including families at the start of the process creates more opportunities for involvement and support. "It does take some time for parents to understand," admits Diaz, referring to some parents wondering why they are being asked to participate so frequently. But she feels it's time well spent, both in terms of student learning and transforming families into advocates for the Met's way of doing school. "We re-educate parents about education," Diaz says.

Advisories are another structure fundamental to many Coalition schools but often utterly unfamiliar to families. Jan Halson, Parent Liaison and former parent at San Francisco's Leadership High School, plans to bring together the families of students in the same advisory groups to increase parental connection to the school and expand their resource base. "We are constantly looking for ways to improve lines of communication. Next year, we are planning advisory-based social activities with parents. It will create synergy between parents – just knowing other parents of the same advisee group is half the battle. When you need clarification about something in your child's life, you'll have that many more people to turn to." Leadership and other schools also use advisories as structures for parent involvement: as a way to select parent council or parent-teacher-student association representatives, for example, or as a way to organize phone trees and other communication paths.

Some schools seek to incorporate parents' wisdom and experience into the academic content of the school curriculum – in ways that don't require the parents to come to school. "A lot of our pedagogy asks students to draw in their families to give testimony," describes Fenway's Larry Myatt. "For a Great Depression unit, students interview their grandparents. Or we ask students to find out how their family members experienced the civil rights era. This engages families in our pedagogy – and families are the best primary source documentation. Because we do this a lot, parents feel part of the life of the school."

DRAWING PARENTS INTO THE LIFE OF THE SCHOOL: FINAL THOUGHTS

Persistent contacts with families can make a difference in students' academic and personal lives. By collaboratively discussing standards and goals, communicating clearly, addressing what really matters to families, involving parents in exhibitions, advisories, and curriculum, and establishing thoughtful boundaries between school and home, educators at Coalition schools are creating connections between school and home and, in the process, transforming families into advocates for small, personalized, rigorous schools. Parents and educators have limited time and varied resources; these constraints demand that we be critical about family partnerships and allow time to reflect on family-involvement efforts, soliciting feedback and refining practices from year to year.

Larry Myatt observes that schools are still finding their way toward these meaningful partnerships. "We've excluded parents from legitimate involvement in schools," he says. "Drawing parents into the life of school is new. We don't know always how to behave with each other." But learning how is well worth it.

REFERENCES:

Epstein, Joyce L., et al. *School, Family and Community Partnerships, Second Edition* (Corwin Press, 2002)

Henderson, Anne T. and Mapp, Karen L. *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (Southwestern Education Development Laboratory, 2002). Also available online at www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf

Weiss, Heather, et al. "Beyond the Parent-Teacher Conference: Diverse Patterns of Home-School Communication," <http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hfrp/pubs/onlinepubs/beyondptc.html>

AFFILIATE WITH CES NATIONAL

If CES stands for what you believe in - personalized, equitable, intellectually vital schools - we invite you to affiliate with CES National as a school or as an individual. Stand up for schooling that is worthy of the name - and join a network of passionate educators and innovative schools.

Learn more about CES National Affiliation at www.essentialschools.org.

LITERATURE CIRCLES: FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS WORKING TOGETHER TOWARD READING IMPROVEMENT

"When you're a single mother, you work here, you work there – even if you want to sit down and talk with your kids, you can't," lamented Raysa Vidal. Balancing her responsibilities as mother of three and as Home-School Community Liaison at Paterson, New Jersey's School 14, Vidal knew that her family couldn't fit another thing into their days and nights – but she also knew that her youngest son, George, a fourth grader at School 14, would benefit tremendously from more time reading at home.

As Vidal struggled with finding time to read with George, School Media Specialist Linda Ernst went in search of ways to support her and other Paterson families. "I wanted to make parents more aware of sharing books with their kids," recalled Ernst. "Very few did – maybe they didn't know how. My goal was to enable parents to share and appreciate reading. If kids see their parents read, then the kids would be more likely to read and learn." Her quest to promote family literacy at School 14 – which enrolls 220 students in grades one through four – led her to literature circles.

Literature circles originally emerged in the 1980s as small student-led literature discussion groups – they are often described as book clubs for kids in classroom settings – and have a strong research base demonstrating how they contribute to literacy improvement and achievement (see *More About Literature Circles*, page 16, for pointers to this research). Working with Raysa Vidal, New Jersey CES coach Stacy Pendergrast, School 14 principal Rosetta Wilson, and other staff members, Ernst adapted literature circles to include third and fourth grade students reading and discussing books with their families. The family literature circles took place once a week after school and work, from 5:30 to 7:00. The school provided pizza and *childcare so that families could come* with all of their children and not worry about having to fix dinner afterward. Parents did bring other kids – one

LITERATURE CIRCLE ROLES: SOME EXAMPLES

Artful Artist Participants use visual art to represent significant ideas or scenes.

Capable Connector Participants find connections between the reading material and other events in their lives: personal experiences, something studied in another class, or another book, for example.

Discussion Director Participants write questions that will initiate and guide group discussion.

Literary Luminary Participants select interesting or important passages.

Word Wizard Participants discuss words in the text that are unusual, interesting, or difficult to understand.

SOME BOOKS THAT SCHOOL 19'S
LITERATURE CIRCLE PARTICIPANTS
DISCUSSED:

A Chair for My Mother, Vera B. Williams
(Scott Foresman, 1984)

*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible,
No Good, Very Bad Day*, Judith Viorst
(Aladdin Library, 1987)

Down by the Cool of the Pool, Tony
Mitton (Orchard Books, 2002)

Fly Away Home, Eve Bunting
(Clarion Books, 1993)

Monster Mama, Liz Rosenberg
(Putnam Publishing, 1993)

mother with five children was a regular participant – and all of them, from three year-olds through teenagers, soon started to participate in the book discussions. Pendergrast says, "Kids that are four and people that are forty are discussing the same story. The process is not scaled down for the younger kids and it really engaged parents. Everyone participates at his or her own level. This inclusiveness creates a really evident tone of decency. It doesn't matter who you are— if you're there, you join in because it feels so warm and inviting."

At the elementary school level, facilitators of literature circles often employ a variety of roles to provide structure so the readers can connect to the books

and lead discussions. (See "Literature Circle Roles: Some Examples" for more detail on the roles that School 14's participants used.) "One of the roles that we started off with was the Artful Artist. Ms. Ernst reads a story to the whole group, and then each person goes to work making sense of the story through his or her chosen role. If you're the Artful Artist, you draw a picture from your own life that relates to story and then, when you lead the conversation, you use the picture as a discussion prompt. It concretely teaches children how reading can connect to their own lives. We read one story about a fire, which is something all adults and kids can relate to. Everyone drew different pictures, discussing our experiences with fire and how they related to the story."

As the weeks progressed, Ernst and Pendergrast introduced additional roles and encouraged participants to choose among them. "Though we have clear goals of encouraging family literacy and increasing the student's reading skills, it was important that it not be too formal," said Ernst. "This was also about parents taking time out to be with their children. There was structure but no one felt intimidated."

Vidal described how she felt as a participating parent. "That hour and a half gave us a new way to get to know our kids. They have a chance to be open and express their opinions in front of a whole bunch of people. A lot of people have stage fright, but on these nights, with family support, kids weren't afraid to express themselves." Parents also gained the habit of reading with their kids and the skills to talk about books. And students saw their parents and siblings in a new light, as fellow readers who made time to support and honor them.

Despite literature circles' track record for improving reading skills and the immediate warmth and connection that families experienced as they read together, attracting families was a challenge. Vidal describes School 14's families as typically reluctant to participate in family activities in the school setting. "It's hard to get parents involved. One of the literature circles parents said to me the other day, 'They're afraid that school officials will get involved in their business.' To her I said, 'We just want to help out. By participating, you're making everyone's lives better.' " Principal Rosetta Wilson echoes Vidal's assessment about parents' reticence to participate: "In the past, we've had problems getting parents to come into the school building to talk with us," she said. But Wilson sees programs like literature circles – run with attention to supporting families' needs – as crucial to the work of family connection and inclusion. "With this, people are willing to make more of a commitment. They can see the impact that it has on their kids, and they're learning too; it has immediate rewards."

To reach out to parents, Ernst sent home announcements and follow-up reminders in English and Spanish. She and Vidal called parents, and she recruited students to promote the program in classes, following up with families of eager students. School 14's staff members feel that such intensive effort will pay off in future years, as parents start to trust the school and spread the word around the community. In addition to continuing literature circles, the school plans to add family math and science programs in the coming year.

Started as a four-week pilot program in March 2003, Ernst and her colleagues extended the program by an additional four weeks in response to families' enthusiasm. Grateful for the time to read with her kids, Vidal looks forward to the coming year's programs and plans a more intensive family recruitment effort for the summer. "I know as a parent that the more you're involved in your children's education, the more they'll do and the better they'll do," she said. "If I am involved with teachers, I know my son will do good. And I know I am not going to lose him when he becomes a teenager because is used to doing well in school, and he knows that Mommy will be watching him with four eyes."

MORE ABOUT LITERATURE CIRCLES

For extensive, thoughtfully written descriptions of the theory and practice of literature circles, along with analysis of research that supports their effectiveness, see *Harvey Daniels' Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups, Second edition* (Stenhouse Publishers, Portland, ME, 2002) Literature Circles is also available online at www.stenhouse.com/o333.htm.

DEFINING LITERATURE CIRCLES

In *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups*, author Harvey Daniels writes that literature circles have the following hallmarks:

01. Students choose their own reading materials
02. Small temporary groups are formed, based upon book choice
03. Different groups read different books
04. Groups meet on a regular, predictable schedule to discuss their reading
05. Kids use written or drawn notes to guide both their reading and discussion
06. Discussion topics come from the students
07. Group meetings aim to be open, natural conversations about books, so personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome
08. The teacher serves as a facilitator, not a group member or instructor
09. Evaluation is by teacher observation and student self-evaluation
10. A spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room.
11. When books are finished, readers share with their classmates, and then new groups form around new reading choices.

The website www.literaturecircles.com, cosponsored by Stenhouse Publishers and the Walloon Institute, also provides an overview of literature circle practices, resources, and research.



DEAR READERS



I believe that building relationships by engaging families in face-to-face contact is a critical factor for student success. Strategies for engaging parents in school life can include an application process in which parents and students write essays on why they want to be in the school community, home visits, learning plan meetings, public exhibitions of work, and community gatherings.

In designing community schools, family members become partners with school personnel to form safety nets for children. By providing information, training, and learning opportunities that empower parents to plan for their own and their children's future, community schools offer opportunities for parents to grow and learn with their children. Family literacy programs, health and fitness opportunities, art and technology activities, and workshops on home ownership, legal issues, and tax assistance are some of the options that community schools can offer.

We need to remember that children learn and grow best when they have strong families. We know that families do better in cohesive communities that help them improve their quality of life. We know that if we can construct schools where students and their families are known well, the whole community is much more likely to thrive. These practices create a community of life-long learners experiencing education in a community setting.

It is my dream for communities all over the country to offer viable learning environments for kids to grow—and it begins when we enroll families.

ELAYNE WALKER-CABRAL
*Director, Family and Community
Engagement, The MET School*

Recently, I participated in an assessment of a graduating student's portfolio that demonstrated the evolution of his dream to become a rocket scientist. Along with teachers and community members, the student's mother and sister were there. His presentation was reflective, thoughtful, ambitious—and a tearjerker. Among many artifacts, he included a ticket stub from a space museum visit when he was five. He spoke about the trip as the birth of his intellectual self, recounting his mother's descriptions of his zeal. I had a vivid flash of how his five year-old eyes must have shined with the thrill of new learning.

His portfolio demonstrated what kept those lights shining brightly through the years. The development of his passion for space travel resulted from collaboration between his family, school, and his own scholarship. I looked, a little misty-eyed, at his beaming mom and thought, "You did this! You paid attention to what sustained your kid's imagination and you helped him use that to become this extraordinary, accomplished eighteen-year old." I was deeply moved to witness his intellectual achievement—and the human connections that had supported it.

As I researched this issue of *Horace*, conversations with CES-affiliated educators and parents deepened my understanding of how connections between families and schools help create the conditions for our children's minds to blossom and thrive. Thanks go out to all of them for the resulting professional and personal insight. I hope that this issue conveys the depth of their wisdom and experience.

p.s. As I mentioned in this space in the last issue, I was expecting my second child. Those expectations indeed were met by Leo, born in April 2003. Thanks to all of you for creating better schools for him and for all children.

JILL DAVIDSON
Horace Editor

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE

Resources for learning more about Family and Community Involvement

NATIONAL NETWORK OF PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS

The National Network of Partnership Schools is a group of 900 schools working to promote, evaluate, and improve their family and community partnership programs. In exchange for agreeing to a set of standards and practices for developing, implementing, and assessing their partnerships, schools gain access to training materials, workshops, and a newsletter, along with participating in ongoing research on the effects of family-school-community partnerships; the National Network of Partnership Schools website provides much of this information. "Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork" is a particularly useful section for educators interested in engaging families in students' daily academic efforts.

website: www.partnershipschools.org email: nnps@csos.jhu.edu

telephone: 410/516-8800

mailing address: Johns Hopkins University, 3003 N. Charles Street, Suite 200, Baltimore, MD 21218

NATIONAL CENTER FOR FAMILY & COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS WITH SCHOOLS

Part of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, the National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools produces research reports, holds conferences and satellite broadcasts, and maintains a website devoted to school-family-community partnerships. Its Resources section offers a searchable research database and a clear and comprehensive review and synthesis of research on school partnerships entitled "A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement." If you're planning or evaluating education partnership programs, it's a must-read.

website: www.sedl.org/connections email: connections@sedl.org

telephone: 800/476-6861 fax: 512/476-2286

mailing address: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 211 East Seventh Street, Austin, TX 78701-3281

STUDY CIRCLES RESOURCE CENTER

The Study Circles Resource Center assists individuals and organizations interested in addressing challenges facing their community, offering a process to create constructive conversation and action. In facilitated small group discussions, community members exchange views, generate solutions, and collaborate to transform their discussions into change. Through its website and in regional workshops, the Study Circles Resource Center offers advice on organization, facilitation, and goal-setting along with other technical assistance. The website also offers success stories, links to local study circle programs, assessment and documentation information, and discussion guides focused on various civic issues including education (for school-specific discussion structures, look for "Helping Every Student Succeed: Schools and Communities Working Together").

website: www.studycircles.org email: src@studycircles.org

telephone: 860/928-2616 fax: 860/928-3713

mailing address: PO Box 203, 697 Pomfret Street, Pomfret, CT 06258

INSTITUTE FOR RESPONSIVE EDUCATION

For thirty years, the Institute for Responsive Education has been a leader in the field of school, family, and community partnerships, conducting research, distributing information, offering training and technical assistance, and working as an advocate for effective partnerships. IRE's work defines what works best in school partnership programs at all grade levels and in various settings. The website presents IRE's past and ongoing research findings and links to its publications (some available free of charge). It also features a Tips section, which offers advice on starting and sustaining school-family-community partnerships in specific, one-page briefs.

website: www.responsiveeducation.org

telephone: 617/373-2595 fax: 617/373-8839

mailing address: 21 Lake Hall, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115

COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

As its name indicates, the Coalition for Community Schools promotes community schools—schools that bring together services to support students, families, and community members. The Coalition unites dozens of local, state, and national organizations as partners. Its website gathers resources from its partners and other useful sources to assist community school builders in the areas of research, design, advocacy, policy, and network building. The site also offers research reports, a large bibliography, and a diverse group of descriptions of community schools from around the country—these descriptions demonstrate a wide range of community school possibilities.

website: www.communityschools.org email: ccs@iel.org

telephone: 202/822-8405 fax: 202/872-4050

mailing address: c/o Institute for Educational Leadership, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20036

NATIONAL PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION

The National PTA provides resources for establishing well-organized local PTA or PTSA (parent teacher student association) groups, along with information for PTA members and the general public. Its website houses online conversation groups for idea exchange, resources, positions on federal legislation, and specific advice for parents about children's nutrition, substance abuse, crisis management, television and media, assessment and standards, family communication, and more. The National PTA offers many resources in Spanish; some are available in Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and other languages. National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, offered on the National PTA site, is an excellent resource for assessing and strengthening family-school initiatives. State and school-level PTA websites, linked to the National PTA site, have more specific information on fundraising guidelines, state legislation, and other local issues.

website: www.pta.org email: info@pta.org

telephone: 312/670-6782 or 800/307-4PTA fax: 312/670-6783

mailing address: 330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60611

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT NETWORK OF EDUCATORS AT THE HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT

The Family Involvement Network of Educators provides resources to train teachers and families to work together. Focusing particularly on training educators in the theory and practice of family involvement in education, FINE publishes monthly research and resource updates and a semiannual e-newsletter that concentrates on specific issues such as family involvement in mathematics or working with diverse communities. The website also offers a large resource section with links to research, annotated bibliographies, course syllabi, teaching cases, and workshop materials.

website: <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine.html> email: fine@gse.harvard.edu

telephone: 617/495-9108 fax: 617/495-8594

mailing address: 3 Garden Street, Cambridge, MA 02138

NATIONAL COALITION FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

NCPIE is a coalition of education, community, public service, and advocacy organizations working to create family-school partnerships. NCPIE works both locally—with monthly Washington DC-area meetings—and at the national level to advocate for family-school partnerships and offers policy guidelines and analyses of related legislation. Offering an excellent annotated resource section along with links to research and reports from partner organizations, the NCPIE website is a useful guide to the world of research about and policies affecting families' involvement in their children's education.

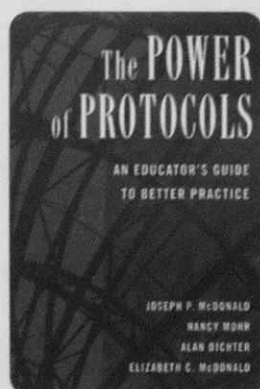
website: www.ncpie.org

telephone: 703/359-8973 fax: 703/359-0972

mailing address: 3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91-A, Fairfax, VA 22030-2401

THE POWER OF PROTOCOLS: AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO BETTER PRACTICE

by Joseph P. McDonald, Nancy Mohr, Alan Dichter, and Elizabeth C. McDonald
(Teachers College Press, 144 pages, \$15.95) reviewed by Mary Hastings



Many CES schools have been using protocols over the past ten years for looking at student and teacher work, as part of Critical Friends Groups, or in the context of common planning time. With many combined years of practice as Coalition researchers, urban school leaders, and founders and active participants in the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), *The Power of Protocols'* four authors offer a depth of wisdom and practicality that is enlightening and reassuring.

When first introduced, the practice of using protocols may feel stiff, formal and even a bit mysterious. But the authors make a compelling case for the necessity of "constraining behavior to enhance experience" by placing the term "protocol" in the context of its use in other fields: diplomacy, medical science, and the social sciences. My first encounter with the term "protocol" came from my nursing background and I recalled the necessity for following specific steps in the care of patients in any number of situations. While those steps were meant to ensure the optimal response from the patient, it was also important to remain flexible and adapt our care as necessary. This is exactly what the authors encourage us to do as they present the theory and practice of protocol use in educational settings.

The four basic ideas of the book are: that professional educators should take charge of our own learning, that we should pause periodically in our practice to become "students of our students," that we understand more deeply the term "protocol," and that we build the high performance, collaborative workplaces that will lead to student and teacher learning and success. Through gaining experience in the facilitation of protocols and the practice of exploring student work together, educators have developed an "accountability based on faithfulness to learning...that combines front-line scrutiny of student work, collective responsiveness to individual student needs, and strategic flexibility at all levels of the organization," as opposed to the accountability imposed by district, state and federal policy makers. In other words, we can find out for ourselves much of what we need to know about our teaching and our students' learning. And we can hold ourselves responsible for the changes needed to enhance teaching and learning in our particular school communities.

Anyone who has ever facilitated or participated in protocols and heard other participants lament, "Why can't we just talk about the work? Why do we have to follow all these rules?" will appreciate the opening chapter's rich description of the reasons why protocol use all over the United States and in many other countries has enriched the learning of educators and had a positive impact on student achievement.

The second chapter examines the role of the facilitator. The use of protocols requires a facilitator who will "promote participation, ensure equity and build trust" within the professional community. The structure of protocols demands these skills and also allows for them to develop and deepen as facilitators gain experience with various protocols and contexts.

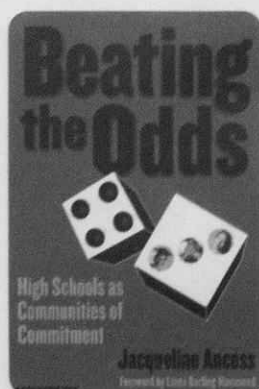
The remaining chapters are devoted to the various protocols, aggregating them according to their most likely purpose: protocols for opening, intervening in, or closing a meeting; protocols for setting norms; protocols for use with outside sources such as texts or speakers; protocols for examining challenges and successes in teaching practice; and, finally, protocols for examining student work. Each protocol's origin is described, along with its purpose, organization, process, facilitation tips, and possible variations.

Finally, the authors encourage the reader to "jump in" and begin, with practical tips for beginning and developing the practice of protocols. They also include a chart in the appendix that matches protocols with their suggested uses along with a list of other useful resources. As a Critical Friends Group coach and member of NSRF, I deeply appreciate the way this guide helped to enlarge my understanding of protocols and deepen my sense of their efficacy in teaching practice.

Mary Hastings is the Program Director of the Southern New England Coalition of Essential Schools based at the Center for Collaborative Education in Boston, Massachusetts.

BEATING THE ODDS: HIGH SCHOOLS AS COMMUNITIES OF COMMITMENT

by Jacqueline Ancess (Teachers College Press, 192 pages, \$19.95) reviewed by Kathy Simon



It is hard for most of us who attended and began teaching in standard-issue schools in this country to visualize how schooling could be truly different. We can stretch our imaginations to picture a particularly exciting project, a spectacular field trip, or maybe smaller class sizes. But it is hard, without living it, to envision schools that are different at the core, where all of the structures and relationships are designed to nurture students' needs for meaning, purpose, mastery, connection, and growth.

Describing the work of three CES high schools—Paul Hodgson Vocational-Technical High School in New Castle County, Delaware; International High in Queens, New York City; and Urban Academy in Manhattan—Ancess provides vivid images of schools that are set up on a different paradigm from the current norm. These schools are by no means carbon copies of each other; each is substantially shaped by its faculty, its community, its history, and the particular groups of students it serves. But each of the schools has succeeded in creating what Ancess calls a “community of commitment,” characterized by a shared vision, a culture of caring, a willingness to engage in productive struggle, and a sense of mutual accountability among all community members. Teachers, parents, administrators, and students at these schools have created environments that bring out the best in all the groups, succeeding particularly in unleashing their students' energy and intellectual vitality. Ancess quotes Urban Academy Co-director Herb Mack, describing the vision of this sort of community as “a people-centered educational community in which adults provide students with opportunities to learn and develop; people are the most important thing; who we are and who we want to be drives the school; individual needs, not institutional needs drive the school; decisions are made around constellations of people-issues rather than external requirements.”

In this “age of accountability,” *Beating the Odds* provides an alternative understanding of the notion of accountability. As Ancess puts it, “conceptions of accountability must change from compliance to collective responsibility for student outcomes.” As teachers, we resist taking responsibility for the failure of any particular student when it seems beyond our power to help, and in large, impersonal schools, it often is beyond our power to help. We take responsibility, by contrast, when we have a sense of power and efficacy. Ancess' portraits demonstrate that it is possible to construct schools in which teachers actually do feel powerful—because they work in teams that can lend support, because

they have flexibility to create curriculum that works for individual students, because they have few enough students to get to know them well, because the school culture supports the idea that students deserve individual attention.

Ancess worries, as I do, that schools like those she describes will be written off as "boutiques," schools that can't be replicated on a large scale. The emphasis that these schools put on individual relationships and caring, in particular, may seem at odds with the needs for efficiency and achievement. But as Ancess argues, "the problem lies in our collective imagination, which refuses to consider large-scale possibilities of successful breakthrough schools." *Beating the Odds*—and the classrooms and schools it depicts—helps us develop a more powerful collective imagination, convincing us that we can create a whole system of public schools that are places of caring, meaning, and accomplishment.

Kathy Simon is co-Executive Director of CES National and author of Moral Questions in the Classroom: How to Get Kids to Think Deeply about Real Life and Their Schoolwork, Yale University Press, 2001.

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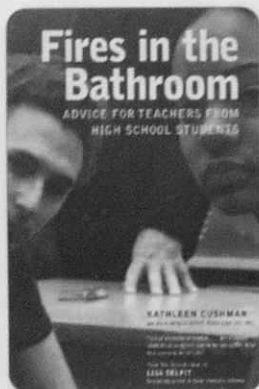
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FIRES IN THE BATHROOM: ADVICE FOR TEACHERS FROM HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

by Kathleen Cushman and the Students of What Kids Can Do, Inc. (The New Press, 240 pages, \$24.95) reviewed by Jill Davidson



"Getting adolescents to talk honestly takes only genuine interest in what they have to say," writes Kathleen Cushman in *Fires in the Bathroom*, a book of advice to teachers coauthored with forty high school students from New York City, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Providence, Rhode Island. By talking and writing with these students, Cushman—*Horace's* former editor—elicited insightful commentary on the pivotal interactions that either create or destroy strong relationships between teachers and students. While the book contains criticism—and some horror stories of bad teaching—many students praise teachers for the support and guidance they've been given.

Much of the advice focuses on building relationships of mutual understanding and respect. The authors tell us that though teachers may view them narrowly—as a sophomore, as a good history student, as a new immigrant—students have full, vivid, and complex lives. Such artifacts as a schedule of one girl's day from waking to bedtime in the "Knowing Kids Well" chapter and lists of what various kids read when they can choose freely in "Motivation and Boredom" reveal crucial information that teachers do not always know how to uncover.

Cushman invites us in to her coauthors' thoughts—presented extensively throughout the book in their own words—by organizing them into concerns and challenges including: classroom behavior, teaching and learning difficult material, teaching English language learners, dealing with setbacks, and more. Students' thoughts about what teachers can do to help them in each area vary and sometimes contradict each other—for what works for one person may well not work for another.

Each chapter includes supplementary material: a questionnaire for teachers to get to know students better, a reflective exercise to help teachers determine if they play favorites, a chart that suggests what students may be feeling when they exhibit specific classroom behaviors and how teachers can help, a list of dos and don'ts for making homework matter, and more. These exercises enable teachers to explore their reactions and connect their experiences to the authors' suggestions and perceptions.

Though primarily aimed at teachers, *Fires in the Bathroom* is useful for students, too. Because Cushman takes her coauthors' experiences seriously, kids who may not have the confidence or conditions to voice their thoughts will realize that their insight into themselves as learners really does matter. For anyone who aims to understand high school kids more deeply, this book is a great place to start.

CLASSROOM DISCOURSE: THE LANGUAGE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING SECOND EDITION

by Courtney B. Cazden (Heinemann Press, 216 pages, \$24.00) reviewed by Zaretta Hammond

Classroom Discourse

The Language of Teaching and Learning

Courtney B. Cazden

Courtney Cazden examines two questions fundamental to successful CES practice: How do patterns of talk in classrooms affect the equality of students' educational opportunities and outcomes? How is discourse a support for deeper student learning?

Cazden focuses on a variety of different types of discourse that occur in classrooms, from "sharing time" to "public disagreements in student discussions." She deftly marries analysis of university and teacher research findings with rich examples of actual transcripts of students and teachers talking to reveal patterns in the conversations. Cazden suggests that how students talk to each other connects directly with their ability to use their minds well.

The heart of the text examines ways in which teachers struggle to "retrain" students to engage in more rigorous student-to-student discussions that stimulate and support "higher-order thinking" across the curriculum. She shares an exchange among fourth-grade students discussing a math problem. At first, they are unsure of what there is to discuss—they think that the solution to the problem is either right or wrong. But with some prompting from their teacher, the students actively debate the different approaches to finding a solution. Each student's statements reveal more and more of his thought process to his classmates. Despite the public "disagreements," each student's thinking is pushed deeper. While not a how-to book, the text is instructive for those who want to shift from teacher-led discussions to true student-to-student discourse.

Cazden's book challenges us to think about how "observable classroom discourse affects the unobservable thinking of each student," and thereby, the very nature of what they learn. She also asks the reader to re-examine whose talk is valued in the classroom and how a multicultural society can honor different types of discourse and different ways of using language. Cazden reminds us that in order to have healthy communities (inside and outside the classroom) all students must be active members, engaging in public discourse around important issues. She demonstrates how enriching classroom dialogue can help bring alive our Common Principle of democracy and equity.

Zaretta Hammond, a former writing teacher, is the Director of Professional Development and Research at the Bay Area Coalition of Equitable Schools.

A CARING ADULT IN A DIFFERENT SETTING

by Gary Heyder



In schools where people know each other well and focus on supporting academic and personal growth, meaningful relationships blossom in offices, in the library, on the basketball court, or in the lunchroom, wherever adults pay close, caring attention to students. Gary Heyder, custodian at Hilliard Weaver Middle School in Hilliard, Ohio, one of thousands who support CES school communities nationwide in countless ways outside the classroom, talked with Horace about his connection with students and the meaning of his work to the school community.

I am one of five custodians. I'm the first one here in the morning, getting the building open and prepped for the day. I set the tone for the school—the kids need that friendly atmosphere. I love my job, love working with kids.

I am not a teacher, and that's important—kids can talk with me about things that aren't school related: cartoons, baseball cards, Pokemon, Yu-Gi-Oh, skateboards. There are kids who I target: kids who struggle, who spend time at the principal's office. Sometimes, their home lives are not what they should be, and sometimes I can find ways to build relationships with them. I am a person in the school building who gives kids a different perspective on life. I didn't go to college and am not a teacher, but I still can help kids.

Sometimes a teacher will come to me and say, "This kid and I need a break from each other. Can she hang out with you for this period?" I show these students what I am doing for the day, and I say, "Come on, help me do this." Then we pick up trash, or fix lockers, and just talk. Being with a caring adult in a different setting really works with some kids who are angry, shut down, or having a hard time. You are an adult and a role model. If you're having a bad day, you have to show how to handle stress and pressure in a positive way.

Safety is a huge issue in schools. Because I don't teach, I have the freedom of roaming the building. I greet any adult immediately. Nothing beats the eyeball, checking someone out. That promotes a positive feeling—parents feel like their kids are safe at school.

I graduated from this school district; I've been here since 1970 and I've watched it grow and change. Hilliard is one of the fastest growing districts in the state. All the time, we're getting new families in and different kinds of students, especially more ESL students. There's a girl that I see every day who speaks Spanish; she can't say very many words in English yet, but we have made a bond. I am a familiar face. I am a non-threatening person for her because I am not a teacher.

I think that having a building that isn't run down helps kids learn. If you've got bathrooms with stall doors broken off, people can't feel good about their school. The district believes in that and spends the money. The custodians wear uniforms, so when you see us you know who we are. It makes a difference. Kids know we're there, and we are proud of taking an active role. Teachers can only do so much, so custodians and other school staff members feel like we have to help kids make the right choices when parents and teachers aren't there.

We believe that if we can personalize our jobs and make the students realize that someone has to clean graffiti, they're more likely not to do it. And we see the effects of our leadership: the baseball team always cleans out their own dugout after school. We want them to be as proud of the school as we are.

Gary Heyder, *Union Secretary*
OAPSE LOCAL #310

MORE ABOUT THE SCHOOLS

Information for learning more about the individual schools featured in this issue of Horace.

FENWAY HIGH SCHOOL *Public school serving grades 9-12*

174 Ipswich Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02215

telephone: 617/635-9911 fax: 617/635-9204

website: <http://fenway.boston.k12.ma.us/>

HILLIARD WEAVER MIDDLE SCHOOL *Public school serving grades 7-8*

4600 Avery Road, Hilliard, Ohio 43026

telephone: 614/529-7424 fax: 614/529-7425

website: www.hilliard.k12.oh.us/wms/default.html

LEADERSHIP HIGH SCHOOL *Public school serving grades 9-12*

300 Seneca Avenue, San Francisco, California 94112

telephone: 415/841-8910

website: www.leadershiphigh.org

THE METROPOLITAN REGIONAL CAREER AND TECHNICAL
CENTER (The Met)—PUBLIC STREET CAMPUS *Public school serving grades 9-12*

325 Public Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02905

telephone: 401/752-2600

website: www.metcenter.org

MISSION HILL SCHOOL *Public school serving grades K-8*

67 Alleghany Street, Roxbury, Massachusetts 02120

telephone: 617/635-6384

website: www.missionhillschool.org

SCARSDALE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL *Public school serving grades 10-12*

45 Wayside Lane, Scarsdale, New York 10583

telephone: 914/0721-2590 fax: 914/721-2579

website: www.scarsdaleschools.k12.ny.us/hs/Aschool/

SCHOOL 14 *Public school serving grades 1-4*

522 Union Avenue, Paterson, New Jersey 07522

telephone: 973/321-0140 fax: 973/321-0146

website: <http://inet.paterson.k12.nj.us/~schools/school14/>

QUEST HIGH SCHOOL *Public school serving grades 9-12*

1890 Timber Forest Drive, Humble, Texas 77346

telephone: 281/641-7300 fax: 281/641-7417

website: <http://qhs.humble.k12.tx.us/>

To learn more about all Coalition of Essential School Regional Centers and affiliated schools,
visit the CES National website at www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/schools/schools.html

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS:
STRENGTHENING BONDS BETWEEN FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS
HORACE VOLUME 19 ^{NO.} 4

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READ THIS! *Recommended Books*


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
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*Cover: Gary Heyder, Custodian at Hilliard Weaver Middle School
in Hilliard, Ohio with seventh grader Abby Cornwell.*

HORACE AND THE COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS




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 engaged in redesigning schools and teaching practices to create equitable, personalized, student centered, intellectually rich schools. Interested 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.




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Visit the CES National web site at www.essentialschools.org to read past *Horace* issues from 1988 through the present. And *Horace* wants to hear about your experiences and reactions to this and past issues. Go to www.essentialschools.org and join CES Interactive for follow-up discussions, or email Jill Davidson, *Horace* editor, at jdavidson@essentialschools.org.



THE NEXT ISSUE

Horace's next issue, on school design, focuses on how schools structure their space, time, and personal relationships to create conditions for student success. If you would like to contribute questions, thoughts, or your own experiences, contact Jill Davidson at jdavidson@essentialschools.org. And see our themes on the next page for a broad sense of what's coming up. We welcome book review suggestions, contributions, and ideas for future issues.

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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.

THE COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS

LEADERSHIP

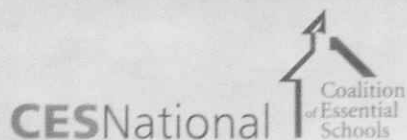


What kinds of leadership are necessary to transform schools into more humane and intellectually rigorous environments? How can the change process be sustained? Topics include: governance, distributed leadership, and managing the change process.

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

STRENGTHENING BONDS BETWEEN FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS

The national office of the Coalition of Essential Schools gratefully
acknowledges support from the following foundations
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SHOW, DON'T TELL: STRATEGIES FOR FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN CES SCHOOLS

The continuity of family involvement at home appears to have a protective effect on children as they progress through our complex educational system. The more families support their children's learning and educational progress, the more their children tend to do well in school and continue their education.

—A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement

As partners with parents in helping students grow, Essential school educators work to include families in school life. But as they do, they grapple with questions. What sorts of parental involvement in school positively influence their children's academic successes? How can we best listen and respond to families' ideas and concerns? How can we make parents into allies and advocates?

To view how connections between families and educators sustain small, meaningful, and intellectually challenging schools, *Horace* talked with educators and family members at six Essential schools: Quest High School in Humble, Texas; Scarsdale Alternative School in Scarsdale, New York; Mission Hill School in Roxbury, Massachusetts; The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center in Providence, Rhode Island; Leadership High School in San Francisco; and Fenway High School in Boston. While these school communities differ widely from each other on many measures, they all deeply value connections with families. Each school has worked to expand conversations about standards and goals, to improve their communication strategies, and to identify ways for family members to experience school life.

FAMILY CONFERENCES AND FAMILY GOAL SETTING

Families are often engaged in schools in a variety of ways — from fundraising, to sponsoring clubs and teams, to using school-based health services and adult-education classes. But for most of our schools, the key concern is getting parents involved in understanding and supporting their children's academic work. Joyce Epstein, Director of the National Network of Partnership Schools and the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, observes, "In this era of accountability, there really is an emphasis everywhere on helping youngsters do better on tests, meet standards, and work toward their highest potential. This carries over into desired kinds of parental involvement."



6th and 7th graders at Mission Hill Elementary sharing their sugar cube pyramid from science class

Building a true collaboration between school and family around academic achievement and personal goal-setting, however, is not so easy. While parent-teacher conferences can be powerful venues for conversations about academic and personal goals for students, often such in-depth conversations prove nearly impossible to schedule. When they do occur, parent-teacher conferences are often strained, full of the anxiety of unasked questions. Parents might wonder, "Does this teacher understand how much is at stake with my kid, how she needs to do well in school and get into college?" And teachers might think, "Does this parent understand that how much the pressure to succeed is causing this kid stress and preventing her from trying new things?" But they talk about the student's successes, perhaps about how hard she works or where she might go to college, and they don't get to the common ground of underlying issues.

John Wolfe, the Learning Coach at Mission Hill School in Roxbury, Massachusetts, teaches, tutors, works with children with special needs, and meets with parents and students. In conversation, Wolfe emphasizes the importance of breaking the mold of the typical parent-teacher conference; he believes that serious talk about a student's school experiences must include parents (or other adult care-givers) and students. Wolfe says that the practice of including students in conversations between parents and teachers increases students' power and reduces the charges of anxiety or miscommunication. Family conferences allow insight and information to be freely shared and openly discussed. "There is nothing that the teacher could say to parents that the kid doesn't already know. In most cases, it's fine to discuss school matters in front of a child. Family and school may disagree about conclusions," says Wolfe. But if they talk together, with the student who lives in both worlds, there is common ground.

Jane Eberle, Director of Volunteer Services and Business Partnerships for the South Portland, Maine schools, agrees with Wolfe's conviction that school conferences should include parents (or other adult care-givers) and students, noting that including students gives parents a powerful incentive for participating. Many of the South Portland schools are replacing parent-teacher conferences with twice-annual student-driven goal-setting conferences in which students discuss their progress toward their personal goals and the standards set by the Maine Learning Results. "It's much more motivating, says Eberle. "Parents recognize the importance of their child participating in creating that educational plan and setting goals for year. The kids really need to be there and leading the conversation – it doesn't work so well for parents to go back to their kids and say, 'Your teacher says this and that.' Parents want to support their kids and be there when they are doing important things with their lives."

Corresponding with Eberle's observation, Joyce Epstein's research on effective family involvement programs shows that the power in conversations about student progress – which are typically school-driven – needs to be redistributed. "A powerful way to link families and schools is helping students set goals for the school year and then following how the family, the school, and the student are working toward those goals," commented Epstein. "This is very helpful, especially if the process is student centered, meaning that it's the student's task to set goals and plan the conference and the family is brought into the task."

As schools reach out to include families in planning and assessing students' academic progress, it's useful to recall that families already have expectations about the ways their children will learn and grow. When planning to talk to parents about their kids' learning, it's crucial that teachers ask parents about their goals for their kids. (For an example of this kind of conversation, see "Written on the Body," *Horace* 18.4, Summer 2002.) Creating opportunities for parents, educators, and students to voice their hopes and expectations promotes clear communication and prevents students from feeling caught between family and school value systems.



Fenway High School seniors Felice Poles, Alicia Linton, Priscilla Weinstein, Julian McNeil, Phedra Roberts, and Sydney Gray

PICKING UP ON ISSUES THAT MATTER TO PARENTS

Finding out what is on parents' minds requires extra effort as students get older. A Harvard Graduate School of Education study of family-school communication in kindergarten and first grade classes reports, "When asked about their strategies for communicating with study families, the most frequent type of communication teachers reported were informal meetings with parents at the beginning or end of the school day." In the early years of school, parents are much more likely to be present at school for pick-ups and drop-offs, making that valuable informal communication possible. But as their children gain independence, parents are less likely to appear routinely at school, and casual contact between teachers and parents diminishes.

Larry Myatt, founder and long-time Headmaster of the 270-student Fenway High School in Boston, realized that if they were going to have meaningful connections with parents, Fenway staff members had to engage parents in conversations about parents' concerns. "We had to reach out to parents and ask, 'What are you struggling with and how can we help?'" Many of them were facing questions about their children's progress toward higher education, especially in families where no one had ever been to college. How do you apply? What about financial aid? Or they'll talk about how they're having trouble talking with their adolescents, how their previously open, communicative kids have shut down. In focus groups, by talking with parents who came into the building, in meetings, whenever we could, we plumbed the parent community for real issues." Fenway acted on these concerns by changing the structure of its Parent Council meetings, devoting the first hour of each to discussing specific, parent-raised issues such as teen sexuality, or gang involvement, or how to help with homework.



Leadership High School's Polynesian dance group, Hokelea', performs at Parent Association Silent Auction

WHEN SCHOOL AND FAMILY GOALS DON'T ALIGN

At Fenway, as at most schools, parents' objectives and the schools' goals don't always align perfectly. For years, Fenway teachers sustained rigorous standards while developing their own authentic measures of learning, ability, and growth. But high school graduation in Massachusetts is determined by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test, rather than at the school level by the people who know what individual students have accomplished on authentic tasks.



Parents and students work together at Fenway High School Family Math Night

Given the link between passing the MCAS and graduating, parents, of course, are often inclined to concentrate on their children's test results. Fenway staff members, focusing on helping students develop broader skills and habits of mind, work to help parents to understand the goals of education beyond high test scores. Myatt explains, "Test scores are the coin of the realm right now. But we need to show parents that other student accomplishments can mean a lot more. Kids will take their portfolios to college interviews or to a job interview, and it makes a powerful difference. We do a little better than the district high school on tests. That's nice, but it doesn't say enough about the accomplishments of our students. I work explicitly with parents on how we use relationships and relevance to get to the rigor."

Sometimes, in an attempt to respond to urgent issues, schools' efforts don't quite intersect with families' concerns. Jane Eberle of the South Portland schools recalled an attempt to help parents that went awry because it was ripped from the headlines, not from communication with parents. "After the Columbine shootings, we planned a middle school parent meeting about guns and violence in schools. We got the word out by advertising it in the school newsletter. We planned to talk about the schools' safety plans and about how to communicate with their kids about what's happening. We organized a panel discussion that included the police chief, the school psychologist, a crisis response counselor — there were nine panelists. And only five parents showed up. It was not a local issue. We went wrong by assuming that anything that's getting a lot of attention nationally is also a local concern."