

The Journal of the Coalition of Essential Schools

# horace

Innovation in Education



## High School Conversions: Essential Restructuring

**Life Academy and Fremont High School: Lessons for Large School Conversions** Laura Flaxman, current CES staffer and former principal of Oakland's Life Academy, focuses on opportunities for improving the "instructional core" when large schools divide into small schools.

**Supporting Conversion: Structure or Instruction?** Jay Feldman and Lisette López, CES National's research team, discuss integrating pedagogical support and design planning during the high school conversion process.

### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

**CES Takes a Stand: The Coalition of Essential Schools Opposes High-Stakes Standardized Testing** CES asks you to join us in our stand against high-stakes standardized tests as the sole measure of students' knowledge, understanding, and performance. Stand for the widespread adoption of multiple measures and performance-based assessments as more challenging and accurate demonstrations of student achievement.

**Annotated Resources** Other resources for making the most of school redesign to improve teaching and learning.

**Go to the Source** A guide to the schools and support organizations featured in these pages.

### Book Reviews

- David Tyack's *Seeking Common Ground: Public Schools in a Diverse Society*
- *Great Books for High School Kids: A Teachers' Guide to Books that Can Change Teens' Lives* edited by Rick Ayers and Amy Crawford
- Sam M. Intrator's *Tuned in and Fired Up: How Teaching Can Inspire Real Learning in the Classroom*

while managing their fledgling schools with scant resources and without the time they need to do all of the work that starting and running a school requires. They convene regularly to hash out details of their “interconnectedness.” The majority of the principals were former administrators, department heads and academy leaders at Fremont, and much of the old climate of distrust remains. It’s hard to turn that climate into one of mutual support and innovative collaboration, and as one might expect, much time and energy continues to be spent on politics and logistics. Adequate support in terms of time, resources, professional development, and assistance for the school leaders to create and refine innovative visions for their schools is lacking.

The final constant is in the nature of the assistance and professional development that the schools receive: there is, nationally, a limited amount of experience about how to do this work. While dedicated professionals from both the school district and BayCES are working hard to help the schools get off the ground, it’s in the nature of the newness of this work that few of them have experience with successful small schools. Together as a profession, we must work fast to collect our growing expertise to create a significant “knowledge base” about school conversions.

### Examples of Positive Changes at Fremont

At the Youth Empowerment School (known as YES), principal Maureen Benson has implemented many innovative structures and worked hard to create a positive culture and sense of community. Attendance is up and disciplinary incidents are lower than the district average. Parents are very involved in the daily life of the school; more than thirty signed up to be on the hiring committee for next year. While the cultural changes are taking hold, shifts toward academic excellence aren’t happening as quickly, and some students complain that the school is too easy and their teachers’ expectations of them are too low. Hopes are high though that as the school grows, doubling the number of students and staff and moving to another campus, they will be better able to implement their vision of community-based, project-based learning and see gains in student achievement.

As for changing the pedagogy in the new schools, Ben Schmookler, principal of the Media College Preparatory School, puts it, “In my experience, it’s been more difficult to get experienced teachers to teach new pedagogies, while new teachers, because of their lack of experience, are reaching out to get new ideas and support for their classroom practices.” Although Life struggled with issues related to hiring a large number of inexperienced teachers, the autonomy to hire staff from outside the building is critical. When teachers have learned their craft in environments of entrenched low student achievement, it is quite challenging to support them in transforming their expectations of students—and their practice. BayCES’s Director for Oakland’s High School Redesign Initiative, LaShawn Routé-Chatmon, explains, “The biggest obstacle to this high school conversion work is not technical—it’s human.”

Everyone involved with the Fremont Federation is working tremendously hard to accomplish an incredibly difficult task under particularly stressful conditions. The school leaders in

particular have not been given the resources and support that they desperately need and nonetheless, they have still been able to make some progress. To open the schools at all has been a significant accomplishment and everyone who has worked hard to make this happen deserves tremendous credit. As first-year schools operating within set parameters and without opportunities to change most of the variables that can influence their success, they are probably farther along than one could expect. It also helps to remember that this is a developmental process and it takes time to build these schools; their success should not be judged until they have had a few years to establish themselves.

### RELATED RESOURCE

Based on interviews with staff at BayCES and others who have been pioneers in this work, staff at CES National are currently compiling a volume of what we know so far about school conversions, which should help to fill this gap. Look for this resource from CES National in the coming months.

### Lessons Learned

Much about the experiences of Life Academy and the rest of the Fremont schools is tremendously instructive for people interested in converting large schools into small ones. Allowing these schools time to mature and develop and closely watching their evolution will be informative, and may, in the end, change opinions (including my own) as to how best to take on this difficult and important work. By converting a large school to smaller schools they have created conditions in which it is at least possible to start changing culture and improving the academic core.

Opening Life Academy and, from that vantage point, observing the birth of the five Fremont Federation schools has demonstrated to me that the key elements of successful conversions include the ability to completely transform some of



*Life Academy winter 2003 intersession: Rhythm and Soul class featuring drumming and dance*

## Comments from Maureen Benson, Principal, Youth Empowerment School

Maureen Benson, principal of the Fremont Federation's Youth Empowerment School (YES), talked with Laura Flaxman and *Horace* editor Jill Davidson about YES's early successes and challenges as a small, autonomous, interconnected school.

### On Professional Development and Staffing

Academically and instructionally, we are nowhere near where I would like us to be. But creating a cohesive staff takes time, patience, resilience and a commitment to change, within both practice and the system. There seems to be an increase in the amount of stress, especially for the more veteran teachers. Moving our work from a big school mentality to a small school mentality is a huge transition, and I respect that and work hard to honor it.

However, it has been extremely difficult for teachers to convert their practice from the old school expectation of "isolation and seeing 150+ kids per day" to "intimacy in collaboration." Being observed regularly, having the results of those observations guide the professional development, and having more time with kids than you were used to having all deepen the relationship with and the context of the instruction and behavior management. Formulaic approaches, which used to be the norm for the conveyor belt of kids we would see every day, simply are not what is acceptable once you break down the walls of isolation and see the depth and complexities of every students' issue. When the wounds are uncovered, we are accountable for making every effort to heal them.

This deepening of the work is a major shift in the job description—and the learning curve for all of us has been vertical. Some are able to tackle the curve, and others have not. There seems to be a really huge increase of stress because they're now being looked at in ways that they weren't before. That's a big transition, and I respect that. I know that must be really scary, and I can guess that shift after many years of one kind of practice is overwhelming in many ways.



YES students

### Alliances with Families

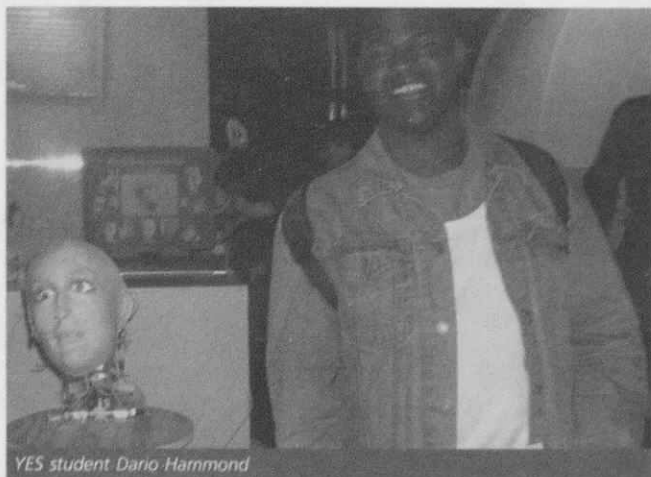
Truly having parents on our design team—not just as somebody who signed a paper so we could get a grant—provided a lens that was essential for us. Creating community expectations of what we wanted to see in the classrooms has made us be consistent in how we include parents. Following up on that, one huge thing that I did last year was home visits with the majority of the incoming students' families. We also have parent liaisons make phone calls to other parents encouraging them to participate, building relationships with them so that we have really good turnout at our town hall meetings. Our town hall meetings are not just information sessions but are places for dialogue and debate as to what we want to see changed, what are the issues that are coming up, and how people feel like their voices are heard when they come. So it's kind of like a continuous cycle where they're having input and they're seeing response to it. That, coupled with the fact that I took that first step to build a relationship with them before their kid even started, feels like our biggest success.

You have to build alliances between new teachers and parents. We've had a couple of parents really flip out about what some teachers are doing but the good thing is they don't really do it publicly. They'll vent and then, for the most part, we're able to facilitate a discussion that resolves it. What I had seen elsewhere is someone yelling and screaming, "You'd better change my kid's grade," but we don't really have that type of discussion. We see a lot of the teachers willing to give kids projects to make up work and a lot of communication at home with the families either by advisors or by the teachers if the kid is in danger of failing or if they're doing well. So those little things tend to build relationships and that makes it a lot easier for us to be really comfortable talking about hard things.

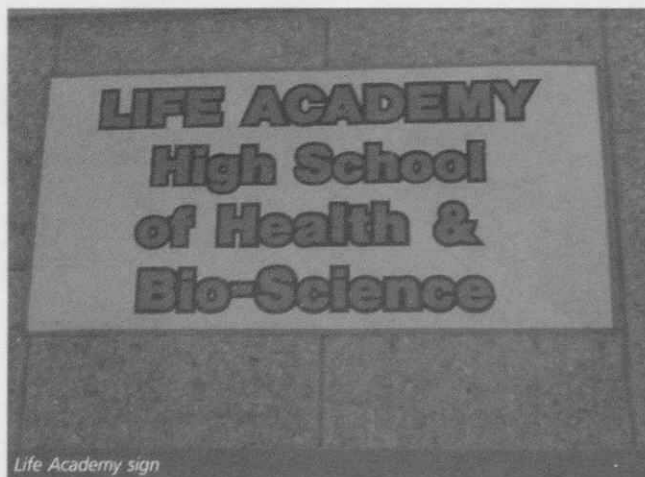
For example, a real issue that comes up in our school site council is that parents want more culturally competent teachers. We're very comfortable talking about the fact that we don't have any teachers of color in our school—yet, almost all of our students are students of color. But I couldn't imagine having that conversation at a big school. I mean it would turn into a race war, I would think. But that doesn't happen here.

Include your parents and students in hiring the teachers so that way then there's kind of a relationship already before they start and there's a buy-in. Then they say, "We picked that person because they had X, Y, and Z gifts so we wanted to help them develop," as opposed to, "No, we didn't pick that person, we don't want them here." This approach connects the two really important factors for success: professional development and building relationships between teachers and parents.





YES student Dario Hammond



Life Academy sign

the components of the new schools (at least a couple of variables in the equation) and the vision and experience brought by people with outside, small school experience and a different paradigm for rethinking schools. The adults in the school need to be unified around a clear vision of instruction and most importantly, a common belief about their students' abilities to learn and achieve at high levels.

Life Academy had just enough of these elements to make for an easier journey while the Fremont Federation schools can still gain what they need in these areas. All of the schools still have a long way to go before they have transformed the educational experience of their students and institutionally believe in and support all of their students in fulfilling their tremendous, and largely still untapped, potential.

In the end, I believe that in order to transform schools and create equitable and transformative results for students, schools must change as many of their components, or variables, as possible. Small schools that operate under the same conditions and with the same practices as large schools will have largely the same results. It is my view that to change these conditions and practices, large school break-downs should be organized to emulate free-standing new school start-ups to whatever extent possible. Most importantly, in spite of all of the overwhelming pressures of details, logistics, crises, and the endless pressures inherent in the life of a school, we must find ways to remind each other to keep our focus on the teaching and learning. This, in the end, is the only way to make a difference and transform the educational outcomes for our children. ■

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*Laura Flaxman joined CES in 2003 as Co-Director of the mentor and new schools project. Laura came to Oakland four years ago to start Life Academy, a new small autonomous public high school, where she served as principal. Prior to a year at Harvard and an internship at the Boston Arts Academy, Laura worked for Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound in New York City helping to create and support several new middle schools and a couple of existing high schools. Laura taught English, art and social studies at Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn, a residential treatment center in Manhattan, and South Bronx High School where she coordinated a program with the New York City Outward Bound Center.*

THE COALITION OF  
ESSENTIAL SCHOOLSFALL FORUM 04  
SAN FRANCISCO CA

NOV 11-13

# equitable SCHOOLS FOR a new DEMOCRACY



Come celebrate the Coalition of Essential Schools' 20th Anniversary at Fall Forum 2004! This year's conference will focus on creating a system of schools in which students of all races, classes, and backgrounds achieve their full potential, gain the skills they need, and develop a passion for contributing to an active democracy.

The Fall Forum, CES' primary networking and professional development event, attracts several thousand educators, parents, students, and leading thinkers in education from around

the world to exchange ideas, ask questions, and share insights about effective school practices and designs.

We are seeking proposals for workshops and interest group gatherings through June 28, 2004.

Visit [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org) to submit a proposal or register for the Fall Forum; registrations are ongoing throughout the summer and fall. Don't miss the discount for early-bird registration through October 4!

## The CES Small Schools Project is pleased to announce its first group of new small schools and large high school conversions!

The first new small schools are:

- Civitas (Los Angeles, CA)
- Humanities Preparatory Academy 2 (New York, NY)
- Lighthouse Community Charter School (Oakland, CA)
- Metro School (Columbus, OH)
- High School for Student and Community Empowerment (Houston, TX)

The first large school conversions are:

- Leominster High School (Leominster, MA)
- Tyee High School (SeaTac, WA)

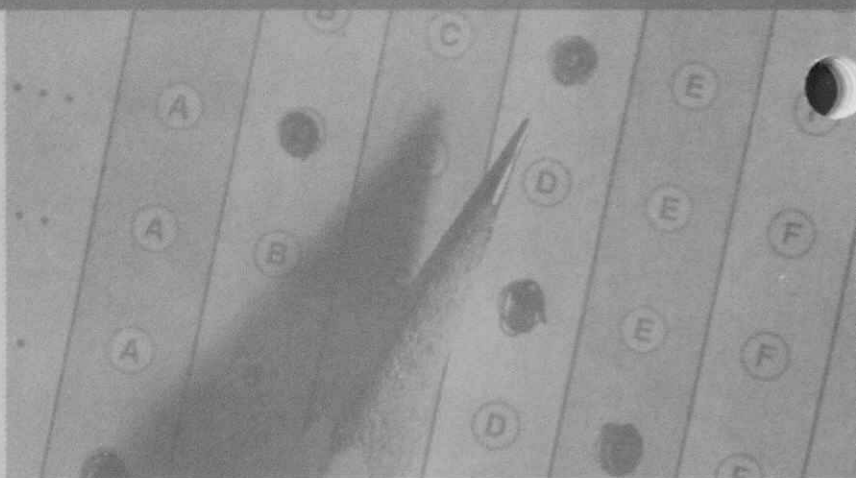
Congratulations to all grant recipients!

For more information on the CES Small Schools Project, visit [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org).



Teacher and student at Humanities Preparatory Academy, New York City.

# CES Takes a Stand: The Coalition of Essential Schools Opposes High-Stakes Standardized Testing



Take a stand with CES! Visit the CES National website, [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org), to see commentary on this statement, links to more resources, and an action kit of advocacy tools, including an online petition, sample press releases, Op/Eds, letters to the editor, and methods for communicating with lawmakers.

We urge you to sign the petition, alert your colleagues and friends, and join the CES network in changing the face of schooling by taking a stand against high-stakes standardized testing and supporting better alternatives.



## **The Coalition of Essential Schools supports effective assessment and opposes high-stakes standardized tests.**

The Coalition of Essential Schools believes that standardized test scores should never stand as the sole measure of students' knowledge, understanding, and performance. We are therefore opposed to "high-stakes" standardized tests—state-administered tests that prohibit students from graduating or advancing to the next grade.

We believe schools, teachers, and students themselves can and should be held accountable for their performance as assessed by high standards. However, we assert that standardized tests do not adequately reflect students' true proficiencies. Furthermore, an emphasis on such tests diverts scarce funds and energy away from the high quality teaching and resources that promote active engagement and critical thinking and toward test preparation materials and "practice" activities.

The Coalition of Essential Schools affirms that tests and other assessments should support instruction and should not interrupt effective learning strategies. We actively promote the widespread adoption of multiple measures and performance-based assessments as more challenging and accurate demonstrations of student achievement.

## **CES National endorses broader, deeper, locally controlled high-stakes tests.**

If students are educated poorly and cannot demonstrate the competencies, understanding, skills, and habits that form the foundation of a successful adulthood, the stakes are frightfully high for those students and for society. We therefore believe passionately in high-stakes challenges that demonstrate learning and growth in equitable, educationally sound, and locally controlled ways.

Well-designed exhibitions, portfolios, and other such high-stakes learning assessments are broad and deep, requiring students to develop and use a wide range of skills as they publicly demonstrate mastery of the entire curriculum. Such assessments reflect progress and competence gained throughout years of schooling. Success in performance-based assessments depends on refinement, revision, attention to detail, and higher-order thinking skills. Such assessments demand environments in which each student is challenged to meet high standards set by the school and by the community. And authentic assessments require teachers and learners to know each other well, so that all students are both nurtured and challenged to demonstrate competence across the curriculum.

Just as no two students are alike, and no two schools are alike, no two demonstrations of mastery that determine that students are ready to advance educationally ought to be alike. All students should meet and exceed minimum community-determined standards, and most Essential schools base these expectations for achievement on national curriculum standards such as the Principles and Standards for School Mathematics from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. Schools then adapt specific curriculum and assessment to their local contexts, creating learning and assessment experiences that support each other, are meaningful to students, and publicly demonstrate student and school progress.

## **Resources are distributed inequitably among schools, so common measures such as high-stakes standardized tests are not effective measures of student and school progress.**

The high-stakes assessments to which we are opposed are standardized assessments that are formulated and scored by the state or other outside authorities. They don't measure



how well students have mastered the curriculum of their particular school. Rather, they assume that all students at all schools have studied the same curricula and can demonstrate the same sort of knowledge on a narrow assessment given under high-pressure circumstances. And they don't rely on the judgment of teachers, parents, mentors, employers, and peers—the people who best know students' growth, learning, and capabilities, and the people who have the most significant stake in students' successes.

These high-stakes standardized tests require all students to respond to the same questions under similar conditions. Moreover, their results override other information, so no matter how comprehensively students can demonstrate a record of growth, learning, and achievement, they are not permitted to graduate or advance to the next grade if they cannot pass state level high school exit exams.

Under the current No Child Left Behind federal legislation, the stakes of standardized tests are also high for schools, requiring all schools to meet a minimum test score standard or demonstrate predetermined yearly progress toward such standards. Should schools not meet these preset benchmarks, they can be labeled as failing and lose students, funds, and hope for a truly improved future.

High-stakes standardized tests can punish students for conditions they cannot control, such as run-down school buildings, under-skilled teachers, large class sizes, and inadequate facilities. Penalizing students in inadequate learning conditions with such tests isn't fair; it reinforces and exacerbates existing inequity.

Many research studies have found that a higher percentage of certain student populations—low-income students, special education students, students whose first language is not English, and children of color—drop out of school in response to the high-stakes standardized testing barrier. There are also well-documented cases of students being insidiously pushed out of school so that their poor test performances don't tarnish a school's average scores.

If students do not have access to an adequate and equitable education, they end up being held accountable while the system is not. Policy makers and civic leaders must take responsibility and be held accountable for providing strong educational opportunities for all.

#### **High-stakes standardized tests can derail good teaching.**

Studies have found that teachers change their pedagogy specifically to "teach to the test," rather than teaching in ways that promote active engagement and critical thinking. Research has yet to demonstrate that the use of high-stakes standardized tests leads to measurable, positive outcomes of student achievement or to increased efficacy of teaching practices. The pressure of high-stakes standardized tests narrows, distorts, and weakens the curriculum, impelling teachers to teach to the test rather than create rich, vibrant, culturally appropriate, individually challenging curriculum.

On the other hand, school-based authentic assessments not only provide a more equitable method for gauging student learning, but they inform pedagogy, elucidating for teachers

what students are and are not understanding. Teachers can make mid-course corrections, refining their teaching and providing personal attention as needed for student mastery.

When standardized tests are the primary factor in accountability, educators succumb to the temptation to use the tests to define curriculum and focus instruction. Assessment drives curriculum and instruction. If assessment changes, curriculum and instruction must change as well. What is not tested is not taught, and what is taught does not include higher-order learning. At the extreme, school becomes a test prep program.

It is of course possible to use a standardized test and not let its limits control curriculum and instruction. However, this split focus can result in a school putting itself at risk for producing both lower test scores and portfolios and exhibitions that have been gravely compromised and that may be inadequate.

#### **CES National promotes the use of a public system of multiple measures and performance assessments.**

People have a right to know how well schools are doing. However, state-administered high-stakes standardized tests indicate little of true significance. Instead, the Coalition of Essential Schools promotes the use of a system of multiple measures and performance assessments, which we believe is a more challenging and accurate gauge of students' abilities.

We strongly support the efforts of schools within districts, regions, or states to discuss and determine performance standards for major areas of competency across curricula and within skill sets. Agreements about performance standards within such realms as analytical writing, mathematical reasoning, application of scientific concepts, and evidence-based argument allow comparisons among schools; at the same time, schools are not bound to the constraints of a single high-stakes test. Ideally, states would be partners with schools, supporting the development of these performance assessment correlations.

We do believe that the process and results of student assessment should be made public and visible. Such results can reveal achievement among students who often suffer as a result of educational institutions' low expectations, as well as differences in performance from one community to another that can guide policymakers and funders to allocate more resources to struggling schools. ■



## Supporting Conversion: Structure or Instruction?

by Jay Feldman and  
Lisette López

The movement to create small schools is driven by the desire for equity. Research and experience prove that small, autonomous schools serve students more effectively than large, comprehensive schools. While the creation of schools that are small is not in itself sufficient, smallness provides the best opportunity to create structures, relationships, and habits that define an environment for success.



One of the most difficult challenges of large high school conversions is developing and enhancing teachers' pedagogical practices to improve engagement, learning, and achievement. Many of the first high schools to begin conversion efforts—that is, the process by which large comprehensive high schools break down into several new small, autonomous schools—have spent considerable time examining issues of school design, and not as much time engaged in professional development to strengthen instruction. Consequently, after restructuring, teachers had the conditions that allowed them to personalize their teaching, but they struggled to implement the necessary classroom pedagogy. Drawing on the experience of CES (and like-minded) schools and the wisdom of coaches and researchers, this article explores three ideas about how schools may build the foundation for improved academic outcomes and student growth as they make the shift from large to small.

### Teaching in Small Schools Requires an Active Transformation of Pedagogical Practices

In the challenge of opening small autonomous schools, it is easy to forget that the opening of the school is not an endpoint, but a beginning. The opening of a new small autonomous school provides a renewed opportunity to teach all students well. As researcher Michelle Fine writes, small schools shouldn't be big schools in drag—schools with the culture and learning environment of large schools. The opportunities created by a small school cannot be realized if the style of teaching remains the same (if teachers continue to teach lecture-style even when they have a class small enough to have a seminar), if the relationships between students and teachers remain the same (teachers need to know students well to personalize the curriculum), or if the relationships between teachers and administrators remain the same (if principals continue to run their school like big bureaucracies with a hierarchical chain of command).

While the exact nature of a community's new small schools will be unclear at the beginning of the conversion process, we do know that certain elements characterize effective small schools, such as heterogeneous classes and differentiated instruction, block schedules, advisories, personalized practice, an authentic curriculum, adaptive pedagogy, performance assessment, and anti-racist teaching. We also are learning (thanks in part to the evaluation research on the implementation of the Gates Foundation high school redesign grants) that there

are predictable challenges that many small start-up schools face. In particular, small start-up schools are challenged to focus on instruction and curriculum development and preserving equity while working with students of varying prior academic achievement. Small schools developing out of a large high school conversion not only face these same challenges around instruction and equity, but also confront a standing school culture and vision of pedagogy that usually conflicts with or undermines the conditions sought in the new school.

Tom Vander Ark, Executive Director of Education at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, believes that struggling schools not only need a different structure but a markedly different mission and culture. However, in a school that is converting from large to small, changing these elements in the original building and with the same staff and students is extremely difficult. According to Vander Ark, changing a school culture that is complacent with inequitable outcomes requires a disruption in the school's practices and expectations. Frequently, existing beliefs about different types of students need to be consciously interrupted as well. Many conversion efforts have focused on structural changes to create this disruption. Ultimately, however, the change must affect classroom practice. When professional development time focuses on improving instruction, it provides an opportunity for this disruption and is an essential lever for change.

### Professional Development Should Link School Vision Creation to Instructional Practice

If we know what small schools look like, how do we get there? Instructional practice should drive design; as Kate Jamentz, Executive Director of the School Redesign Network, says, "We need to put teaching at the center of the structure conversation." A solid pedagogical foundation and vision for the school makes design more effective. Instructional practice is based upon the needs of students, and discussions and decisions about design should happen in the context of professional development on instructional

#### RELATED RESOURCE

Visit the Bill & Melinda Gates Evaluation website for Gates Foundation high school redesign grant evaluation reports by American Institutes for Research and SRI International at <http://smallhs.sri.com>.

#### THE KEYS TO IMPROVING INSTRUCTION AS SCHOOLS TRANSFORM

- Professional development should link school vision creation to instructional practice.
- Teaching in small schools requires an active transformation of pedagogical practices.
- Professional development for improved instructional practice prepares teachers to make the most of new small schools.

#### WHAT IS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TIME?

When we say "professional development," we mean the various activities that can enhance instructional practice, such as ongoing in-school collaboration with other teachers, visits to other small schools, and formal trainings. In addition to scheduled professional development opportunities, this also means time used to plan and design a new school.

practice and student needs. Pedagogical support—training to help teachers most effectively take advantage of personalized schools and classrooms—can and should be embedded throughout the conversion process.

Eric Nadelstern, Senior Instructional Superintendent on the Deputy Chancellor's staff at the Department of Education in New York City, says, "You need to know what you believe about how kids learn, and everything about how you conduct business in that school needs to reflect those beliefs. That's the degree of coherence that will allow the teachers to ensure that the kids are successful. But the primary thing, really, is to get a group of people who believe something together about how kids learn and then give them an opportunity not only to realize that but to ensure that they prove the efficacy of that approach by ensuring that the kids succeed. Because in the end, it's the connection between the teachers and the kids." Helping teachers develop their vision of how students learn is an important part of professional development that supports powerful instruction.

While we know the characteristics of many effective small schools, each school community must still spend time developing its own beliefs of instructional practice and use them to shape its school vision. The small school provides the opportunity—perhaps only glimpsed by the school community at the beginning of the process—to transform instruction to best

meet the needs of all students. Because it's only glimpsed, teachers need time to engage and develop their vision. Building the vision for small schools is an important step and an opportunity for professional development in the kind of teaching that can occur in small schools.

Professional development time is more effective when it focuses heavily on instructional practice, integrates that focus in conversations on process issues and, in fact, allows it to drive structure and design decisions. The experience of Clover Park High School, near Tacoma, Washington, supports this idea. School coach Holli Hanson saw that teachers were getting "burned out" making decisions about structural issues and they were not making decisions that related to their classroom or instruction. The school was making design decisions without having spent the time to develop their school vision

### The Futures Protocol and More

Want more information about the Futures Protocol? The Small Schools Project website offers a version entitled, "Future Protocol a.k.a. 'Back to the Future'," originally developed by Scott Murphy of the Jefferson County Public Schools.

[www.smallschoolsproject.org/PDFS/back\\_future.pdf](http://www.smallschoolsproject.org/PDFS/back_future.pdf)

Many CES regional centers offer workshops and other professional development opportunities that feature protocols training. For self-study, see *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). Teachers College Press offers an accompanying list of protocols for free download at

[www.tcpress.com/pdfs/mcdonaldprot.rtf#715](http://www.tcpress.com/pdfs/mcdonaldprot.rtf#715).

and a vision of instructional practice. Hanson led the school staff through a futures protocol, and seven or eight major themes emerged around what the staff wanted their school to evolve into in the future.

"From that," says Hanson, "We saw some nuts and bolts things that we turned into action groups and people got to decide which of those action groups they were in. We also pulled out two major instructional focuses that they focused on all year. So some of every early release day is devoted to staff development around reading and inquiry. That has seemed to be the one thing about which people can say, 'Okay, I'm excited to be here because I'm going to learn something new. I'm going to have something to take away to my classroom.'"

Clover Park's teachers are still working in a large school, so the staff can begin to implement some of the practices they will use more often in small schools that are designed to support that pedagogy, while still walking away from professional development with something they can use right away. The school has also done several learning walks and staff observations to see what people are doing in their classroom around reading. So they are increasing the collaboration in making their practice public as well as generating ideas and scaffolding. Hanson concludes, "If we really want that powerful instruction, it takes a while to build that."

This sort of discussion on instructional practice and vision then drives school design when redesign opportunities arise. For example, the Marble Hill School for International Studies, which opened in September 2002 at the John F. Kennedy High School, is the only school in New York City with a population comprised of fifty percent English language learners and fifty percent English-fluent students. The ESL students learn English and the English speakers must learn a second language. School staff believed that it was important to require all students to learn a second language. Iris Zucker, the principal, explains the school's vision and how the design supports that vision.

"It's an international studies school with a rigorous academic program, a focus of college and beyond. We want them to learn a second language, we want them to do international studies, and at the same time we infuse a lot of the arts." Zucker praised the school's block schedule, which allows ESL

### RELATED RESOURCE

Visit Small Schools to Develop Your Vision

Visiting successful small schools is a common professional development practice that helps teachers and community members create and deepen their small school vision. These visits can be transformative, giving design teams examples of what small schools can be, of small schools' power, and of how they can be places for more powerful teaching and learning. For more on school visits as a tool to build vision about new school creation, see *Horace 20.1*, "Mentoring and Collaboration among Essential Schools."

[www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces\\_docs/resources/horace/20\\_1/20\\_1\\_toc.html](http://www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/resources/horace/20_1/20_1_toc.html)

## Professional Development Self-Analysis from KnowledgeWorks

While we understand that a schools' intellectual focus and instructional practice should drive design, how can that understanding be integrated into an effective school design and professional development program? The KnowledgeWorks Foundation has spearheaded a professional learning process that led to the opening of seventy-six small autonomous schools converted from twenty urban comprehensive high schools across Ohio.

KnowledgeWorks spends its first year with interested schools going through an self-analysis portfolio and creating a strategic plan to close the distance between its accomplished and struggling students. Schools that are best able to see the gaps in their own performance would be best able to move forward with the change process.

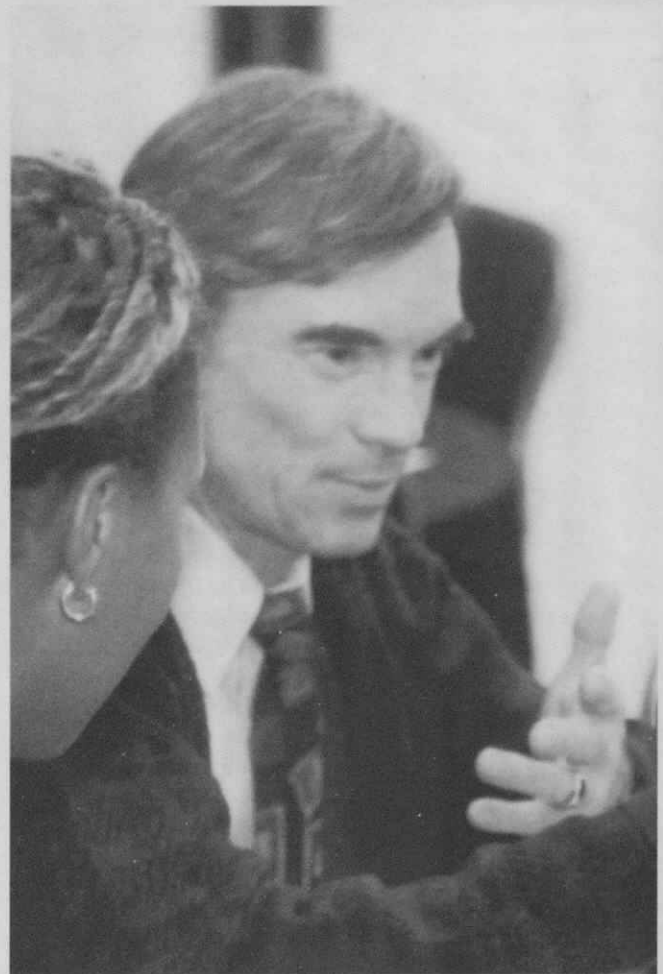
**The portfolio that schools create must measure and address seven areas, adapted from Victoria Bernhardt's *The School Portfolio*:**

1. Student Achievement
2. Leadership
3. Quality Planning
4. Professional Development
5. Information and Analysis
6. Continuous Improvement and Evaluation
7. Partnership and Community Engagement

The strategic plan that each design team then creates is based on two needs: (1) to close the gaps that each schools self-portfolio highlighted and (2) to become a campus of small schools.

**KnowledgeWorks requires that the plan include fifteen non-negotiable elements:**

1. Autonomous governance, budgets, structures, and staffing; flexible use of resources
2. Distributed leadership
3. Open access and choice for students
4. Identification of and release time for principal in first year of implementation
5. Professional development that clearly links changes in teaching practice to improved student achievement
6. A clearly defined system of central office support of small school design and implementation
7. A curriculum clearly aligned with state standards and focused on helping students use their minds well
8. Non-traditional scheduling that promotes deep student learning and meaningful relationships with teachers
9. Clearly demonstrated use of technology and advanced communications resources
10. Clearly stated benchmarks for improved student achievement



11. Performance assessment for students
12. Authentic community engagement as defined by substantive community conversations that engage a broad array of stakeholders and connect with and influence official decisions
13. Clear community involvement in the daily life of the school
14. Individual teacher advisors for each student
15. Target maximum population of 400 students

These non-negotiables put issues of teaching and learning at the center of conversion efforts.

More about this professional development self-analysis can be found at KnowledgeWorks' web site, [www.kwfdn.org/ProgramAreas/School/ohsti.html](http://www.kwfdn.org/ProgramAreas/School/ohsti.html).

Victoria Bernhardt's *The School Portfolio: A Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement*, Second Edition (Eye on Education, 1998), is at [www.eyoneducation.com](http://www.eyoneducation.com)



*Horace*, the quarterly journal of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), is published by CES National. *Horace* combines educational research with "hands-on" resources and examples of innovative practices from CES schools around the country.

Visit the CES National website at [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org) to read *Horace* issues from 1988 through the present. The staff of CES National invites your comments and contributions to *Horace* via the CES Interactive area of our website or at the contact information below.

## **Coalition of Essential Schools**

The Coalition of Essential Schools, founded in 1984 by TheodoreSizer, is dedicated to creating and sustaining equitable, intellectually vibrant, personalized schools and to making such schools the norm of American public education. The CES national office is in Oakland, CA, with nineteen CES regional centers across the country.

CES schools share a common set of beliefs about the purpose and practice of schooling, known as the CES Common Principles. Based on decades of research and practice, the principles call for all schools to offer:

- Personalized instruction to address individual needs and interests
- Small schools and classrooms, where teachers and students know each other well and work in an atmosphere of trust and high expectations
- Multiple assessments based on performance of authentic tasks
- Equitable outcomes for students
- Democratic governance practices
- Close partnerships with the school's community

We aim to create a system that refuses to rank and sort students, and that, instead, treats each child as a precious being with great gifts to be nurtured and supported.

Our work supports the creation and sustenance of large numbers of individual schools that fully enact CES principles—schools that emphasize equity, personalization, and intellectual vibrancy. These schools can serve as models to other schools and demonstrations to the public that it is possible to re-imagine education.

In addition to individual schools, we also need to create the conditions under which whole systems of schools will become equitable, personalized, and intellectually vibrant. To affect these whole systems, CES National supports regional centers as they develop the capacity to aid schools and to influence school districts and states. We seek to influence wider public opinion and policy-makers to develop policy conditions conducive to the creation and sustenance of schools that enact CES principles.

Please visit our web site at [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org) for more information on CES National, our affiliated regional centers, and affiliated schools. Interested schools, organizations, and individuals are invited to the website for more information about affiliating with CES National.

## The Common Principles

**Learning to use one's mind well**

**Less is more, depth over coverage**

**Goals apply to all students**

**Personalization**

**Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach**

**Demonstration of mastery**

**A tone of decency and trust**

**Commitment to the entire school**

**Resources dedicated to teaching and learning**

**Democracy and equity**

teachers to collaborate with subject-area teachers, a partnership that shakes up their traditional alliances, supports all students as they learn, and supports the mission and vision of the school.

### **Professional Development for Improved Instructional Practice Prepares Teachers to Make the Most of New Small Schools**

The pedagogical change necessary to capitalize on the opportunities that small schools afford is challenging to even flexible and adaptable educators. Change of this scale raises understandable uncertainty. Teachers, like anyone, want to know what is expected of them, particularly at the classroom level. Teachers want to know: "What's expected of me? Can I do this? How will I be supported?" A lack of familiarity with the teaching now expected of them—and the lack of a concrete plan to address their needs—is a major challenge for staff buying into the creation of small autonomous schools.

But given our knowledge of what successful small schools look like, one can identify where anxiety is focused or gaps in proficiency exist—such as around teaching heterogeneous classes or implementing performance assessments—and plan backwards to develop skills and generate "buy in" among teachers in the emerging small school. Training or discussions around the skills they need to teach and collaborate in a small school increases the comfort of teachers (and other community members) and ensures they are able to take advantage of the unfolding opportunities that small schools present for powerful instruction and learning. This is not to say that everyone will be an expert—there must be a realization that the process is long and hard—but the support, and a plan for sustaining that support, increases commitment and the likelihood of success.

Bill Hart, principal of Leominster High School in central Massachusetts, was asked by his staff to present an example of just what a complex of six autonomous schools might look like as the school community contemplated conversion. He presented to the staff a plan that showed teacher assignments, numbers of students in each school, and schedules. This plan was useful for staff to visualize what their experience would be like, and as a result, many teachers were able to articulate their worries early in the conversion process. In the case of Leominster, some staffers voiced grave concerns about moving to a block schedule; many had previously had negative experiences with this design feature. Principal Hart, along with Meg Anderson and Frank Honts, two external coaches helping with the conversion process, were able to design professional development that directly addressed this concern.

In other cases, it's something else. Jan Reeder, Director of the CES Northwest Center, recounts the story of a thirty-year veteran teacher who was not yet convinced that small schools were needed. After a workshop on performance assessments, a key feature in the design of their new school, this teacher admitted that he had not known how to integrate such assessments into his teaching, which contributed to his concern about small schools. Now that he feels more comfortable with the new techniques and believes he has the support to master them, he is in favor of the conversion.

### **Coming in 2005! A CES National book on creating new autonomous small schools from large high schools**

Although large comprehensive high schools dominate the landscape of American secondary public education, we are currently witnessing a growing research-driven movement to create small, personalized, high schools. Foundations as well as local, state, and federal education agencies are putting scarce resources into small schools because they have been shown to provide significant positive outcomes for student achievement and behavior, particularly for students most poorly served by the current system. Yet the existing educational infrastructure overwhelming consists of large school buildings. Many communities seeking the benefits of small schools are converting their large comprehensive high school buildings into several smaller schools housed in the same building. It is not economically feasible to close down the large schools being used to then construct a number of new small buildings. But despite the obvious attractions of this solution, there is a considerable gap in our knowledge about the developmental steps involved in the conversion process.

In 2005, CES National will release a book on creating new autonomous small schools from a large high school. Gathering lessons from conversions underway across the country, the book will provide a critical resource for educators as they continue the important yet largely unproven strategy of transforming their schools. It will provide a practical discussion of common and vexing challenges that arise in school conversion and redesign efforts, detailing stories from the field and providing practical discussions of the tradeoffs in choices made. By asking district personnel, technical assistance intermediaries, professional development coaches, principals, teacher-leaders and community partners about their overall strategies for conversion, the main challenges they faced, and the central lessons they learned, the book will provide insight into key pitfalls and share promising practices. Focusing specifically on high school conversions that place equity as a primary motivation for change, the book will highlight (re)design issues with an eye toward exploring the resulting implications for teaching and learning.

### How to Find the Time for Conversations that Lead to Real Change

Most schools have used their contracted professional development time for these discussions, but some schools and districts have created more time. One district attempting high school conversion has six contracted days—and has not supported finding more. Not surprisingly, this district continues to struggle mightily through their conversion effort. Another district, in Washington state, has committed to ongoing professional development time during the school's weekly early release—three weeks with instructional practice as the main focus and one week with design as the main focus. This time has helped the school to have the kinds of conversation they feel they need to move forward. Districts that are committed to this process must create more time for teachers and the community to engage in these conversations.

### Challenges to Integrating Pedagogical Support and Design Planning

There are at least three significant challenges to providing this support during conversion efforts. First, it is difficult to get teachers to talk about pedagogy, the personal relationships and beliefs at the core of teaching, especially if they don't know each other well. This is true whether you are involved in a conversion effort or not. Second, during conversions, especially in the early stages, design seems to be a more pressing issue. Third, there is the overwhelming feeling and reality that there is little time.

Schools and districts in the conversion process continue to move forward, balancing the multiple demands on their time. It is possible to find some more time or other resources, and it is possible, as detailed in some of the above examples, to more fully integrate instructional practice professional development, school vision, and school structure. The structure or instruction question is, in fact, a false dichotomy. Rather, instruction is the lens through which one can view all conversion decisions. In that way, each step in the process is an opportunity for professional development, and an opportunity for change. And the change is incremental and gradual. What's important to remember is that a good school is always one that is on a journey of continuous reflection and improvement. Questions of instructional practice and student needs are always at the forefront of discussions in good schools, and the conversion process helps schools develop and strengthen these characteristics. **h**

*Jay Feldman, M.Ed., Ph.D., has conducted research in child development, whole school change, forms of democratic and equitable schooling, and alternative education. His interests include the educative functions of play and age-mixing, children's moral development, and understandings of race and diversity. Prior to CES, Jay worked at the Center for Collaborative Education, the CES regional affiliate in Boston.*

*Lisette Lopez joined CES in September 2003. She is a member of the mentor and new schools project team. Prior to CES, Lisette helped schools, youth programs and community agencies respond positively and equitably to diverse student populations. Lisette has integrated action research, policy advocacy, and capacity building to facilitate institutional change. She has an MA in Education from UC Berkeley.*

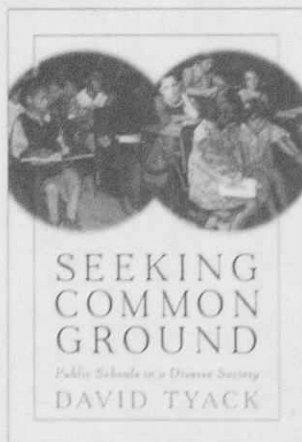
### Affiliate with CES National

If CES stands for what you believe in—personalized, equitable, intellectually vibrant schools—we invite you to affiliate with CES National as a school or as an individual. Stand up for schooling that is worthy of the name, join a network of passionate educators and innovative schools, and receive great benefits such as *Horace* subscriptions, Fall Forum facilitator fee waivers, and more.

Learn more about CES National Affiliation at [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org).

CES National





**Seeking Common Ground: Public Schools in a Diverse Society**

by David Tyack (Harvard University Press, 237 pages, \$22.95), reviewed by Frank Honts

**I**n *Seeking Common Ground: Public Schools in a Diverse Society*, historian David Tyack writes with present-day educational debates in mind, studying how schools have tried to achieve consensus of purpose

while dealing with diverse populations. Faith in democratic principles and practices, according to Tyack, has been essential to preserving public schools.

Typically, school reform efforts have emerged when conflict arises about what it means to be American. Within schools, this tension raises questions about how to acclimate new and different groups of students. During the mid-nineteenth century, a time when public schools were neither established nor inevitable, Horace Mann's solution was "common schools," a system that would serve as the "great equalizer" and "balance wheel of the social machinery" for a society confronting new immigrant populations. Progressives relied on systematic advances in behavioral and social sciences and offered their own prescriptions for child saving, compelling schools not only to attend to students' intellectual growth but also to deal with the physical and emotional needs supposedly absent from immigrant child rearing. More recently, schools have generally adopted an inclusive approach, viewing cultural pluralism in schools as a plus for the successful schooling of all students.

In attending to these societal needs, schools have, in Tyack's view, wrestled with the parallel (and sometimes competing) challenges of unity and diversity. How can schools establish and preserve central aims while simultaneously responding to students' differences? In its early history, the United States tended toward homogeneity: certain values, largely Protestant and pro-republican, could be transmitted through Webster's spellers, McGuffey's readers, and moral catechisms. Education was to be devoid of controversy so teachers could address politically and morally charged issues (such as slavery) with neutrality.

New immigrant groups, diverse in scope and large in number, posed a challenge to this unity of purpose. In discussing reformers' strategies to deal with these new and different children, Tyack reveals the sometimes contradictory nature of incorporation and exclusion. While programs aimed to socialize immigrant children, Progressive-era sociology classified them in often disturbing ways. Tracing the evolution of exclusionary language, Tyack identifies the terms that educators

used during different periods to label immigrant and poor children. "Leftover," "dull," and "slow" gave way to "pupils of low IQ," "limited" or "slow learners," from which modern terminologies like "socially maladjusted," "educationally difficult" or "immature learners" emerged.

At the core of the systems that generated these labels were two troubling notions: that the child was to blame for his problems, and that implicitly the terms meant something else, usually euphemistic descriptions of a child's race, nationality, or ethnicity. Students' authentic needs became mechanisms of classification and sorting while schools failed to address the underlying problems. In today's system, Tyack sees the implementation of No Child Left Behind, with its emphasis on testing, as parallel to the futile enactment of earlier reformers' goals.

In moving toward a unified educational vision while attending to individual student differences, reforms often have been incremental and piecemeal. But at other times, "reformers have come to believe that the educational system required not a tune-up but a major overhaul if the school was not to be a factory of failure for huge numbers of students." Such work has often been the enterprise of progressive-minded reformers, and the Essential Schools movement of the past two decades follows in that tradition, recognizing the needs of the whole child, fundamentally changing the focus of the institutions that educate kids, and forcing the program structures to fit students' needs (rather than the other way around).

In spite of all the contentious cross-currents, ideological battles, and mish-mosh of reforms that have taken place in schools, Tyack concludes that participatory democracy has been central to preserving American public schools. Local decision-making has helped preserve public schools' vitality. Common schools relied on local boards, not central governing authorities, and Tyack contends that better decisions can be made about particular students' needs in smaller and more local environments, an idea that dates back to Jeffersonian principles of democracy. While he provides less definition about how a national reform initiative like the Coalition of Essential Schools might act to help defend participatory democracy, the idea that schools must be entrusted with horizontal, collaborative, and collective decision making powers is a notion consistent with Tyack's larger message.

With the challenge of "choice" (and all its different meanings at the classroom, curricular, school, and system-wide levels) to traditional conceptions of democracy, these local compacts, made up of informed citizens with the most real investment—their own children—are all the more important. This system, acknowledges Tyack, will always be messy, but it is essential to the preservation of American society.

*Frank Honts is the Director of the Regional Teachers Center at the Francis W. Parker Charter School in Devens, Massachusetts*

**Tuned In and Fired Up: How Teaching Can Inspire Real Learning in the Classroom**, by Sam M. Intrator (Yale University Press, 208 pages; \$23.00), reviewed by Katherine Simon

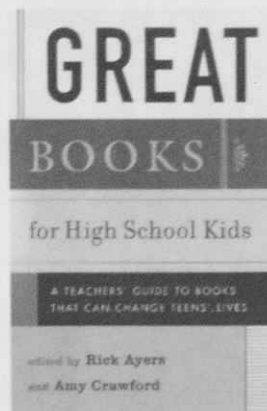
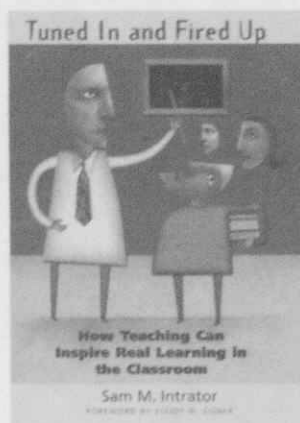
These are tough times for those of us who believe that the core of learning has to do with igniting the imagination, unleashing students' creativity, and whetting their appetite for knowledge. This kind of rhetoric seems embarrassingly naïve these days, and ever so far removed from the serious businesses of standardized test scores and competing in the global economy. But I yearn for our society to change its vision of education, to remember that hearts must be engaged in order for minds to be put in gear. Sam Intrator's book adds to my sense of hope.

Intrator set out to track the work of a teacher who successfully engages his students' hearts and minds, in order to uncover the ingredients for creating classrooms that hum with energy and engagement. In *Tuned In and Fired Up*, Intrator offers five case studies of class sessions that engaged students deeply and inspired powerful learning. The case studies highlight, particularly, the connection between topics that students find personally meaningful and their willingness to engage themselves in intellectual heavy lifting.

In discussing these learning episodes, Intrator writes: "I believe these moments of special luminosity where students stretched upward and grew in mind and spirit are not magical, random events, but episodes cultivated by inspired, artful teaching. A teacher's analogue to a poet's ode or a painter's portrait is the moment when the students are tuned in, fired up, and brimming over. . . . The classroom is the heart of the educational enterprise. Our beleaguered educational system provides a slew of constraints and impediments that impair a teacher's ability to achieve his or her goals and vision; however, within your classroom, you can inspire hope, wonder, and a zest for living and learning."

As a school reformer, I could quibble that Intrator's focus on the individual teacher and the classroom underplays the importance of creating systemic conditions where more individual teachers could shine. But it's merely a quibble, because Intrator's larger point is so timely and true: classrooms can and should be places of deep meaning and connection—and teachers can cultivate the skills that are needed to create these kinds of classrooms. I am grateful for the book.

Katherine Simon is co-Executive Director of the Coalition of Essential Schools 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.



**Great Books for High School Kids: A Teachers' Guide to Books That Can Change Teens' Lives**, edited by Rick Ayers and Amy Crawford (Beacon Press, 224 pages, \$15.00) reviewed by Jill Davidson

Three cheers for summer! The weather's great, but the best part is more time to read. Those of us who are daily threatened by the height and heft of our must-read book

stack will be enthralled by *Great Books for High School Kids*.

The first half presents seven essays, each by a teacher telling the story of reading a specific book with a specific class. The richness of the essays lies in the nuances of the students' reactions to the books. As each class makes their way through *Bless Me*, *Ultima*, *The Oresteia*, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, *Song of Solomon*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Things They Carried* and *Reservation Blues*, we're guided through a potent group learning experience that is particular affirming of the craft and brilliance of great teachers and the insight, intelligence, and emotional capabilities of young people.

While *Great Books* isn't a how-to, teachers can pick up a lot of practical goodness: the authors interweave their stories with specific reading strategies such as how to prepare a class for a book, how to create a group reading experience with readers with different levels of preparation and ability, how to analyze plot and character, and how to conduct the difficult discussions that powerful books provoke.

The second section of the book is a glorious annotated list: book upon book that inspire great teaching and powerful learning. *Great Books'* final section presents a compendium of lists, unannotated but categorized. "Talking Back: Making Moral Choices in an Immoral World," "Cultural Survival," "Love, First Love," and "Urban Gritty" are a few.

Ayers, Crawford, and the other teacher-authors honor the synergy created between a book and the personal experiences of a teacher and a group of students. They understand how the most meaningful learning happens when a teacher goes "off the script" and follows the impulses of a deeply felt discussion. Their insight reminds those in the world that would adulterate literature to use as fodder for standardized tests, or foist prepackaged curriculum on teachers and students that books "expand our sensibilities and deepen our encounter with the world." The real power of *Great Books* is its affirmation that teachers are the best curriculum creators.

# RESOURCES

## Professional Development, School Restructuring, and Small Schools

### Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools

BayCES's website provides a substantial range of tools, ideas, inspirations, and resources for creating small schools from large schools and for establishing new small schools. Throughout, BayCES keeps a close focus on equity, emphasizing professional development that creates opportunities for all students to learn. The BayCES newsletter, *Schools by Design*, is available on the site and is a particularly useful view inside the BayCES schools. Look for BayCES coach Pharmicia Mosely's "Coach Reflections." Mosely is a school coach at Life Academy and Youth School for Empowerment (both schools are the subject of an article in this issue of *Horace*; see "Life Academy and Fremont High School: Lessons for Large School Conversions," page 2) and her observations offer another valuable perspective on the professional development happening at these newly formed small schools.

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

### North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

NCREL provides a professional development needs assessment that serves as a useful resource for determining a school staff's strengths and challenges. It's not geared specifically for the professional development needs of small or converting schools, but much of what's there can be adapted. NCREL's site also contains "Professional Development: Learning from the Best," a comprehensive overview of successful professional development strategies.

Needs Assessment: [www.ncrel.org/pd/needs.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/pd/needs.htm)

Professional Development Strategies Overview:

[www.ncrel.org/pd/toolkit.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/pd/toolkit.htm)

### Small Schools and Teacher Professional Development

Michael Klonsky, director of the Small Schools Workshop at the University of Illinois, Chicago (more from the Small Schools Workshop below) wrote this ERIC digest that serves as one of the few specific resources available for creating teacher learning in small school settings. It's a concise overview of research that highlights the particular opportunities that small schools offer for high-quality, productive professional development, emphasizing the autonomy and agency that teachers in small schools have to direct their own professional development. They can, and do, learn collaboratively, and that leads to gains in student achievement.

<http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-4/small-schools.html>

### School Redesign Network

Along with its wide-ranging resources on new small schools and conversion projects, the Stanford School Redesign Network has collected "Resources for Professional Community." This well-edited list of staff development strategies focuses on creating teacher collaboration designed to support student learning in freestanding small schools and in schools in the midst of dramatic shifts from large to small. The "Teachers & Professional Community Resources" link at the top of the list, which connects to the School Redesign Network's study kit, is particularly helpful.

[www.schoolredesign.net/srn/server.php?idx=454](http://www.schoolredesign.net/srn/server.php?idx=454)

### Small Schools Workshop

In addition to useful online resources about the merits of small schools, the Small Schools Workshop offers hands-on professional development designed for your school and community. This includes a feasibility study, which indicates areas of challenge that a large school is likely to face as it transitions to smaller schools. Such insight is crucial to creating and maintaining the focus needed to keep pressing forward on academic improvement throughout the change process, and the experienced and insightful Small Schools Workshop staff can help.

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

### "A Professional Development Stance for Equity"

This short article by Mark Kaufman from TERC's semi-annual magazine *Hands On!* describes the how to integrate a focus on equity into the professional development process. It was written in 1996, but wears its years well, functioning as a concise overview of professional development based on inquiry, data analysis, best practices, and teacher leadership.

<http://www.terc.edu/handsonIssues/f96/equity.html>



**CES Regional Centers**

Each of the nineteen CES regional centers (of which BayCES, discussed above, is one) offers school coaching, workshops, and other professional development opportunities that are geared for the needs and concerns of particular regions. CES regional centers are staffed by educators and researchers who have many years of experience supporting schools that aim to reflect the CES Common Principles. If you're not already in touch with a CES regional center near you, visit the CES National website for the full list and contact information.

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

CES Regional Center List:

[www.essentialschools.org/cs/schools/query/q/556?x-r=runnew](http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/schools/query/q/556?x-r=runnew)

**CES Resources for Teacher Collaboration and Learning**

CES's website has collected the best of CES practice and study over the twenty-year Coalition history. Its compilation of resources related to teacher collaboration and learning gathers past Horace articles, resources from Fall Forums, and more in a long list of ideas for professional development that focuses on enhancing and improving teaching and learning in Coalition schools.

<http://ces.edgateway.net/cs/resources/query/q/863?x-r=runnew1378>

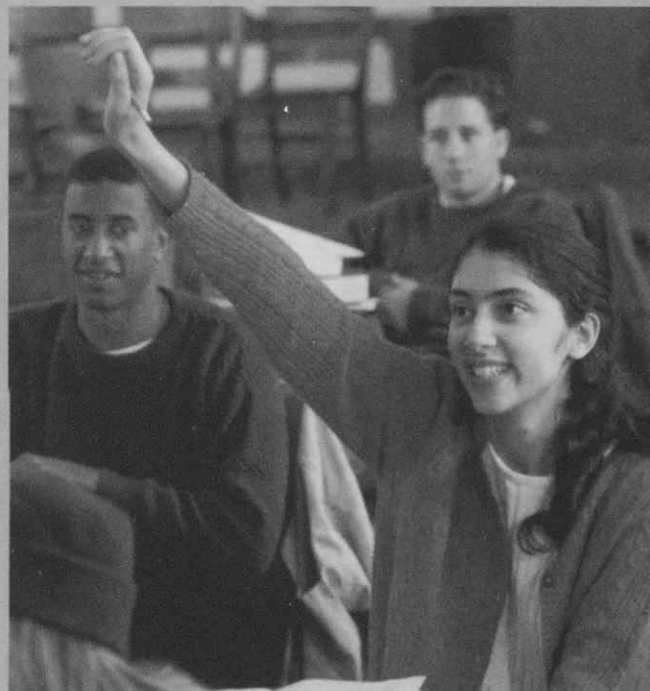
## Help Us Make the Senior Year Meaningful *Wanted:*

some examples of curricula, projects and other ideas that have successfully addressed (or which you think could successfully address) the problem of finding purpose for the senior year.

Also wanted: people who are working on trying to change their senior year and want ideas that would work for their school.

If you are in either category, please send your materials or your questions to Nancy Faust Sizer, Box 293, Harvard, MA 01451. If there is sufficient interest in this project, we will try to raise money for the time of a teacher to present such material at the Fall Forum and other conferences. We will also try to create a website. Down the line, we may create a video, or write a book! But we need to know that this is as good an idea as we think it is.

The ideas can be big or small. We are hoping to hear from many of you.



# GO TO THE SOURCE:

## More about the Schools and Other Organizations Featured in this Issue

### Schools

#### Clover Park High School

Public school serving grades 9-12  
11023 Gravelly Lake Drive SW  
Lakewood, WA 98499-1391  
253/583-5500  
<http://cpsd.cloverpark.k12.wa.us/Schools/HighSchools/CloverPark/CloverPark.asp>

#### College Preparatory and Architecture Academy

Public school serving grades 9-12  
4610 Foothill Blvd.  
Oakland, CA 94601  
510/879-1131

#### Fremont in Transition High School

Public school serving grades 9-12  
4610 Foothill Blvd.  
Oakland, CA 94601  
510/879-1137

#### Leominster High School

Public school serving grades 9-12  
122 Granite Street  
Leominster, MA 01453  
978/534-7715  
[www.leominster.mec.edu/lhs\\_index.htm](http://www.leominster.mec.edu/lhs_index.htm)

#### Life Academy

Public school serving grades 9-12  
2111 International Blvd  
Oakland, CA 94601  
510/879-4110

#### Mandela High School

Public school serving grades 9-12  
4610 Foothill Blvd.  
Oakland, CA 94601  
510/879-1141

#### Marble Hill School for International Studies

Public school serving grades 9-12  
99 Terrace View Avenue  
Bronx, NY 10463  
718/561-0973  
<http://marblehill.newvisionsk12.org>

#### Media College Preparatory School

Public school serving grades 9-12  
4610 Foothill Blvd.  
Oakland, CA 94601  
510/879-1597  
[www.media-academy.net](http://www.media-academy.net)

#### Paul Robeson College Preparatory School of

Visual and Performing Arts  
Public school serving grades 9-12  
4610 Foothill Blvd.  
Oakland, CA 94601  
510/879-1237

#### Youth Empowerment School (YES)

Public school serving grades 9-12  
4610 Foothill Blvd.  
Oakland, CA 94601  
510/879-8877

### Support Organizations

#### The Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools.

1720 Broadway, Fourth Floor  
Oakland, California 94612-2106  
510/208-0160  
[www.bayces.org](http://www.bayces.org)  
[info@bayces.org](mailto:info@bayces.org)

#### Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

PO Box 23350  
Seattle, WA 98102  
206/709-3140  
[www.gatesfoundation.org](http://www.gatesfoundation.org)  
[info@gatesfoundation.org](mailto:info@gatesfoundation.org)

#### CES Northwest

School of Education  
University of Puget Sound  
Tacoma, WA 98416  
253/879-3807  
[www.cesnorthwest.org](http://www.cesnorthwest.org)  
[info@cesnorthwest.org](mailto:info@cesnorthwest.org)

#### Oakland Community Organizations

7200 Bancroft Ave. #2 Eastmont Mall  
(upper level)  
Oakland, CA 94605  
510/639-1444  
[www.oaklandcommunity.org/oakcomorg@aol.com](http://www.oaklandcommunity.org/oakcomorg@aol.com)

#### Oakland Unified School District

1025 Second Avenue  
Oakland, CA 94606-2212  
510/879-8582  
<http://webportal.ousd.k12.ca.us>

#### KnowledgeWorks Foundation

One West Fourth Street, Suite 200  
Cincinnati, OH 45202  
513/929-4777  
[www.kwfdn.org](http://www.kwfdn.org)

#### Small Schools Project

7900 East Greenlake Drive North, Suite 212  
Seattle, WA 98103  
206/616-0303  
[www.smallschoolsproject.org](http://www.smallschoolsproject.org)

# 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.

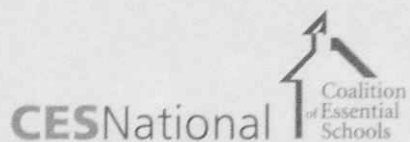
# Community Connections

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.

# Next Issue

*Horace* speaks to students and their families to understand why they chose Essential schools. We also talk with CES schools about their strategies for attracting and retaining students. How do CES schools transcend reliance on test scores as the main success indicator for a school and show their communities the complex and multifaceted qualities of a "good school?"





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## **Leadership**

### **High School Conversions: Essential Restructuring**

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## High School Conversions: Essential Restructuring

Volume 20 no.3 | Spring 2004 | Leadership

- 02 Life Academy and Fremont High School: Lessons for Large School Conversions  
by Laura Flaxman
  - Interview with Anna Le, Life Academy Graduate
  - Comments from Maureen Benson, Principal, Youth Empowerment School
- 12 CES Takes a Stand: The Coalition of Essential Schools Opposes High-Stakes Standardized Testing
- 14 Supporting Conversion: Structure or Instruction?  
by Jay Feldman and Lisette López
  - Professional Development Self-Analysis from KnowledgeWorks
- 20 *Seeking Common Ground: Public Schools in a Diverse Society* by David Tyack  
reviewed by Frank Honts
- 21 *Tuned in and Fired Up: How Teaching Can Inspire Real Learning in the Classroom* by Sam M. Intrator  
reviewed by Kathy Simon
- 21 *Great Books for High School Kids: A Teachers' Guide to Books that Can Change Teens' Lives*, edited by Rick Ayers and Amy Crawford  
reviewed by Jill Davidson
- 22 Resources: Professional Development, Restructuring and Small Schools
- 24 Go to the Source: More about the Schools Featured in this Issue

### Notes on this Issue

In these pages, the staff at CES National has collaborated to examine the opportunities to focus on student learning and achievement that arise when large high schools convert to small, autonomous schools. Laura Flaxman, Co-Director of the Small Schools Project, shares her experience as a principal of one such small high school, Oakland, California's Life Academy, analyzing the variables that affect student learning in the conversion process. Jay Feldman and Lisette López, CES National's research team, take a broader view, looking at ways that converting schools identify opportunities for professional development that leads to improved teaching and learning. Emphasizing the need for a focus on academic improvement even as schools and communities take on the challenges of structural change, both articles demonstrate the contributions of CES schools to what we're learning about the relatively nascent process of high school conversion.

This issue of *Horace* also debuts CES National's new advocacy effort, "CES Takes a Stand: The Coalition of Essential Schools Opposes High-Stakes Standardized Tests." We are proud to support the groundbreaking work that CES schools have done to develop methods of performance-based assessment, and we want to lead the way to promote the widespread adoption of multiple measures and performance-based assessments as more challenging and accurate demonstrations of student achievement. High-stakes standardized tests do not do justice to students who are striving to learn to use their minds well, flexibly, collaboratively, and creatively. Please join us in taking a stand against high-stakes standardized testing and supporting better alternatives by reading the statement here. Then visit our website, [www.essentialschools.org](http://www.essentialschools.org), sign on our online petition, and explore other tools and resources that will help you take a stand along with CES.

I thank all of the teachers, school leaders, CES regional center staffers, researchers, and others who contributed to this issue. Many are quoted here; others lent their wisdom behind the scenes. We appreciate all of the help we get as we make sense of the challenges CES schools face and celebrate their successes.

I also want to thank Carol Anna Lind, on staff at CES National. Most of the time, as our staff accountant, Carol watches our numbers. But when each issue of *Horace* emerges, she watches these words—she's an ace proofreader, and has saved these pages from many an error. Thank you, Carol!

A note to *Horace* subscribers: the final issue of Volume 20 will be published in early September to greet you at the start of the school year. If you don't already subscribe, please join us. Subscription rates are \$35.00 per four-issue year, with discounts for multi-year subscriptions. Use the subscription card attached here, call us toll-free at 1.800.62HORACE, or go to [www.essentialschools.org/horace](http://www.essentialschools.org/horace) to subscribe online. Another way to receive *Horace* is to affiliate with CES. The connection with CES is well worth it. Read more information about affiliation online or call us at 510/433-1451.

Jill Davidson  
Editor, *Horace*



## Life Academy and Fremont High School: Lessons for Large School Conversions by Laura Flaxman

In the summer of 2000, I moved to Oakland to get involved in the city's small schools initiative. For three years, I led Life Academy, the city's first new small autonomous high school, born in 2001 from an academy program within Oakland's 2,000-plus student Fremont High School. Having spent many years working with new school start-ups across the country, I have had the opportunity to reflect on different components that lead to their success.



The year after Life Academy became its own small school, the rest of Fremont High School converted into small schools. The conversion of Fremont High and the development of the five new small schools is still very much a work in progress. But at this early point, it is clear that Life has been able to improve school culture and academic outcomes in ways that so far have eluded the other new Fremont schools. What might be causing this divergence, and what is there about Life's experience that might be useful for other new schools and school conversions? What factors in the creation of small schools seem most likely to improve the educational experience and outcomes for students?

Successful conversions, indeed successful schools, require that the quality of teaching and learning be extremely high. Significant changes in student learning cannot be effected without a dramatic shift in teaching; therefore excellent teaching is always at the heart of an excellent school. Yet creating and recreating schools necessarily focuses on school design and structures, and this may lead to some neglect of what Harvard's Richard Elmore calls the "instructional core." In my view, it is more difficult to change instructional practices and teacher expectations for student learning than it is to enact even the most complex structural changes.

In most attempts at reconfiguring large high schools, nearly all of the potential variables that have a powerful effect on the instructional core remain constant: the students, teachers and staff, facility, and community are fundamentally the same as they were before. But without altering these variables in some way, it is close to impossible to transform the educational program. I believe that within its constraints, it is crucial for a school to introduce as much change as possible in order to avoid replicating old patterns and old outcomes. Whether the change is in the staff, the students, the facility, or the professional development, the more the balance is shifted from the old to the new, the better. Life Academy was able to enact enough changes in these key variables to achieve better student outcomes than the larger school that birthed it, even though it is still struggling to provide an excellent, equitable education for all its students.

### The History of Life

Through a tremendous confluence of leadership from then-Superintendent Dennis Chaconas, Oakland Community Organizations (OCO), a faith-based community organizing group, the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES), parents, students, and educators, Oakland instituted a policy in 2000 that encouraged the development of new small autonomous schools and the conversion of the city's large high schools to small autonomous interconnected schools.

Fremont High School seemed to have the right conditions to take advantage of that policy to segment into small high schools. In the same overcrowded area in Oakland that inspired the move towards small elementary and middle schools, Fremont featured "wall-to-wall" academies. All general education students in grades 10-12 had the opportunity to choose from six different theme-based career academies (English Language Learners were together in an "International House" and students with special needs had core classes within the Special Education department.) Students had four classes within their academy, including one "lab" class in the academy's career theme. Physical Education, world languages, AP courses, and many science and math classes included a variety of students across academies. Each academy had at least one teacher-leader or director and most of the acade-

#### RELATED RESOURCE

"Working for Equity through Community Collaboration," *Horace* 18.4, looks at Oakland's new small autonomous schools effort and the productive relationship of three involved organizations: the Bay Area Coalition of Equitable Schools, Oakland Community Organizations, and the Oakland Unified School District

#### RELATED RESOURCE

Available online from the Albert Shanker Institute, Richard F. Elmore's "Building a New Structure for School Leadership" delves into his theories of how leadership can shelter a school's instructional core from meaningful change and how schools can change leadership practices to improve teaching and learning. Full text available at [www.shankerinstitute.org/Downloads/building.pdf](http://www.shankerinstitute.org/Downloads/building.pdf).

In "Management vs. Leadership," Paul McGowan and John Miller write, "School change is not a simple addition, subtraction or multiplication problem." As they analyze how leaders take action to improve schools, McGowan and Miller suggest a list of key variables that affect school quality:

- higher expectations
- common standards
- parent involvement
- technology
- integrated curricula
- assessment
- professional development
- funding
- teaching methodologies
- facilities

Other variables that affect a school's focus on its instructional core include:

- students
- community involvement
- partnerships
- inclusion of structures for personalization such as advisories

As educators and design teams plan to transform a large school into smaller schools, they need to consider the variables at work in their own environment, consciously choosing what is being imported from the original large school and deciding what to alter for maximum positive effects for teaching and learning.

Moving new small schools to new buildings, as Life Academy did, may not be an option for many converting schools. But planners can identify other factors that affect school culture and the conditions for achievement and success for all students.

During the conversion planning process, naming, prioritizing, and acting on the variables that can change—and being aware of the factors that need to remain constant—allows schools to support personalized, intellectually challenging, and equitable teaching and learning.

Paul McGowan and John Miller's "Management vs. Leadership" appeared in the November 2001 *The School Administrator Web Edition*, available at [www.aasa.org/publications/sa/200111/mcgowan.htm](http://www.aasa.org/publications/sa/200111/mcgowan.htm)

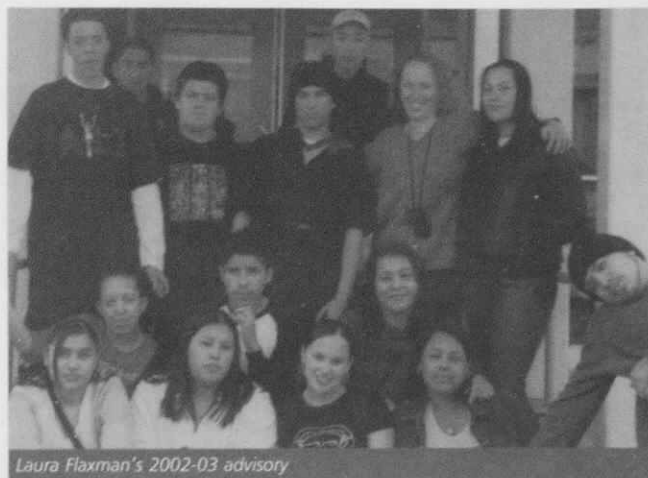
mies received supplemental state funding. The more established academies featured student internships, partnerships with professionals in the field, and interdisciplinary projects.

At the start of the 2000-2001 school year, bolstered by the district-wide move toward small school creation, a group of teachers, students, parents and an administrator from Fremont High School began working on a proposal to change the Health and Bioscience Academy from a small learning community into an autonomous small school. Thanks to tremendous community, parent, and student organizing, the Health and Bioscience Academy was given a facility and approval in May of 2001 to open in September 2001 as Life Academy. One ninth grade teacher, five academy teachers (including the two Health and Bioscience Academy co-directors), one assistant principal (me), two clerical staff members, and one custodian left Fremont to create the new school.

Leadership in many different quarters enabled us successfully to transform ourselves from an "academy" within the larger school to an autonomous small school. BayCES, OCO, and the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) partnered to create the small schools policy and were ultimately given financial support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. OCO helped to organize the parents on the design team to take on leadership roles and become advocates for their children and the school. The teachers in the Health Academy had worked hard to create a relatively successful program at Fremont and were eager to demonstrate their capacity to do more with the opportunity that the new school presented. Our professional partners in the academy, such as Oakland Children's Hospital and Berkeley Biotechnology, Incorporated, continued to support the students and provide internships and programs as we made the transition, in spite of the uncertainty that the move engendered. My experience opening and working in small schools in New York and Boston enabled me to provide a vision from those regions, with histories of small high schools—a history that Oakland lacked.

Life's 250 founding students were a tremendously diverse group. We added significant numbers of English Language Learners, students with special needs, and students who had not been successful in (including many who had been kicked out of) their previous schools. Our ninth graders were recruited directly from Fremont's feeder middle schools and posed a challenge to the teachers who had been used to teaching in the upper grades of the academy. Many of the students we enrolled in ninth grade would never have made it to tenth grade at Fremont High School—they would have dropped out—and therefore would never have been in any of the academies. Everyone—staff and students—had to work with everyone else in all their heterogeneity of backgrounds, experience, ethnicity, talents and struggles.

Life Academy began with all four grades in place, filled with the same students who had previously attended (or were expected to attend) Fremont High School. About half of the staff was from Fremont High School as well. Although for a while it looked as if we were going to be housed on Fremont's campus, ultimately we opened in a former Red Cross building about a mile away. Because of this relocation, some people might not consider this a conversion, but Life continues to live on in the shadow of its parent. From its inception,



Laura Flaxman's 2002-03 advisory

Life faced the challenge of converting an existing student culture, existing adult culture, existing pedagogical approaches, existing instructional program, existing resources, existing belief systems about what students can and can't accomplish, and existing abysmal student achievement data while overcoming the same existing obstacles inherent in the school district's bureaucracy and East Oakland's struggling, violence-plagued community.

### Cultural Improvements at Life

Squeezed into what had previously been a custodian's office off a dimly lit basement corridor, a circle of fifteen tenth graders, my advisory, sat together on their first day at our brand new school. The group was nervous and skeptical, waiting to see what this was all going to be about. Many of the students knew each other and some—those who had spent a large portion of their Fremont freshman year getting into trouble—knew me. As if the switch to a new high school weren't traumatic enough, they were now trying to figure out what this advisory thing was and what their principal was doing teaching a class (and how did they end up with the principal as their advisor anyway?). After an hour or so of introductions and explanations, we walked four blocks to the closest park (and closest thing to a gym or auditorium that we had) for some teambuilding initiatives and a gathering of all of the students and the staff. Within the course of a few hours, the students knew that this school would be very different from what they were used to as they began to grasp the staff's commitment to establish a strong and positive school culture. They saw that time would be devoted to building relationships, that there would be room for their voices and input, and that they would certainly no longer be anonymous.

Our parents and students took a significant risk by taking a chance on the new school. Many lived within a two-block radius of Fremont and their commitment to Life added a substantial commute to their educational experience. Many of our parents and students gave generously of their time and energy to open the school and make it successful. They attended conferences, workshops, retreats, and numerous meetings to plan everything from the student and parent agreements to designing and implementing a process to select the teaching staff. Students played a key role in con-

## Interview with Anna Le, Life Academy Graduate

Anna Le, a graduate of Life Academy, actively participated on the school's design team during its transition to an autonomous small school. In conversation with Laura Flaxman, Le shares her insights about small school design from the student perspective.

**Laura Flaxman:** What should students be aware of when they're moving from a large high school to a small one?

**Anna Le:** Students have to be very open-minded and willing to take risks. They have to understand that if you want a good future, if you want to go to college, you're going to have to make sacrifices, like maybe not seeing friends that you would hang out with at lunch time. Some students who came to Life in the beginning switched back to Fremont. I think it was because people would get just on their nerves. Everybody's so close. Some of them didn't feel like they had any privacy or, at the same time, any close friends. If you can't make friends with these people, then you're stuck at this school.

One of my friends wanted to leave, but I said, "Girl, you might as well just stick with it. You're halfway through the school year. And if you go back to Fremont, you'll probably end up being stuck with a teacher that you don't even like or you don't even know. But if you stay here, you can have these teachers that already know you and help to get you where you need to go." So she stayed. And a lot of other students stayed because I did some talking and made some more friendships.

What's different between Fremont and Life is that the school got smaller, way smaller. And you would have fifteen to seventeen kids in a classroom, which makes it easier to do role-plays and to assign projects like in Mr. Lee's class, where we did the Jerry Springer shows and the Greek mythology plays. That was fun. I think that the school size was why we decided we wanted to stay at Life. It's better for us and it's going to be better to get us in college.

**LF:** If you were talking to adults who were planning to restructure a school, what would you want to tell them that the role of students should be?

**AL:** I think that teachers should be more open-minded and supportive. You're told that you should go to the big high school and graduate, but most of the teachers in the school don't really care about you. They just pass you just to let you go on. And then by the time you graduate from high school, you don't even know how to do algebra. I mean, that happens. At Life, all the teachers know all the students. They could name you, versus if you're in Fremont it's more like, "Hey, you." So the teachers know your name and they can talk to you individually if you were failing or behind.

I would say that young adults know what works best for them in terms of education. I learn better visually than from textbooks. So teachers should talk to the students about what works for them in terms of education and what will help the material stay in their minds. And students have creative ideas of how to make the whole lesson fun. And if it's fun, it's

going to stay in their minds. They'll say, "Oh, I remember this part in high school—we did this." It's going to help.

Kids have energy. They're willing sometimes to go overboard for something because their belief is so strong. So it's better to use their energy, especially if you go to meetings. At the board meetings it's best to have students—they hold up the signs and shout and cheer.

**LF:** So what did you gain by being on the Life design team?

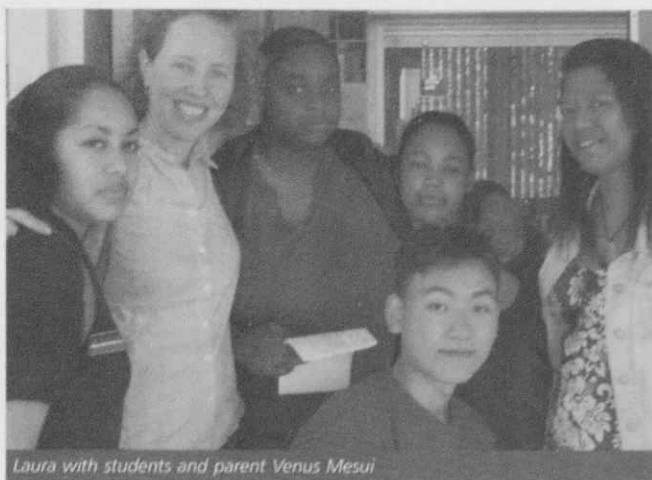
**AL:** People always say that education always comes first, but I learned that was just B.S. Because if you look at the government, they don't care. When the budget gets cut on education, they should have to do the same for jail cells. I think that's what the biggest thing I learned, how America can be so ironic sometimes and at the same time can be completely racist, how the white kids get mostly the good stuff and what we get is our grandfather's books.

I learned a lot about how the school system is being run. At one point I actually wanted to be like you, to make changes in school or either become a teacher, a counselor in school, or a person in the government that deals with school stuff, like a school board member. And I learned how to be outspoken, how to get my thoughts across.



Anna Le





Laura with students and parent Venus Mesui

vincing their peers to come with them and then worked hard to create a student government and a whole host of student activities. They organized town hall meetings, dances, fundraisers, sports teams, student clubs, the prom, and graduation. Individual advisories and entire grades sponsored and planned events, celebrations and service projects.

New and old staff alike took on many additional roles in shaping the school, creating structures, systems and protocols as well as trying to create a model for our instructional process and philosophy. Dramatic and immediate improvements in the school's culture led to some early successes. For example, attendance was up and incidents of violence were down, students were happy enough in the school environment to stay for long hours after school, and parent participation in school events was high. The bathrooms were clean and shared by adults and youth alike, a significant improvement that mattered a lot to the students.

### Transforming the Instructional Core

Academic gains have been slower in coming than many of the meaningful cultural and environmental developments at Life. While the graduation, attendance and college matriculation rates have surpassed those at Fremont, they are still not as high as they could and should be. It appears that the graduation rate for this year's seniors who entered Life as tenth graders will be somewhere in the sixtieth percentile—unacceptably low, though certainly better than the recently published district graduation rate of thirty percent.

The staff was not in concert about what it would take for all of our students to achieve academic success and we spent much less time than would be optimal discussing and developing consensus around important matters of teaching and learning. We had the opportunity to meet together as a staff for three and a half hours each week. During these meetings, we faced trade-offs and tensions between attending to structural issues—for example, disciplinary procedures, the structure of faculty meetings, etc.—and working on instructional practices.

I held the view, as one case in point, that if we focused on working together on high level, engaging instruction, many classroom management issues would be allayed. For this reason and others, an instructional focus was an extremely high

priority for me. A majority of faculty members, however, felt that their instructional work required the support of a detailed school-wide discipline plan listing potential misbehaviors and consequences. To honor this need, we spent five consecutive weeks crafting and coming to agreement on a disciplinary system. In the end, the disciplinary system certainly proved useful, but our focus on that meant that for five straight weeks we did not have any all-staff conversations about the "instructional core."

Thus, while we received structural support from BayCES and instructional support from Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, we spent very little of the first year focused on instructional practice and curriculum planning. The many needs of redesigning and creating a school always felt most urgent; as a result, student learning and achievement were neglected. Increasingly, we learned to focus more on classroom practice, prioritizing professional development, instituting peer observations and teacher portfolios, and beginning to look at student achievement data to inform our practice.

However, the instructional core remained and continues to remain somewhat elusive. Improving teacher practice above all else never emerged as the clear priority for the school and the staff was never able to coalesce around high achievement goals for all students. Tellingly, we were unable to add a proposed amendment to our staff agreements about taking responsibility, as adults, for the success and failure of our students. The staff was also not on the same page about whether or not our job was to prepare every student for college. Some teachers felt that many of our students were not "college material." To me, it's the profoundest of equity issues if adults make decisions about young people's potential and future for them. Because of this, along with my shortcomings as an instructional leader, the veteran staff from Fremont teach much the way that they have always taught. Entrenched pedagogical approaches, cultivated over many years in a large, traditional, low-achieving high school, are hard to change. The big school still lives in the small school.

Teachers who came in fresh to Life Academy, unburdened by the Fremont legacy to the same degree, were quicker to adopt innovative instructional practices. As the school leader, I struggled to find ways to unify the staff around a progressive vision of teaching and learning. I believe that indicators of academic achievement and student performance are still demonstrating low results because of this lack of cohesion and inconsistent beliefs about whether all students should be expected to go to college. Although I'm not a

### THE FREMONT FEDERATION SCHOOLS 2003-2004

- College Preparatory and Architecture Academy
- Fremont in Transition High School
- Mandela High School
- Media College Preparatory School
- Paul Robeson College Preparatory School of Visual and Performing Arts
- Youth Empowerment School (YES)

proponent of relying solely on test scores to determine progress, it is significant that the school continues to rank a one out of ten on the state's Academic Performance Index.

### The Full Conversion of Fremont High School

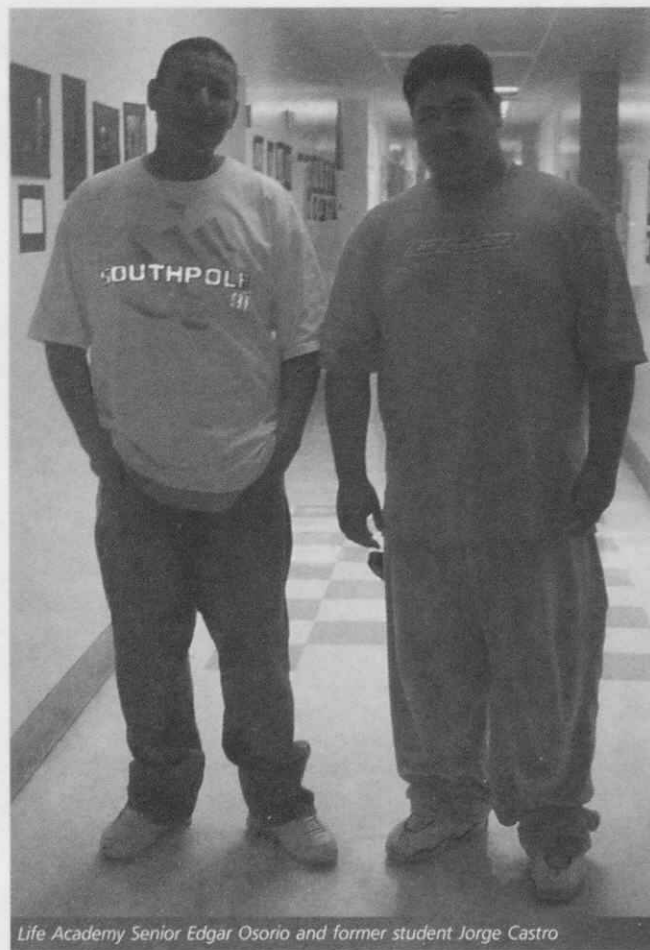
When Life Academy was being birthed, there was tremendous anxiety that the new school would take the best students and staff. Although in 2000 less than half of the students who began at Fremont four years earlier actually graduated, and the school was consistently on the state's under-performing schools list, faculty members would frequently talk about the "haves" and the "have-nots" and fight amongst themselves—as if there were any real "haves" at all in the school. Distrust abounded. And as with other large, struggling high schools across the country, years of working in an environment that was constantly failing its students led to a culture of pervasive low expectations.

Once Life Academy established itself as an autonomous school, Fremont High School began the process of converting from the academy model to a campus of new, small, autonomous, interconnected schools. In Life's first year, 2001-2, a couple of the Fremont academies worked with BayCES and the school district to develop plans for their schools and create pilots for the 2002-3 school year. Board approval was granted for a Fall 2003 opening with campus-wide small schools. What is left of the former Fremont High School is a small group of 11th and 12th graders in a small learning community called "Fremont in Transition" which will cease to exist once the current students graduate. Of the original academies, the Media Academy, Architecture Academy and Arts Academy have all transitioned into new small schools. A fourth school, Youth Empowerment School (YES), started with only ninth graders, and a fifth school, Mandela, will grow from the ninth and tenth graders it currently serves.

### Fewer Variables, More Constants

The new schools at Fremont have had even fewer of the conditions that I believe are necessary for success than Life Academy had. As if the challenge of opening small schools weren't enough, they did so in the immediate aftermath of a state-takeover of the Oakland schools and an exorbitant district-wide debt in a state that seriously underfunds its schools. Under those constraints, they are also struggling with transforming and recreating schools with a group of constants. Life Academy had a new location and a partial infusion of new staff; at the Fremont schools, almost all of the adults in the building have remained the same, as has the physical location. And similar to Life, the new schools at Fremont (known now as the Fremont Federation) have the same students, community, neighborhood, financial and district resources, and obstacles.

Having kept most of the core elements that make up the school community constant, it has been that much harder to transform instructional practices, school culture, adult belief systems, and even elements of school design. For example, at Life Academy, we immediately created advisories, a three-week intensive course between semesters called "Intercession," town hall meetings, and numerous other alter-



*Life Academy Senior Edgar Osorio and former student Jorge Castro*

native protocols and practices with the intention of proactively building a distinct and positive school culture. At the Fremont Federation schools, fewer of these kinds of structures have been put into place. Both the instructional practices remain largely consistent with what occurred at Fremont before and the more general culture remains largely unchanged. As a result, the schools' staff members still struggle with discipline issues and violence on their campus, and in some cases they've defaulted to the roles and responses that were in place before the new schools started. Poor student attendance, strained school-family relationships, long-term teaching vacancies, and of course, low student achievement continue to plague many of the schools.

Venus Mesui, a parent leader both at Life—her son graduated last year—and at the Media School, where her daughter is a junior, says, "For us [at Life] it was easier because we left the campus and we had expectations for students and for staff. A lot of the teachers [at the Fremont Federation schools] don't know what the expectations are...and a lot of the expectations aren't high enough." For Venus, the variable of Life's move to a new building was an invaluable boon, and she recognizes the urgency of creating schools that set consistent, clear and high expectations for students.

Just like at Life, educators at the Fremont small schools are working hard, late, and wearing multiple hats. The school leaders are learning the nuts and bolts of the principalship