

The Journal of the Coalition of Essential Schools

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Special 20th Anniversary Issue

Equitable Schools for a New Democracy
Responses from the CES Network

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How do we define democracy and equity in schooling? Why is it important for schools to strive for democracy and equity? How can we teach to promote democracy and how can democracy be the core of what we teach? What are the connections among diversity, democracy, and equity? What are the connections between democratic schooling and a democratic society?

I Stand for Dorie Finn

by Peggy Silva

Essay

02



I teach in Brigadoon, the land that time forgot. Like the students of mythical Lake Wobegon, the students at Souhegan High School are all gifted and expected to win Olympic gold. I exaggerate, but not by much. The truth is that I do not recognize my school when I listen to colleagues working against overwhelming odds in our nation's schools. Souhegan's students expect to succeed. Banana Republic and Abercrombie dot our halls, highlighted by the occasional tattoos, piercings, blue hair, and camouflage of our rebels without a cause. And then there's Dorie Finn*, and with Dorie in the equation, we gain a slight toehold in the conversation of equity.

Equity is the single topic dominating the education journals I read. Dorie is not equal. Her life would make an Oprah novel. I won't spell out her story – you can fill in your own blanks and would be mostly right in your guesses as to what happens behind her family's closed doors. She disappears for awhile, sometimes physically and sometimes in spirit, but she always bounces back. Dorie defines the term "resilient."

Dorie attends classes with students of all ranges of motivation and ability in our inclusive classrooms. If relegated to the very bottom track of the very lowest level of ability in a more traditional school, Dorie would give up. She would not see a future mirrored in classmates; she would only see her present. And her present is not tolerable. Of all the students I have ever taught, Dorie Finn deserves a future.

Dorie attends class with the most gifted of our gifted kids. Expected to meet rigorous performance standards, Dorie produced a portfolio and a research paper, and is working on her

senior project. At graduation, Dorie's teachers will stand in ovation for her true grit.

Dorie has not been expected to succeed without assistance. She has had a wide net of support. After spending their middle school years in a resource room as self-labeled "sped-tards," Dorie and her cohorts were plunged into a mainstream high school environment. Their ninth grade team made many accommodations to support their needs. We established regular meetings for Dorie with the school's social worker, and chose female counselors and advisors for her. And when Dorie made a very dumb, really stupid, one-time mistake, we accompanied her to court to vouch for her character.

We have never wavered in our understanding that students who present complex learning issues need us to muster support for their learning. When students cross our threshold, we commit to providing them with the tools they need to secure their future.

We are sometimes overwhelmed by the needs expressed by some of our students, but because we deal with a small storm and not a tsunami of students with complex needs, we figure it out. That sheer volume of need is what separates us from colleagues who work in the hard places of hard stories. I am extremely tentative, therefore, to jump into the conversations about "equity," afraid that my thoughts will be dismissed as pathetically naïve. Please assume my good intentions as I express my caution about that word as the current rallying cry in education reform.

Of course we need to fight for equity – the fact that that is still an issue is a travesty. Our public schools were founded on

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the promise that our children would become active citizens of our democracy. What I reject is the cleanliness – the sanitary sweep – of the word “equity” that is the current buzzword of reform. Yeah, great for us – we stand for equity, but what does that mean? The word remains intangible to me.

To me, the term equity is analogous to our history with the word “homeless.” When faced with the knowledge that a particular person lacks the dignity of shelter and food, we are horrified and outraged. When we hide behind the term “the homeless,” however, we accept homelessness as a societal norm. The term allows us to distance ourselves from a failure to provide basic necessities for the weakest of our neighbors. This glossing over institutionalizes an American tragedy.

I fear that when we embrace the word “equity,” we accept an institutional failure. Remember how powerful it was to read stories of the individuals who died on September 11, 2001? Each individual’s life mattered much more than reading that thousands had died. The numbers numbed us but the personalization made us recognize the horror of their loss. The term equity does not raise my consciousness; getting Dorie what she needs to be a productive adult moves me to action. We need to name our students and their needs. We need to tell their stories – constantly. We are the only ones who can, we who are on the front lines fighting to change our students’ stories.

When we name the children for whom we are fighting, we act with power. Instead of running the term “equity” up the reform flagpole, we should embrace the phrase “No Child Left Behind” and call the politicians at their word. The same politicians who designed “No Child Left Behind” have co-opted the term to stand for “No Child Left Untested.” But what if we truly left no child behind?

To leave no child behind, we must use the tools at hand. In the same way that reporters bring war into our living rooms, educators must keep our students’ stories – their challenges and their successes – front and center. We must write about our students and our classrooms – in newsletters, in the Op-Ed columns of our national press, in graffiti on our politicians’ offices if need be. Every newspaper should have a column called “Going Public,” written by local educators. It is morally imperative that we make our nation weep at the needs we witness every day. We need to speak of the children who stand before us each and every day.

For the past thirteen years my school has used the ten Common Principles as a template for our work. When we personalize learning “to the maximum feasible extent,” when we “explicitly and self-consciously stress values of...trust and of decency,” when we design our school practices “to meet the needs of every group or class of students,” and when we “demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies” – then we demonstrate our commitment to equity for we have left no child behind.

Gene Thompson-Grove, co-director of the National School Reform Faculty, asks conference participants to attend to their work in the name of one of their students. As educators speak the names of hundreds of students, one-by-one, the

What is honored in a country shall be cultivated there. –Plato

power in the room is palpable – in a way that can never be achieved if we stand for the term “equity.”

Twenty years from their inception, the ten Common Principles still mandate that we stand for all students and every student. And today, I stand for Dorie Finn.

*Although Dorie is a very real student, I have changed her name and blurred some specific details to protect her privacy.

Peggy Silva

Peggy Silva is a charter member of Souhegan High School in Amherst, New Hampshire and serves as that school’s writing coordinator. Peggy co-authored, with Dr. Robert Mackin, *Standards of Mind and Heart: Creating the Good High School*, and also co-authored *At the Heart of Teaching: A Guide to Reflective Practice*.

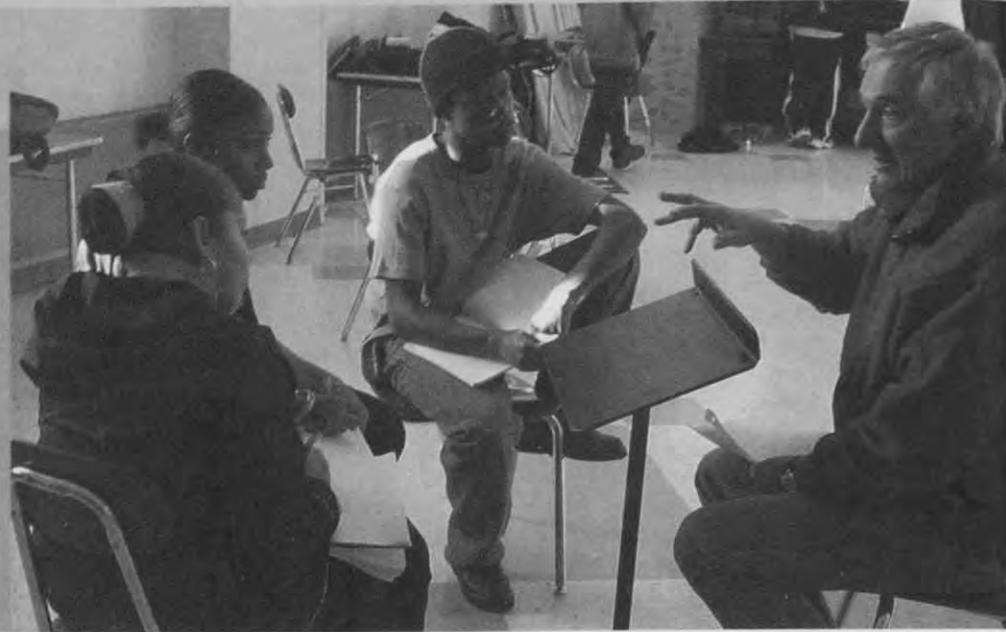
Bio

Faith in our Schools

by David Montes de Oca

Essay

03



What does it mean to “have faith in our schools?” We are not talking about the inclusion of prayer or religious study. We are referring to a faith in what our schools can do and what our schools can be. Over the past several decades the association between public education and failure has become so strong; it is typical to see aspects of mainstream culture, video, film, music, and television portraying public schools as a setting for little more than chaos and crime. We begin to assume that if schools were meant to function well they would, and that the notion of any substantial change is unrealistic and perhaps suicidal. As we remain on this well-traveled path, what does it mean to “have faith in our schools?”

Despite this, often we see an image of a teacher standing or kneeling beside his or her student as they grapple with a problem or a topic together, offering support and guidance in a picture synonymous with what education should be. Committed educators willing to bring themselves to “where the children are.” Receptive, humble, curious students eager to explore the unknown and challenge themselves with the help of an experienced adult. Found on the covers of the latest educational magazine, or on posters promoting a career in schools, this image of what school can be is what we want and desperately need to believe is possible for all children. These are the ingredients of what a quality 21st century education should look like. One adult, one child, and a universe of learning ready to unfold. *One child at a time.*

So, why is such an environment so utterly rare? Why does the above description resonate with so few of today’s schools

and classroom experiences? What makes teaching *one child at a time* so difficult? Or is it?

Without retracing the steps of how the origins of public education defy the notion that “one child at a time” was even the point of the current school system (see anything on “the last 100 years of schooling”), one can still debate that there is enough research, evidence, and example in our midst to render us at least a little confused by the fact that we have not come further. We have empirical data that is not only contemporary but also historic which indicate successful methods and measures for ways in which we can teach *one child at a time.*

Equitable schools do this. They are small, personal, innovative, responsive learning environments where every child matters and all the adults share the same vision. Similar to the town hall meeting or indigenous councils of old, democratic practices are born out of the collective efforts to meet and maintain a vision of who we are and who we are to become. This is how a democracy thrives, and schools that attend to each and every one of its citizens create a new democracy.

This may seem strange to those who have not read such research, and it may seem foreign to many who have not sat in cycles of inquiry. It may seem even a bit ludicrous to those who have recently emerged from one of our country’s hundreds of teacher credentialing programs that continue to *reproduce* instead of *redesign*. For most, even when discovered, this evidence is still considered remote, reform-driven idealism. Coming from what many consider highly unique circumstances, these examples of quality education are

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excused away as extraordinary and therefore incapable of replication. But what is so unique about "quality, high performing" schools that we find so rare and therefore not real evidence of the possible?

The **attitudes and beliefs** held by so many who have come to regard education as terminally faltered constitute a looming challenge to the efforts to reconstruct our existing system of education. In schools where this belief in failure pervades, the **norms of behavior** are so reflex-oriented when it comes to making excuses for failure that even our most ambitious young teachers are learning the "tricks of the trade." By creating "us and "them" cultures or "one size fits all" classrooms, new educators begin to assimilate towards the abysmally low expectations we often hold for our schools. The average career spent in urban education continues to drop from five years (already a catastrophically low figure) to nearly three and a half years. **Relationships** within schools continue to foster distrust, denial, and distance because so few are encouraged to make connections in this dog-eat-dog world of high stakes and low performance.

However, if we are to realize of vision of more equitable and democratic schools, we must change these attitudes and beliefs. We must practice a new set of norms, such as taking responsibility for our learning AND our teaching, as well as being reflective and honoring diversity, to name a few. We must develop deep and meaningful relationships with one another in our schools and classrooms. Otherwise, we are destined to ignore the truth that a **one child at a time** education is possible. We can meet students where they are, and we can help them sustain their curious ways so that, for example, questioning becomes synonymous with growing up. *(Not that students should grow up too quickly.)*

In recent efforts to take the ideals and experiences of a small school reform movement and bring them to scale in Oakland, California by implementing district-wide changes that would begin the perilous task of "district redesign," many voices emerged both to rebuke and rejoice in the efforts. No stereotypical face could be placed upon the many who have spoken for or against the efforts. Some applaud and others boo, staunch advocates for one side or the other, even though all are seeking change. Few desire the status quo. Yet often what stands in the way of meaningful change is a set of attitudes and beliefs held by adults about other adults and about chil-

dren. These attitudes and beliefs include our lack of "faith in our schools." We simply don't expect or even accept that schools can work for students, and therefore we consistently undermine their potential for success.

Participation in public education is an act of faith. Regardless of what the mainstream has to say, children, teachers, families, and school leaders take a leap of faith every day, all over this country when they enter the schoolhouse believing that the image of teaching "one child at a time" is not a dream deferred, but truth realized.

¡Si se puede! —United Farm Workers

David Montes de Oca

David Montes de Oca is an Advisor at MetWest High School in Oakland, CA. He also works with the New School Development Group supporting new principals to open new small schools. He was educational strategist (principal) at Urban Promise Academy, a middle school for three years. He is a founding member of the team of educators, families, and reformers who started *Tris* crew, small, autonomous schools as part of a movement throughout Oakland to create small learning communities and models of quality, equitable learning environments. David is also the executive director of the Urban Arts Academy after-school program, and is involved in addressing gang violence and preparing young urban warriors to advocate for non-violent alternatives in their communities. David and his team have focused on the use of constructivist listening structures as a vehicle to manifest relational power and change within their school and programs.

Bio



Why is it important
for schools to strive
for democracy and
equity?

Emma Paulino, Zawadi Harmon, Abbey Noelle Kerins, Seewan Eng and Tanya Friedman, Jan Reeder, and Mara Benitez create layers of significance and purpose. When schools strive for democracy and equity, they create the conditions for students to know each other in new ways and for teachers to teach in new ways. But how does the lack of diversity in our teaching force threaten the power of those discoveries? And what additional challenges do democratically run schools pose to equitable academic outcomes?

A Common Vision for Equitable Education

by Emma Paulino

Essay

04



Being a parent of three children hasn't been easy for me. As an immigrant (I'm originally from Mexico), and a full-time working mother, it has been very hard for me to come up with a solution for Oakland's children education. Back in 1995, I started noticing that my second son wasn't doing well in school. Who or what was failing? Nobody and everybody, nothing and everything. Our school system was the first one failing. My reality as a parent was that I was powerless. But I wasn't able to let things go in that direction.

At the same time, Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) was doing hundreds of one-to-one, face-to-face conversations in order to listen to parents, teachers and community people. By having those individual conversations, they learned that many people were concerned about the same thing: the poor education of many students in Oakland. We decided to work together to make a change in the public schools.

We started dreaming. We dreamt about equitable education for every child regardless of their color or what language they spoke. Our dream was a big one: to help each child in the public schools succeed. Our desperation for quality education for students attending schools in Oakland's low income areas was great. Compared with the students attending schools in affluent areas, it seemed like we were dealing with two school districts. Students in the affluent areas have what we know they deserve – a good education. But our children do not deserve less than that. OCO gave us the courage and the power we needed. The most painful and important part for me to learn was how our children were doing. In the low

income schools, our students' scores were an average of 3 in a 1 to 10 scale, with 10 at the top. In the affluent areas, the lowest score was an 8.

Our next step was to find out the reason for this. What we learned was that the schools in the affluent areas were small; with a maximum of 370 students. Our schools in the "flatlands" were schooling up to 1,447 students, though they were built for a maximum of 800 students. As you can imagine, the playground area was full of portable classrooms, the learning conditions were horrible, and students were attending a year-round school. Teachers didn't have their own classrooms. All of that information was a wake-up call for us.

We decided to work and make a difference. Organized by OCO, we changed the old policy to a new one, one that would benefit every student in Oakland. Now we have a new policy for New Small Autonomous Schools in our city. This was the product of very hard work that didn't come from our politicians, but from well-organized parents, teachers, community members, and school administrators who understood what they wanted and made it happen.

In 2001, we opened our first five small schools. I was a part of the design team of ASCEND (A School Cultivating Excellence, Nurturing Diversity), a new K-8 school. The difference between then and now is that I'm a part of my child's education, just like any other parent in the school. The teachers respect the parents, and the parents respect the teachers. We feel welcomed by the people in the front office, and our school principal knows every child by name. Our teachers know every

A Common Vision for Equitable Education

child – they not only know their students, but all of the other teachers' students.

One of the most important things for parents is the leadership development, not only inside the school but outside the school as well. Now, as a parent, if a student fails, I feel that I'm failing too. The reason why it's important for me to help other parents understand that it's not only about their own child, but it's about all the others as well, is because the only way we can make a difference in education is when each one of us learns how to love each child in this country as our own. Each one of us has a little loved one: it could be our own child, or a niece, nephew, grandson, or granddaughter, and when we see those faces in other kids, we will be motivated to overcome any barrier we might face.

Love can change any child. I don't feel I could see myself accomplishing what I've done without having such love for others. The other ingredients that are needed are respect and the willingness to work with

others. No one could do this job by themselves. It needs to be done as a team, each one in their own position, understanding that there is no job is more important than any other.

One of the biggest failures that I have seen is the lack of community participation. We need to understand that everybody's role is very important, that it "takes the whole village to raise and educate a child." Teachers need to understand that without parent participation, they're missing an important element to accomplish their mission. School administrators need to put themselves outside their offices and get to know their students, parents, and community. Parents need to understand and respect teachers and school staff and be more active in the school. The last message, but not the least important, is that teachers and administrators shouldn't underestimate parents' participation in their children's education. We have so much to offer. See us as partners, not as useless people. We just want what you want: a good education for our children. The work is hard, but it's harder yet when we try to do it by ourselves and without the help of others.

“Anger and bereavement, throughout history, have provided the engine for relentless struggles for change.”

–Barbara Kingsolver

Emma Paulino

Emma Paulino was born in Michoacan, Mexico. She has been living in Oakland, California for the past 20 years, and has been married to her Filipino husband Edgardo J. Paulino for 17 years. She has three kids, Fhatima, Mac Edward and Edgardo, and is working as a Community Organizer with Oakland Community Organizations (OCO).

Bio

Donny

by Zawadi Harmon

Essay

05



I remember him clearly. His wandering eyes framed by thick-lensed glasses that made them appear twice their size. I remember his drooling mouth, always wet with saliva, curved into a preposterous smirk that never seemed to fade. He was always too willing, too anxious to please. He hungered for the feeling of being cool, being accepted. He had coarse brown hair, which always seemed to need a cut. His frame was not very athletic and he was neither tall nor short. He seemed to rotate between four different button-down shirts draped over an old dingy t-shirt and similar, if not the same, daily blue jeans. He was the epitome of a geek. We snickered as he walked by. Everything he said seemed to be comedy. He basked in the glory of our attentions, too simple-minded to detect our mockery. In our school, he was considered an amusement, publicly accepted as a funny distraction from our teenage popularity battles, and hormonal courtship struggles. When it came to class work, his ridiculous answers were welcome interruptions of our often serious and intellectually charged class debates.

"Donald?" The teacher interrupted his anxious rocking in his chair and thumb-twiddling. "Yeah, whassup teach number one?" he absently answered amongst a multitude of background snickers. "Donald, my dear, what do you think about the issue of abortion?" "I dunno. I guess, girls should do it if they want to. But not using hangers. That will hurt their..." The class broke out in a loud obtrusive uproar. The teacher began to walk quickly to the center of the room, aggravated by the disruption. Our eyes seemed to surround Donny, fascinated at his ignorance, celebrating his audacity. "Okay class, settle down. Settle down! In our study of *Roe v. Wade* we will

be pondering our personal views of abortion. In groups, I would like for each of you to discuss your ideas and perceptions of abortion. Outside of the law, outside of what we have read about this case, try to decide as a group which side you would take ethically, as individuals. Remember our safe space. Remember that everyone's thoughts must be included in your answers."

I was outraged to find myself in a group, side by side, with king geek himself. He smiled a wide grin, feeling victorious. My peers had crowned me the smartest girl in the class, and assumed that group work with me meant an easy "A" on their paper. I began to lead, as I always did, schooling my peers on my absolute truths and pro-choice politics. "Women have a right to do whatever they deem necessary with their own bodies. Society can't tell me what to do. If want to have a baby or not, is my own choice. And I am the one who should decide that!" Everyone nodded in agreement. I felt comfortable as usual in a space of consensus. I began to write the group's statement assigning each person a task in the transcription. Donny seemed perplexed. He sat dazed as I handed the paper to him. "Donny," I said, "Write why you think women should control their own bodies." He began to write, in a awkward slanted hand, quickly and silently.

"My mom, prayed, for seven hours. She prayd to Jesus, she prayd to the saints, she prayd to the president of the Uniter State. She prayd to all these peoples who she thaut about. And she sat in the bafroom with that hanger and that bottle of Bacardi, and she decided that I could be elive. And I am. Elive."

Donny

We all stared at him. Frozen. Not knowing exactly what to say. Tamika began to laugh, nervously, too loud and uncomfortable. I raised my hand and the teacher came quickly. "Yes, dear? What is it?" I answered, my eyes still on Donny, "Can we have some more time?" "Yes, but the day is just about over, so we'll finish up tomorrow."

That evening, I thought about him. I couldn't believe that this strange character, from the depths of geekdom, had made me consider the pro-life viewpoint. I had never considered the fact that perhaps even I could have been the victim of an abortion. My siblings often chided me, saying that our parents had named me Zawadi, "gift of love," because really I was a slip up, a mistake, the unexpected result of too much nooky. I wondered why Donny's mom had named him.

I imagined his face, his funny smirk. The way he always made us laugh. The way he seemed overly honest, almost like a child. The way he struggled through each lesson, never giving up, always trying under the

teacher's encouraging words, never seeming frustrated or tired. I, on the other hand, often gave up when an assignment seemed unusually hard. Perhaps there was more to him. Perhaps I'd written off his intellect too soon. I realized that I had created a very one-dimensional perception of him. I had never considered who he really was, what challenges he'd faced in life, why he'd come to be the way that he was. I'd simply written him off as a cartoon-like figure in my life whose only role was to provide daily amusement. I pondered what would have happened had his mother made a different choice? Donny was a survivor. I vowed that from this day on I would respect him as my fellow human being, help him in class whenever I could, and invite him into my social circle.

Looking back on those days, on my friendship with Donny, and my other classmates from every walk of life, I realize that the question of whether we were pro-life or pro-choice, whether we were in discussion groups with popular people, geeks, or nerds, whether we chose the hard research question or the easy one, whether we scored an "A" on a paper or an "F," while all very important, were truly mere precursors to the very real lessons we learned from each other. Lessons of compassion, cooperation, democracy. Learning from each other how to get along, in a world full of people, who, although very different from ourselves, deserved our careful consideration and respect for the complexities within us all.

Humanity reaches as far as love reaches;
it has no frontiers except those we give it.

—Italo Calvino

Zawadi Harmon

Zawadi Harmon (previously Zawadi Powell) attended Central Park East Secondary School between 1986 and 1992. During her time at CPESS, she created poetry, creative writing, and theatre pieces that are still used in the CPESS curriculum today. She went on to attend Brown University where she studied abroad in Ghana, West Africa. She taught as a substitute teacher in several CES schools and played a major role in the creation of two new non-profit organizations. She is currently living in North Carolina with her husband and three children and working for the nonprofit Mekye Center teaching poetry to students diagnosed with learning differences.

Bio

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 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, California, 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 demonstrate 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 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.

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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

Equity in Small Schools

by Abbey Noelle Kerins

Essay

06



We need to have a more intentional approach to creating education environments that are equitable and that prepare every student to participate in an increasingly diverse society. The importance of racial diversity in curriculum, student body, and leadership has been an afterthought in the work of small schools and is a missing piece of progressive education's politics. While progressive educators seek to reform schools, classrooms, and our notions of success to serve a new kind of student, this student continues to be predominantly white. The types of students that flourished at my small school were representative of a large social cross-section – queers, geeks, punks, radicals, HIV infected, runaways, teen mothers. However, with the exception of three people of color who I remember, they were all white. While many graduates from small schools might not identify with my experience, conversations about the movement often return to the issue of its overwhelming whiteness. The journey of School One toward a more equitable school culture may echo in the hearts and minds of many readers, and it is a story that too often goes untold.

Located in an old converted monastery on the East Side of Providence, Rhode Island, School One saved many social misfits, including me. The East Side is like many other urban areas where there is a clear line that defines the right and wrong sides of the tracks. We were on the border, the edge of Brown University behind us and Fox Point, a notoriously violent working-class neighborhood with a majority of Black, Latino, and Portuguese families, just around the corner. This environment, this borderland, was a fitting place for us. We were a population of students that had been left behind,

fallen through the cracks, or had just checked out of our anonymous, comprehensive high schools. We opted out and, instead, chose a school that promised to place the unique interests of each student at the center of the classroom. Both the students and the staff understood and embraced these places in-between.

In every classroom, in advisory, in town hall meetings, in every corner of the building, students' voices could be heard making important decisions about their schooling at School One. Through thoughtful questioning and high expectations, teachers encouraged us. It was obvious to anyone who came through those doors that this was a place that had a clear concept of educational equity. Yet it was equally obvious that racial diversity was missing.

From 1994 to 1996, I developed a sharp sense of my voice as a young person in courses that drew from a heterogeneous pool of resources. However, the people that participated in my education all looked like me; we were nearly all white, middle-class, and relatively "privileged." There was an unspoken assumption that it was enough to learn about diversity through reading the books of Morrison, Cisneros, and other authors of color. But how much could we understand about the experience of race, power, and the cultural differences of historically oppressed communities without the voices of these communities participating in the school culture? I was left quite unprepared to actively engage in and thoughtfully communicate with the diverse groups that I became a part of in college and in everyday life. Even with my honed critical voice and sense of youthful empowerment, I repeatedly found

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myself painfully exposing a lack of understanding around issues of race in college and beyond.

It has been ten years since I first walked through the doors at School One, and while its mission largely remains the same, the student body is much more representative of Providence's larger ethnic and racial diversity. Denise Jenkins became School One's head of school fourteen years ago. Inheriting a school where, as she puts it, "I wouldn't have enrolled my two [Black] step-sons," she made a commitment to change this reality. Currently, 40% of the students enrolled are students of color. Denise emphasized the role that staff and board support play in achieving the kind of structural changes that were needed in order shift the school culture toward one that explicitly supported diversity.

"Roughly one-third of our budget goes toward financial aid, meaning that our school is affordable for many more students than any other non-parochial independent school in the state." It became clear in our conversation that the more difficult work of changing school culture was changing the way the school related to the community. School One has made great efforts to reach out to previously excluded communities; Denise has developed partnerships with "at-risk" youth organizations in the state in order to recruit young people that too often go under-served.

There are still many hurdles on the road toward a more equitable education for students at School One. Even as the ethnic and racial diversity of the student body has grown over the years. Jenkins says, "This year, we only had one ethnic minority member (out of eight) on the full-time staff and three (out of about ten) among the adjunct faculty. We always advertise positions in the local African-American newspaper as well as the *Providence Journal*, and we always seek to interview minority applicants who apply. However, our salary scale is an impediment in this area." The school faces some new challenges in the coming years: the challenge of white educators teaching across differences in the classroom, the challenge of a school culture where the student body is not represented by the staff, and the challenge for small schools to compete for the relatively few teachers and school leaders of color across the nation.

I still find myself captivated by School One's struggles and successes because I feel that the necessary dilemmas of creating diversity in small schools are shared by all of us who are committed to the goal of equitable education. The school

reform movement has struggled to put diversity at the center of its work, and yet we still serve a largely white population of students and teachers. The absence of a clear and purposeful push toward school cultures that truly honor diversity will continue to leave many students unprepared to engage in meaningful relationships with communities of color, particularly as our social landscape becomes increasingly more diverse. The addition of the tenth Common Principle, in 1997, was the first nationally symbolic gesture made by CES to recognize the importance of equity in the transformation of American schools. It is in this regard that I feel that it is not enough to say, "Schools should serve all students well." We, as educators of tomorrow's citizenry, need to have a clear plan

Every change effort occurs in context, and every context bristles with constraints that must be engaged in pursuit of something better, something fairer. — William Ayers

and passionate commitment to racial diversity, so this commitment will lead us to a more equitable and democratic education for all.

Abbey Noelle Kerins

Abbey Kerins is an alumna of School One, a CES affiliate in Providence, RI, and joined CES National as an Administrative Assistant in August 2003. She received a Cultural Studies B.A. from the New School for Social Research, where she researched the East Side Community High School's Community Based Organizing classes and directed a documentary on her findings.

Bio

Democracy...For What?

by Seewan Eng and
Tanya Friedman

Essay

07



For all the talk about “teacher leadership,” “teacher empowerment” and “democratic decision-making,” an essential part of the conversation is missing: democracy to what end? Some practices in schools create a more democratic professional community of educators but don’t necessarily impact excellent and equitable results in terms of achievement and school experience for students. There is not a direct causal relationship between democratic school processes for adults and equitable results for students. Our vision of effective democracy involves a professional learning community that supports educators to take action toward a common vision of equity. While a teacher may feel empowered when her colleagues include her in planning next year’s budget, this instance of “voice” does little to help her figure out the real reasons why the struggling students in her classroom still aren’t reading at grade level. Our focus here (and in our work in schools) is on the aspects of a democratic and equitable school that most directly impact students.

At San Francisco Community, we have created and sustained a democracy where every voice is heard and a school culture that empowers adults to take action toward equity. Our structures and systems (rotating leadership, consensus model, representative committees, inclusive decision-making) have helped us refine our common vision of equity and take clear steps toward making it real. These same structures and systems also consume enormous amounts of time and energy without clear links to student results. We continually work to align our democratic practices with our vision of equitable schooling for students.

Giving educators more voice and decision-making power may lead to increased buy-in and involvement. But this alone doesn’t necessarily translate into improved classroom practice. There is an important distinction between giving teachers voice in decisions about running school and empowering teachers to take action that makes progress towards equity. We want to expand the concept of democracy to empower teachers to teach differently so that all students meet high standards. True democracy lies in the uncertain and complex processes of working for equity for students.

There are a number of reasons why schools, particularly small schools, focus narrowly on this “voice” definition of democracy. For one, there are countless decisions that need to be made in every school, and these decisions must align with a collective school vision, so it makes sense to consult colleagues. Buy-in and shared ownership often lead to better morale and more investment. The opportunity to voice opinions and be part of making decisions can feel powerful and freeing particularly since many of us have experienced alienation and frustration with top-down decision-making models. Given the stress and pressures teachers work under, this sense of “voice” is seductive because it feels like getting good work done. But it is not a substitute for the transformative action for which true democracy calls.

And it is easier to create democratic processes and structures than to create and sustain a school culture that transforms classroom practice and thus, student achievement and experience. Working in a school community that has made inroads toward creating and sustaining this kind of culture and vision

Democracy...For What?

of democracy, we know both how difficult and how essential it is for equity. What does it take to support such transformation? How do we ensure that our democracy is for equity?

Not surprisingly, the principles necessary for a transformative adult community are the same principles necessary for an excellent and equitable classroom community. When unanxious expectations and trust infuse a professional community, educators support and hold each other accountable to a school's vision for equitable achievement. Creating unanxious expectations and trust in a professional community is complex. Every professional adult community is a differentiated classroom. The work that each teacher needs to do towards equitable instruction is specific and individual – and the work of the community will overlap with each teacher's own work to varying degrees. Uncovering, respecting, and supporting these individual needs through a professional development program are practices a truly democratic school embraces.

Teachers need time and space for thoughtful reflection and for struggles with their own beliefs, ideas and practices against their particular backdrop of student achievement and school experience. This work rarely happens in isolation. Teachers need to be in meaningful and ongoing conversation with colleagues about the specific gaps of underserved students, high-leverage curricular standards, the habits of mind the community values, and the biases teachers hold that impact our perceptions of our students. We fear that too often educators focus limited energy and time on democratic processes for adults that don't change results for students. It is only when time and space for conversation and reflection about classroom practice is protected that a professional community can develop the environment of expectation and trust that all people need to do their best learning and work.

A truly democratic school supports teachers to find their voice so they can make public their questions, struggles and passions about their practice and they can support each other to identify and ask for what they need in order to take meaningful and effective action for equity. The more deeply we understand each other's practice, the more we are equipped and compelled to support each other while simultaneously holding each other accountable to the school vision of equity.

In this kind of environment teachers take risks based on the shared vision – teaching algebra to all 8th graders because algebra is a gatekeeper, changing a reading program for the

first time in ten years to meet the needs of English Language Learners, challenging a colleague's inconsistent grading system – that bring the community closer to its vision. Empowerment means taking responsibility through action for what's not working. Inclusion means making the vision real with students. Democracy means that every individual can and will take responsibility for what matters most and can count on emotional, technical and pedagogical support to make their actions effective.

It is not only not enough that schools embrace inclusive, democratic decision-making practices – it's not the point. The kind of buy-in that arises in this limited concept of democracy is not enough to sustain teachers to stay in teaching, to continue

The more the people become themselves,
the better the democracy. *–Paulo Freire*

to improve their practice, to do the long, hard work it takes to teach for equity. Teacher leadership needs to be rooted in taking responsibility for the professional development of a community. Teacher empowerment needs to be about developing a sense of efficacy in all teachers as they take action in their classrooms. To this end, democracy must be for equity.

Seewan Eng and Tanya Friedman

Seewan Eng has been teaching middle school language arts and social studies at San Francisco Community School for the past three years. Before coming to SFC, she worked at Leadership High School in San Francisco and the Francis W. Parker Charter School in Devens, Massachusetts.

Tanya Friedman teaches 2nd and 3rd graders at San Francisco Community School where she has taught and learned for the past nine years. She rotated into the Head Teacher position from 1999-2002. Before teaching at SFC, she taught in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Bio

One Teacher at a Time

by Jan Reeder

Essay

08



I believe the impact of the Coalition of Essential Schools' Common Principles on teachers and students in America's schools is much greater than indicated by the number of schools that have affiliated over the years, a number estimated to be over a thousand. Some say many of these schools are not actually doing CES work any longer, that the movement does not do enough to "police" its ranks. I heard Ted Sizer say, in response to such comments, that we should not spend valuable time on who was not working on our ideas, but should invest our energy in those committed to the work. The wisdom of this has become more obvious through my own twenty years of working with the Common Principles in schools. Whatever the number of schools, or depth of work in those schools, the number of teachers impacted by CES is indisputably significant.

In my work as a high school principal of a CES member school and most recently as a director of CES Northwest, I have found that the way CES impacts the creation of equitable schools for a new democracy is one teacher at a time. We continue to work one school at a time even as the need grows to address district level issues. I am reminded again of the power of our ideas in individual classrooms. Teachers have told me constantly that the Common Principles have transformed their classroom practice. When teachers volunteer their stories, they mention the "permission" to go more deeply into fewer topics, the impressive results of letting the students do more of the work in the classroom, the enlightenment of student exhibitions, the value of planning backwards, and on and on. Clearly, the Common Principles are such powerful tools that teachers exposed to them inevitably transform their practice.

I was present when the tenth Principle, calling for equitable and democratic schools, was "born" during the CES Congress meeting in 1997. It was an exciting process and I think a deliberate and specific focus on equitable and democratic practices has made and will continue to make a much-needed impact on America's classrooms. Here the importance of the whole school working together on CES practices is critical. Empowering teachers to improve schools has finally given school reform a chance to succeed, because it is only teachers who have the wisdom, the experience, and the passion to change schools. Working collaboratively, they can resolve the complexities of meeting the needs of their students in the face of ever-changing regulations from outside.

As most of us know, historically it has been almost impossible to gain teacher commitment to federal, state, or even district-mandated change. But if teachers in individual schools are given the authority to determine which reforms meet the needs of their students, they have the ownership and commitment to implement the changes. Watching the small school conversion process in schools in Washington state, I have been reminded again of the incredible ability of teachers to resolve dilemmas in their practice. On a number of occasions, I've seen teachers come up against what appears to be an unsolvable problem and have been amazed at the creative solution they worked out collaboratively. For example some have been concerned about the survival of some electives when schools become small. Teachers in Washington Conversion High Schools have found several powerful ways to rethink programs in music, vocational education and advanced placement courses in their design process.

One Teacher at a Time

In addition to empowering teachers to design reforms, democratic schools can have a major influence on the evolution of democratic classrooms. As Linda M. McNeil said in *Contradictions of Control*, "Teachers treat students the way they are treated." Equitable and democratic classrooms are essential to meet the challenge of succeeding with each student. Teachers who empower students to take charge of their own learning are finding the key to motivating unsuccessful learners.

Fortunately, even in schools where the culture does not encourage CES practices, teachers exposed to the Common Principles still change their practice. CES is, as Ted Sizer says, a "conversation among colleagues." What we need to remember is that teachers network regardless of formal collaborative processes. They continually learn from one another

in university classrooms, in curriculum committees, in publications and Internet sharing of best practices – all venues in which CES ideas continually appear. In fact, references to CES principles are common in educational literature and conversations, giving teachers in all schools the opportunity to learn about them. And teachers in all schools recognize the power to these ideas and routinely implement them in their classroom. Although only a few of the new small schools in Washington are actively implementing the Common Principles, many use "CES" ideas such as essential questions to organize curriculum across disciplines, exhibitions for assessment of students, and advisories to further personalize learning.

Indeed, this widespread access to CES principles may be a saving grace for schools that might not as a whole be working toward implementing the Common Principles. Even teachers without support for innovation within their school still have much autonomy to implement new ideas when they close their classroom doors. In fact, a school's interest in CES usually comes from teachers influencing peers within a school. Districts rarely and principals infrequently ask our center for help, while teachers regularly ask us to come to their schools to present an overview of CES.

It is clear that CES ideas have spread far and wide in classrooms even in schools that don't call themselves "CES" schools. The impact of the Common Principles on teacher practice continues to grow, and permanently changes each teacher it impacts. This is the profound legacy of the Common Principles on the students of America.

The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness, and in human responsibility.

—Václav Havel

Jan Reeder

Jan Reeder has been the Director of CES Northwest since its inception in 1997. She was a high school principal for sixteen years, the last eight years at Gig Harbor High School, a CES school in Gig Harbor, Washington.

Bio

The 10th Common Principle: "With All Deliberate Speed?"

by Mara Benitez

Essay

09



As CES pauses to reflect on our next twenty years, this is the time to look more deeply at the tenth Common Principle's call for equity and democracy, to examine our schools through this lens, and to measure ourselves by its standards. Representation and participation are basic indicators of democracy. As we look at the face of American public education, we see a shifting demographic that is more racially diverse than ever before. Increasingly, public schools in the United States serve more and more students of color, yet there are disproportionately low numbers of teachers of color and no real organized efforts to change this growing trend. How does this impact democracy and equity in our schools? In order to meaningfully understand the effect of learning with teachers who share their races and cultures, I interviewed colleagues, academics, teachers, students, and parents – and I looked at my own experience as a student.

Vanessa Coleman, former Executive Director of CES National, recounts her experience at Lockwood Elementary School in the flatlands of Oakland, California. "I was taught predominantly by Black teachers from preschool to the 6th grade. They were fully aware of the challenges many of us students faced and they tried to incorporate that into their teaching.

I was exposed to more authors of color by the 6th grade than I was in grades 7 – 12. I found power in that environment. I was confident and I expected to excel and be successful."

Looking back on my public education, I can't for the life of me remember having had a teacher that looked like me or the other Black and brown students who attended my school. Growing up in the Bronx, I lived in parallel realities between

school and home. However, I do remember one of my white teachers, Miss Zachary. She was the only one who recognized that there was something missing from our social studies book and she was the first one that sparked in me the interest to learn about my own history. Later I learned that Miss Zachary lived in one of the few privately owned houses on my block. Miss Zachary had figured some things out. While other teachers were learning by "trial and error" about the culture, race and language of their students, she was getting a first-hand account. Unfortunately, according to Albert Pena, Field Instructor for Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, "The learning curve for white teachers is hard to determine. Some get it quickly, but some don't ever get it at all and get stuck in stereotypes about who their students are and what they can expect from them."

What we need are teachers who have a robust tool kit filled with experience, knowledge, consciousness, and commitment to high standards to make the real difference in the classrooms of today. Pia Infante, teacher and education consultant, feels strongly that teachers also must be compassionate. "An important part of becoming a good teacher is developing a strong sense of empathy, particularly if you want to work in urban areas that are highly impacted by poverty, violence and whose population has been historically marginalized. It should be a part of their teacher training."

Teachers, white and of color, can perpetuate inequities by promoting negative ideas about the inferiority of children of color or they can serve as agents of change by interrupting racist practices and attitudes that contribute to the oppression and alienation of already disenfranchised students and

The 10th Common Principle: "With All Deliberate Speed?"

communities. Educators who understand that lack of resources and access can be a predictor in academic success or failure can use that knowledge to dismiss the pervasive idea that under-served poor white, black and brown students don't succeed because they are not capable, hardworking or disciplined enough.

Michael Miller, a parent and activist from Berkeley, California, observes, "We can't allow our African American and Latino students to grow up believing that the only way to become educated is to accept another culture and reject your own. As long as education is Eurocentric, people of color will have some difficulty fully embracing it. We have to diversify the content of education and students of color need to see themselves within the context of education. People who look like them must teach them their history and show them that there is value in education. People who have some relationship with them and/or their families, neighbors, community, etc. need to be leading the classrooms."

In a truly democratic school community, the adults in decision-making roles reflect the community they are serving. Peggy Kemp, principal of Boston's Fenway High School, says, "Having people who look like you in the adult community is important, if we want our society to be open and inclusive. We want to make sure that school is a place where students are learning to become productive citizens. The message is about how 'you too' can be successful. Our Black students as well as our white students need to see adults of color in roles that help to guide them and support them."

Stephen Allen, a sophomore at Life Academy in Oakland, supports Kemp's claim. "There is something wrong with a school if the teachers don't look like the students. I like it when there is a mixture, but right now it isn't balanced at all. Believe me, it is hard on us youth as it is – and what we need is to have adults around us who understand our experience and know what we are going through, because they've been there and back. I want to be able to talk to someone that knows what I am carrying around – not just because they read about it, but because they lived it."

A shared understanding among those I interviewed was that it isn't enough to talk about equity; we have to see it in action. Truly democratic schools should "deliberately and explicitly challenge all forms of inequity." Doing whatever is necessary to attract and include more Black, Latino and Asian teachers in CES schools is fundamental to implementing the

tenth Common Principle. Having teachers of color proportionally represented in CES schools is one way that we can put the word equity into action. We need to be actively engaged in creating comprehensive plans to pool together the resources of schools, universities, and districts to design teacher education programs that target and recruit students of color. We need the philanthropic community to work with the private and public sectors to create partnerships that provide talented students of color with more opportunities for higher education, financially support their student teaching experiences, giving them incentives to becoming teachers. To attract people of color into the teaching force, we need to increase the relevance and stature of the profession by

There are risks and costs to a program of action. But they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction. *—John F. Kennedy*

creating better working conditions with competitive salaries and more power over teaching and learning. And as a movement working to change public education and creating equitable outcomes for ALL students, the Coalition of Essential Schools needs more intentionally to place more energy into increasing the number of teachers of color among our ranks and include their voices in the process of creating equitable, intellectually vibrant, and personalized schools.

Mara Benitez

Mara Benitez is the Co-Director of the Small Schools Project at the Coalition of Essential Schools. She served as the Executive Director of Alternative Education for the Oakland Unified School District, helping to launch new small schools and programs that presently serve at-risk youth. Ms. Benitez taught humanities at several CES schools in New York City and she directed a small CES alternative high school in the South Bronx. Ms. Benitez holds a MS degree in educational leadership and is a graduate of the Principals Institute at Bank Street College of Education.

Bio



How can we teach to promote democracy and how can democracy be the core of what we teach?

Linda Nathan, Kathleen Large, and Ted Graf describe ways of democratic teaching through curriculum and through developing – year by year, student by student – the habit of careful listening. How do you place democratic intention at the center of your practice as you face a whole school, a class, or individual students? And how do you reconcile the inevitable inefficiency of democracy with the urgent imperative for all students to participate and succeed?

From Jill Davidson, *Horace* editor

Twenty years ago, the Coalition of Essential Schools began as a group of schools that gathered to support their collective journey toward embodying the Common Principles – then nine, eventually ten. As the years passed, that foundation – a network of critical friends – has remained CES's invaluable strength.

To honor the power and resilience of the CES network at this twentieth anniversary moment, this issue of *Horace* has gathered twenty-three representatives to offer their reactions to Equitable Schools for a New Democracy, the theme of 2004's Fall Forum. Writing about how the ten Common Principles create the conditions for and demand the practice of equitable and democratic schooling, they describe their schools' successes – and at the same time, they worry over missed opportunities for equitable achievement. They describe ways in which CES as a movement has propelled democratic practices in schools and school systems – and they point out not only how far our country needs to go but also specific shortcomings within CES. The collective message: we have created something momentous – and we can still see the road ahead.

Even as each writer, reflecting on her or his experience as a CES student, parent, teacher, founder, school leader, staffer, regional center director, or ally, contributes to the whole, the particular moments offered in these pages resonate in deeply moving ways. They describe a way of keeping – and creating – school that changes the lives of individuals, families, and communities. A student confronts her own prejudice toward a disturbingly offbeat peer. A school faces and changes its diversity-starved history. Students write a book, serve their communities, participate authentically in democratic institutions in their schools. And all of us are challenged with some truths – about teachers' untapped power, about the limits to systemic reform that we face, about the persistent lack of educators of color – that we must confront and surmount.

We appreciate the experience, care, time, and passion that these words represent. Thank you to all contributors for sharing them with us to celebrate this two-score milestone – your words will give us inspiration and direction for the next twenty years.

Jill Davidson
Editor, *Horace*

From Lewis Cohen, Executive Director of the Coalition of Essential Schools

When the founders of the Coalition of Essential Schools began this effort twenty years ago, they humbly described it as a "conversation among friends." But as the readers of this Twentieth Anniversary edition of *Horace* will surely discover, our founders started a movement to create schools that embody and promote the highest ideals of democratic society. Essential schools are models of democratic participation, and like democracy, they work best when everyone is included.

The United States was founded by individuals who saw a clear connection between a system of public schools and a functioning democracy. Yet from my own experience as a central office administrator in a large urban school district, I know how all too often the organization of our public school systems discourages democratic participation. What lessons do we teach when students, parents and teachers are shut out of decision-making?

This issue of *Horace* features twenty-three writers – CES alumni, parents, teachers, principals, past and current CES staffers – discussing our 2004 Fall Forum theme, Equitable Schools for a New Democracy. As I read these diverse and insightful contributions, I was struck by their collective sense of optimism. They serve as powerful reminders that the ten Common Principles create the conditions for schools that run on the collective energy and full participation of everyone involved.

The ten Common Principles, supported by the ongoing strength of the nationwide CES network, create the best conditions for meaningful, highly challenging, and life-changing teaching and learning. As CES celebrates its twentieth anniversary, *Horace* continues to report on our schools' victories and challenges, telling our schools' stories, drawing connections between theory and daily practice, and serving as inspiration for and an enduring record of the CES network. So subscribe to *Horace*. Affiliate with CES National. Join our network and make your voice heard.

Lewis Cohen
Executive Director, Coalition of Essential Schools

A Letter to the Boston Arts Academy Community

by Linda Nathan

Essay

10



Each month Headmaster Linda Nathan writes a letter to the parents, caregivers, and larger community of Boston Arts Academy (BAA), a CES National Small Schools Project Mentor School and a member of the Boston Public Schools Pilot Schools group. As Nathan wrote this letter, she noted the democratically-focused climate of the school. "Classrooms are buzzing with the meaning of the electoral college system and whether it is fair. All seniors eligible to vote have just registered at school – that was just amazing! Kids and their teachers were so proud. Students are studying how the global economy is affecting people in poor and rural India as well as studying the Patriot Act here in the United States. The theater department is mounting Lope de Vega's classic play *Fuente Ovejuna* which deals with the Spanish Inquisition and has many parallels to today. It's all reinforcing that we are on our way to the engagement and democracy around which we structure BAA's teaching and learning."

Dear Boston Arts Academy Parents, Caregivers, and Friends,
We start our seventh year at BAA with a revised mission statement, the result of hard work by our Board, parents, students, and faculty. We haven't changed many words from our original mission statement, but we have sharpened our focus.

Here's the mission we agreed on:

The Boston Arts Academy, a pilot school within the Boston Public Schools, is charged with being a laboratory and a beacon for artistic and academic innovation. The Boston Arts Academy prepares a diverse

community of aspiring artist-scholars to be successful in their college or professional careers and to be engaged members of a democratic society.

The first sentence acknowledges the role we have played – and will continue to play – in the larger education reform movement. We work with other schools, both in Boston and beyond, to share successful practices (and the lessons learned from not so successful ones). Our first Summer Institute this year brought together thirty-five educators from around the nation to learn from our experience, including our autonomies as a Pilot School in governance, budgeting, curriculum design, scheduling, and hiring.

We continue to expand and deepen our curriculum in both artistic and academic domains. In math, for example, we are piloting a curriculum that emphasizes graphic design. In science, we are teaching engineering for the first time. We continue to examine ways in which artistic and creative endeavors are linked to one another and to academic pursuits. Because of this, many of our teachers teach outside their primary certification area. All of us teach reading and writing. Our students and parents realize that an education at Boston Arts Academy is not a traditional one.

The second sentence of the statement underscores the dual nature of our school. The words "artist" and "scholar" are connected by a hyphen (not a slash, which would mean "or") because they stand not in opposition to one another but, rather, linked intimately. In their final year at BAA, students explore, through a senior project that connects to the community, how an artist-scholar creates and contributes in a democratic society.

A Letter to the Boston Arts Academy Community

Engagement and democracy are, for us, the bottom line. Our world is increasingly fragile; our communities are besieged by violence, poverty, and unemployment, yet we send our poor out to die in faraway lands. How can the arts help us to confront, understand, and change the powerful social forces that lead to inequity, intolerance, and the destruction of culture and human lives?

From our mission statement we derive our school-wide goals. This year they are:

- *To create a culture of excellence by cultivating seriousness of purpose*
- *To increase our students' access to critical conversations by supporting their functional and cultural literacy.*

Seriousness of purpose in all our classrooms remains a primary goal. Sometimes students think this means they have to be "serious," as in grim or unsmiling. But

we refer here to commitment and passion – to work hard in class, in rehearsals, on homework. We strive to create a culture where all students regardless of disability, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, or linguistic background work together to produce excellent artistic and academic work.

Our second goal is about having sometimes difficult or uncomfortable conversations about race or gender that will help us understand one another better and increase our capacity to function in a diverse world. Functional literacy refers to the ability to read and discuss complicated texts; cultural literacy includes the ability to understand those texts from the perspective of culture and to connect that understanding across communities and cultures different and larger than our own.

As the year commences, we want to continue to debate our mission statement and challenge ourselves to keep it in our minds in all that we do. We will also track progress on our school-wide goals; we hope all the members of our community will participate in that endeavor. Our faculty members write their professional development plans in relation to these goals; in each classroom, students discuss what these goals mean to them personally. It is in creating these long-term plans and this search for personal meaning that we do our most important work.

El monolingüismo es curable.

Linda Nathan

Linda Nathan has a long history of success in urban public education and is the founding headmaster of the Boston Arts Academy. Under her leadership, the school has won state, national, and international recognition. Linda's articles on school reform and arts education have appeared in *Phi Delta Kappan*, *Educational Leadership*, *Horace*, and other publications. She has worked on issues of school reform in Puerto Rico, Brazil, and Argentina and is currently a lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where she teaches a course titled "Building Democratic Schools."

Bio

Our Best Critical Friends: What Happens When Students Write a Book About Teaching

by Kathleen Large

Essay

11



Like many school stories, this one is about process more than product. This is a story about young people using their minds and hearts, becoming writers, and publishing a book. It is also a story that haunts me: what about the two students who didn't participate in the process?

In the 2002-2003 school year, the junior class of American Literature students at Leadership High School wrote, edited, and designed a book, *Talking Back: What Students Know About Teaching*. Our course essential question asked: "What role does literature play in the creation of a just, equal, and free America?" We embarked on our first unit of the year, an examination of literature about education in the United States. Using James Baldwin's "A Talk to Teachers" as a springboard, the students wrote essays that answered this question: "If you were to give a talk to teachers, what would you say?" When the students shared their essays in class, I yearned for a wider audience for their insights in to teaching and learning. The next day, I called Ninive Calegari, a former teacher at Leadership and the executive director of 826 Valencia, a San Francisco nonprofit organization that connects professional writers with youth through in-class tutoring, workshops, and a writing center. The junior class, Ninive, 826 Valencia tutors, a book designer, and I embarked on a collaboration that would result in a published book. By extending the project beyond our classroom, the students had the opportunity to work with real writers and in the process, become real writers.

Every single junior (I taught all the juniors that year) was encouraged to be in the book, as long as his or her essay

scored at least a three on the course's zero to four writing rubric, indicating the achievement of solid mastery of writing at the eleventh grade level. The original essays had been assessed long ago; the additional assessment came after the students revised their "final" drafts to make them publication-ready. A volunteer thirteen-member student editorial board committed to attending the evening work sessions at 826 Valencia. Meanwhile, the course had moved on, and we were busy with *The Scarlet Letter* and then *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

It's hard to talk about process and not product when the process is the creation of a book, but for me it's still all process: a student editor takes photographs for the cover and the editorial board pores over the prints, voting on a favorite. The editorial board spends two hours debating whether I should write a preface. What would it mean for an adult to have a voice in a book about student voice? We reread the seventy-five essays and sort them into sections. Pizza in hand, students pair up to become the editors of the sections. They take the essays back to the authors, demanding further work. They annoy their peers when they demand more revision. They huddle around computers at 826 Valencia, collaboratively writing the section introductions, professional writers at their sides, gently coaching. We have fun. The project is intellectual play. The students are writers, editors, and book designers. They hang out in the company of adults who spend their days writing and editing.

Parts of the process are stressful rather than fun. We worry about our school's reaction to the book and grapple with the

Our Best Critical Friends: What Happens When Students Write a Book About Teaching

responsibility that comes with putting work out into the world. We wonder: will other teachers in the school feel defensive? Will people want to read this book? Do we rush to publication before June so that students have copies in their hands by the end of school, when we know this means that one more round of copyediting will be sacrificed? Whose essay will open the book, and whose will close it?

In the spring, I notice one of the juniors copying in to her journal the lines from Marge Piercy's poem "For the young who want to," posted above my desk. "The real writer is one / who really writes." Writing is process.

The book goes to press in May, and during the last day of finals in June, a Federal Express box arrives to our classroom.

I tear it open and whisper

to the editors in the

room. At the break,

they rush around

school, telling the

juniors to stop by

after the last final.

While classmates

throw water balloons

to celebrate the start of

summer, the juniors crowd

in to room eighteen, all eager to

see their words in print. They bring copies home to their families, I show off the book to my partner and friends, and we all

think this is the end of it.

But in the fall, we learn that the first print run of 400 copies is almost sold out. San Francisco State invites the students to present in a credential class. All of the credential candidates have read the book, and they ask the Leadership students for advice on planning curriculum and classroom management. They quote the essays and ask the students to expand on their thoughts. Mills College orders copies. We do another print run.

As *Talking Back* takes on a life of its own, I reflect on the hard questions. All but two of the juniors offered pieces to the book, which also means that all but two students showed mastery of the course standard for writing. But why didn't the two submit work? They had multiple opportunities to complete the assignment—in fact, from October all the way to early May. They had encouragement from peers and adults. They had an assignment that asked them to think and allowed them to be heard. And yet, their voices are missing. They both failed the course; they both lacked enough credits to graduate from Leadership last spring. This reality reminds me that even with some success in closing the achievement gap, there are persistent challenges. The work towards equity is not done, neat, or all tied up in a book.

The following year, my new students ask: "Are we doing a

book too?" to which I want to respond, "No way! I can't do that every year!" How do we do projects in ways that are replicable? How can I take what is good from this project and do more of that throughout the course and from year to year? How can students practice creating and participating in democracy, while at the same time, take real action so that the society in which they will become adults will be democratic, just, and equitable?

And finally, how can we really listen to our students, especially when what they have to say is about our practice? They are, after all, experts on education. And, they are perhaps our best critical friends.

So any citizen of this country who figures himself as responsible—and particularly those of you who deal with the hearts and minds of young people—must be prepared to 'go for broke.' —James Baldwin

Kathleen Large

Kathleen Large is in her seventh year at Leadership High School, where she is an English teacher and humanities department co-coach. Before teaching high school, Kathleen taught at Long Island University, the City University of New York, and in a union program run by Cornell University. Kathleen has participated in BayCES' Teacher Inquiry Project and Teacher Consultants for Inquiry. Her poetry has appeared in several literary magazines. *Talking Back: What Students Know About Teaching* is available at www.826valencia.org.

Bio

A Perpetual Question and Four Lessons about Student Voice

by Ted Graf

Essay

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My memory of Mr. Zito is cracked and curled like a photo from the mid-70s. I do remember this much: he was the lead teacher of a special team at my public middle school. He had a moustache, a sweater, and glasses, but he wasn't my teacher. I know that because some of the most interesting kids (we called them weird) were over *there* with him and the other teachers; a whole hallway, off to themselves, while we filled the other hallways with our predictable and unruly fifth grade fascinations. Frank, as he wanted me to call him, had a reputation for being moody, and, even though I was never one of his students, somehow I became a student representative to a faculty group that met in the evenings, and so he and I worked together for a time in 1975. I honestly don't remember why I was included; I honestly don't remember the topics of our meetings or what we were trying to achieve. What I do remember clearly is that Mr. Zito picked me up and drove me home; he gave me an agenda and asked for my opinion. Whether he meant to or not, he introduced me to my chosen profession in fifth grade, and he listened to me.

Nine years later I was a teacher when I met a tenth grader named Luis. He was the center mid-fielder on our school's soccer team and was a wise-cracking boy-man who loved our little school, located outside of Houston on what was once a poultry farm. Luis was tall and somewhat gangly, and he had an unruly mop of hair that flopped wherever it wanted. As a new teacher at a school designed solely for students who were being neglected in the Houston public schools, I was Ted. We were a first-name school, and I felt like one of the kids, though I knew I wasn't. I remember an overcast day

some time in the fall out on the soccer field when I bellowed at Luis, making the poor choice of calling him "Lurch," the ungainly character from *The Addams Family*, the same name that all the kids called him. Luis, who was taller than I, came over to me, got in my face, and told me never to call him Lurch again. I never did call him Lurch again, nor did I ever call another student by a nickname, unless asked to explicitly. To this day, I remain grateful to Luis for a much-needed lesson on the symbiotic relationship between respect and authority.

Twelve years later, I was new again; this time in the role of upper school head at a school whose morale was low and whose community had deep doubts about its own educational philosophy. I learned, as part of my interview, that the school had a Student Education Committee whose express purpose was to gather students regularly to think about, scrutinize, and suggest changes to curriculum, or virtually any other aspect of the school's educational program. Because the committee had been marginalized for quite some time, it was a highly skeptical group. Its student members didn't believe that they had power or influence and so what emerged from the group was a predictable and familiar brand of adolescent cynicism. When I, as an administrator, asked to join the group, eyebrows were raised. The eyebrows dropped when we reasserted the group's purpose, developed agendas, and ultimately, created a survey used to give teachers feedback on their practice. The Student Education Committee had conversations over rushed lunches about whether adults could trust students to have their own educational best interests at heart. They raised the perpetual question for me that if students

A Perpetual Question and Four Lessons about Student Voice

couldn't be trusted with their own education, then what could they be trusted with?

For the past two years, I have been new again, this time in the role of Head of School. As people like to remind me, all the bucks, literally and figuratively, now stop with me. I am transported to recent history at my current school, where we spent a lot of time last year crafting a strategic plan. As part of that process, we established core values and guiding principles. When Maxamed, then a ninth grader, read our core values of respect, challenge, creativity, service, and diversity he thought we were missing one that trumped all the others. "Where's trust?" he asked, "We can't get any of this stuff done without trust."

These four moments from my experience and career all speak to trust. In the case of Mr. Zito, he trusted that some student would want to be involved in the governance of our school. Luis taught me, in a more dramatic way, to take seriously my role as teacher and, even though we used first names, to know where the boundaries are. The Student Education Committee demanded compassionate listening and then action, for without action our meetings, discussions, and plans meant nothing to the students. Without tangible results, student voice and influence is for naught. And lastly, Maxamed reminded me that trust flows both ways. We educators must trust that the kids want a great education, and that they can tell the difference (most of the time) between educational needs and educational wants.

In *Renewing America's Schools*, Carl Glickman, a long-time friend of CES, asserts that democracy must be viewed as a pedagogy, a way of approaching teaching and learning. "To flourish, democracies must be built from within, must develop parameters for their actions, and must be concerned foremost about their present and future citizens (in a school's case, the education of their students)." With the benefit of hindsight, I realize that each of my lessons came from "within," that they were organic needs of the schools in which I worked. As I reflect on (and celebrate) twenty years of the Coalition of Essential Schools and my experience as a teacher and administrator in three different Essential schools, I hear myself reciting and repeating these lessons and the habits of inviting students to the table (Mr. Zito), of respecting students for who they are and who they might become (thanks, Luis), of listening compassionately and acting decisively based on that

listening (the Student Education Committee), and trusting that every student wants a great education (thanks, Maxamed). After all, have any of us ever met a student who wants a bad education?

The quality of our lives improves immensely when there is at least one other person who is willing to listen to our troubles. —Mikhail Csikszentmihalyi

Ted Graf

Ted Graf is the Head of School at The Gailer School in Shelburne, VT. A veteran of two other independent CES schools (Heathwood Hall Episcopal School and Watkinson School), Graf had the privilege to work for CES National in the late 1980s and recently completed a term on CES National's board.

Bio



What are the connections among diversity, democracy, and equity?

Peter Garbus, Deborah Meier, Vincent Brevetti and T. Elijah Hawkes, and Kathleen Cushman emphasize the indispensability of diversity in a democracy. How does a school organize itself structurally to gather a diverse learning community? How does it prepare to address the resulting omnipresent demand for equitable support and high standards? And how do you change your actions to include silenced or missing voices?

Diverse Schools for a New Democracy

by Peter Garbus

Essay

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While we educators are ever hopeful, I need to start with a cold view of our current reality. We need a new democracy. In today's uncivil society, we pound each other with our views and votes until the last citizen of the majority is left standing. Few people work together to solve common problems. Opportunity-seekers go to any means to gain advantage over their competitors. If you're unlucky enough to lack privileges or even the most basic supports necessary to grow up healthy, strong, and confident enough to go out into the world and make it, well, that's too bad for you. Our communities are divided, our spirit selfish, and our discourse stilted and shrill.

Schools can, should, and must be part of the solution. In schools for a new democracy, students from diverse backgrounds come to know each other. Diverse public schools can build the skills, habits, and dispositions for a new democracy and create renewed civil communities.

Our school, the North Central Charter Essential School (NCCES), is in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, a decaying industrial city of 40,000. We're in our third year of operation, educating 350 students in grades 7-11. Next year we'll have our first graduating class. Half of our students come from Fitchburg and the other half come from other small, old industrial towns and twenty-five other suburban and rural communities.

Our students cross boundaries of race, class, and culture, a rare phenomenon in this country. One third of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch and just under 20% are students of color. Coming in as seventh graders, their tentative relationships are hampered by assumptions and prejudices.

But these fade as they come to know one another. They form friendships. They laugh. They argue. They share the same space in a community. This proximity – students of diverse backgrounds in school together – could be the basis for our new democracy.

In our first days, we held an orientation at a nearby camp while our building was being finished. We caught a glimpse of what this school could become on the basketball court at lunchtime. Suburban kids who had been playing ball since they were four, city kids who had never played on a team before, and all the rest joined in and played their hearts out. They didn't know each other yet, but these students will help build the new democracy.

Our school is small, small enough so that students know one another as individuals and not by superficial labels. I'm thinking of two of our tenth graders, one an African-American young woman and the other a young gentleman – sometimes – from the almost all white suburbs. The young woman is about as outspoken as she could be, with pride, confidence, and just a bit of swagger. The young man is privileged and less than aware of how these privileges have shaped his life. These two students have had their share of arguments, some quite volatile. In other places, they might not be in a school together. But they are, and they work through their differences. They hear each other's perspectives and confront their own assumptions. We are able and inclined to discuss our issues and concerns directly with one another, working together to solve our problems with solutions that are mutually beneficial. It is a school based on community. All of its members

Diverse Schools for a New Democracy

have responsibilities to themselves, but they also have responsibilities to one another.

There are two crucial issues that will determine if diverse schools can indeed be the engine for a new democracy. Can students learn to understand, respect, and live with their differences? And can our schools eliminate the achievement gap? The first will likely not happen without the second.

When I look at our students, I see both incredible potential and how much work there is to encourage and bring out that potential. The challenging circumstances of their lives throw obstacle upon obstacle in the way of these students feeling the hope and power of their futures.

NCCES believes that all children can learn and therefore that all students in our school need to be provided effective and equitable opportunities to do so. If school should make some kids smart, it should set out to make all of the kids smart. The school

expects hard work and real results from every one of its students. Set up to assess and serve those needs, our program includes personalized goal setting and continuous assessment, heterogeneous classes, and project-based learning. These features and others create the conditions for the success of all, including those whose first language is not English or those whose special needs are great.

None of this is rocket science and many schools out there have a lot more experience than we do. We have set up intensive classes for English and math to try to help students who struggle with fundamental skills to catch up quickly within their first year or two at the school. We are concentrating Title 1 supplemental supports in these grades also. We also offer in-depth math classes at each division to provide additional challenge for students who need it. All students are eligible for these classes, though they tend to be filled with the students from the suburbs who came in better prepared. Are these compromises that undermine our principles? They are not tracks but they do separate students. How do we serve our students best and do what's right at the same time?

As we ask these questions and face our challenges, we know that students in a diverse school develop self-awareness along with knowledge and respect for people who are different from them. At the beginning of this year, a ninth-grade student shared an apology with school counselor. This girl describes herself as a devout Christian, whose views on homosexuality seemed set in stone. She said that her experiences at our

school have made her realize how much she has to learn, that she doesn't have all the answers, and that she has been too quick to judge others. While she still feels strong pressure to judge, she can't imagine that's what God would want. This student is learning and she's one who will help build a new democracy. With such knowledge and respect, students will go forth into a diverse, multicultural world with the confidence and openness to continue working with and learning from others. A school that crosses boundaries of race, class, and culture allows students to continue to cross those boundaries wherever their lives take them.

Diverse schools where students work and learn together might begin to change the racism, separation, and inequity

Somehow we must be able to show people that democracy is not about words, but action. *—Eleanor Roosevelt*

that represent the unfinished promise of American life. The Declaration of Independence and the Preamble to the Constitution have set our agenda, and so much of American history has been a struggle to fulfill their promise. Our inability to live up to those ideals has been America's fatal flaw – yet they're there for us to strive towards. Small diverse schools can help us get there. Let's show how it's done!

Peter Garbus

Peter Garbus is the founder and Executive Director of the North Central Charter Essential School in Fitchburg, MA. Peter taught History, English, and Humanities for twelve years, all in new or very young schools. He received a B.A. in history from Brown University and an M.Ed. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He is a member of the National School Reform Faculty of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and he is among Massachusetts' first teachers to receive National Board Certification in History/Social Studies. Peter is also a graduate of the National Outdoor Leadership School.

Bio

Equitable Schools for a New Democracy: Responses from the CES Network

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Common Sense

by Deborah Meier

Essay

14



Uhe depressing thing about arithmetic badly taught is that it destroys a child's intellect and, to some extent, his integrity. Before they are taught arithmetic, children will not give their assent to utter nonsense; afterwards they will." — *W.W. Sawyer, Mathematician's Delight*

It's been nearly forty years since I first stepped into an urban public school in the role of parent, and, soon after, as a substitute teacher. This initial introduction was one of the most enlightening experiences of my life, and helped me understand why the struggle to sustain democracy was so hard and so often frustrating. Never before had I been in a setting that was so deeply in conflict with the essential state of mind on which democracy depends: respect for ordinary people and ordinary "common sense" and for their need to exercise their own judgment about what does and doesn't "make sense." No one else can do it for us.

Spending five or six years in such institutions, as most adults once did, probably had a relatively inconsequential effect on how they saw themselves or the world. Most of what they learned was from the company of the adults in their community. But by the time I entered schools in my parent/teacher role, most youngsters were required to spend twelve or more years there — and today even that barely suffices. The "certification" role — the degree to which schooling now stands as an obstacle to almost any self-respecting work — has altered formal education's meaning and impact. It is no longer a frill.

It still is true that only something like one-fifth or one-sixth of our waking hours are actually devoted to schooling itself. But modern schools are society's defining identifiers of value,

talent, usefulness, and meaning. They establish our pecking order. It is for four- and five-year olds the place where judgments are first made by people who see you as one among many, waiting to be compared and molded into something better. And as they get older, instead of keeping company with adults, students are enclosed in a world of peers, captives of a world designed by another group of adults for the purpose of making money off the appetites of the young. This phenomenon, destructive and depressing, is the apex of "utter nonsense" itself.

But we have the means to resist and to invent ways of raising our kids so that "making sense" is at the heart of learning. Perspectives very different than our own are part of the setting for making sense. And on the way to making sense there is much ambiguity and uncertainty. Learning to celebrate these qualities of mind is what schools can contribute, even though, in fact, they tend to do the opposite.

The ten Common Principles of the Coalition are merely an effort to describe the conditions that increase the odds for getting the balance right: the ratio of teachers to kids, the size of the school itself, the power of those who work directly with students to have a strong say in decision-making, a respectful attention to our many heritages and cultures, as well as individual differences — these are what hold us together. But carrying them out can often divide us as we make different compromises, get tired at different times, and serve different families and different masters.

Teaching children the "algorithm," whether in math or history or science, is hard to resist, and at times it may even provide

Common Sense

the relief a child needs before going deeper. Making such judgments is what parents and teachers do every minute they are in the presence even of a single child, much less thirty. But they can be "trusted" to do so only if, as the Common Principle number four declares, they are in a position to exercise judgment on matters of importance. They too can say, "This makes NO sense." A scripted teacher is more dangerous than an often unwise teacher. You cannot teach the young about the exercise of judgment in its absence.

Schools like Mission Hill – schools that have so much going for them in creating such norms, schools that were created precisely for that purpose – do not find any of this easy. Finding that right balance is time-consuming. And time – leisure – is not a part of very many school schedules, not to mention our life schedules. We are always balancing bottom-line musts against each other and feeling vulnerable as a result. Family versus work, the children at schools versus one's children at home, seeing a movie versus reading a book, doing either versus preparing lessons, calling a family member versus calling an old friend. It seems utterly impossible to imagine being an active citizen on top of it all, a citizen of one's school or one's society!

The Greeks had a solution: only people of sufficient means not to have to work were full citizens. Citizenship was an occupation. The obvious inequity of their solution is one that in reality has beleaguered us ever since – only those who have the leisure or can pay others to act on their behalf have full citizenship even in our far more equitable democracy. If democracy and equity are truly to go together, we must tackle both the issue of education, and of leisure. So too was this the conundrum for John Dewey, upon whose work so much of Coalition practice rests. He saw schools in a democracy above all as a place for the preparation for the vocation of citizen, and as an ally to the struggle to alter other social conditions that impeded its full practice.

It's well-nigh impossible to get this thing right, even were the setting is ideal, and it's that much less possible in settings – where many of us live and work – that were designed to treat kids and adults as interchangeable, scriptable parts of a larger machine. The more we resist allowing nonsense to prevail in school, or in any other place we find ourselves, the better. When it's tempting to utter nonsense, try the real stuff: Edward Lear or *Alice in Wonderland*. Good nonsense provokes laughter and thought and joy. But "utter nonsense" paralyzes

and leaves real power to those who are less dependent on the public system of schooling to develop the habits of mind (and have already the power of status and money) to use democracy effectively – on behalf of our own interests, the interests of those we love, not to mention our nation and even planet we live on itself.

Children have more need of models than of critics. –Joseph Joubert

Deborah Meier

Deborah W. Meier has spent nearly four decades working in public education as a teacher, writer and public advocate. She began her teaching career as a kindergarten and Head Start teacher in Chicago, Philadelphia and New York City schools. She was the founder and teacher-director of a network of highly successful public elementary schools in East Harlem. In 1985 she founded Central Park East Secondary School, a New York City public high school. Since 1997, she has been the principal at the Mission Hill School, a K-8 public school she founded in Roxbury, MA.

Bio

Roots of the Endeavor

by Vincent Brevetti and
T. Elijah Hawkes

Essay

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In the good company of the educators, students and parents of the CES Mentor and Small School Network, and in kindred spirit with colleagues nationwide now embarking on similar projects, we will be creating a new small high school in the fall of next year. We'd like to share here something of our experience in this creative process.

During the course of last year's fall semester, after we'd learned that we were awarded the CES Small School grant, it became apparent to us through informal conversations – here and there and through the grapevine – that some staff viewed this project with a cup-half-full disposition, seeing an opportunity for us to do even better what we already do well; and others viewed the cup half-empty, as an occasion to fix or flee what's wrong or isn't working. Not that these perspectives are incompatible, or that either is necessarily wrong, but at the earliest stages of the project we wanted there to be a more unified consciousness in our perception of the work. Further, it had become clear that some people were already beginning to envision certain staffing arrangements, or rearrangements as part of this growth and change. We thought that this sort of thinking was, at best, premature, and, worse, potentially destructive to the project. As a school of fifteen to twenty teachers, cliquishness is anathema to the democratic functioning and collaborative spirit of our work.

Our faculty retreat last November was where we began the real work of designing the new school, hosting our first extended formal conversations as a staff. Understanding some of the potential divisions, we planned a return to common

ideas and ideals, and for this we turned to the chartering document with which our school was founded in 1997.

Conceived and begun by Perry Weiner, in collaboration with Christina Kemp, Peter Mason and Vincent Brevetti, Prep started as a mini-school in 1993. The Prep program gradually expanded and four years later became an autonomous school. In its chartering text, Perry and Vincent articulated the social and pedagogical mission of the school. We turned to it at the retreat because it seems to embody, still, the essential principles that inform our work. If there was a common point of departure to be found for the new school project, we felt that this text, the ideological roots of our endeavor, was where to find it. We share some excerpts here:

Education leads from the self out to the world – and back again. With its special emphasis on self-reflection, our school encourages meaningful relations with the world outside the self. We wish to create a school that facilitates this, rather than one that stands as an obstacle to it. It is the responsibility of the staff to reflect upon the special character and talents manifested by each student in order to help each student take maximum advantage of those opportunities which may form vital links to career, college, and to full participation in community life.

We hope to foment an intellectual idealism in our students, challenging the nihilistic and cynical tendencies that grow out of community despair and disrepair. Ideas contained in the work of Cornel West, particularly in his essay "Nihilism in Black America," hold true in great measure for all America. Reawakening our students into a culture of intelligent change

Roots of the Endeavor

is, as West suggests, our challenge. The creation of hope is the essential element for such a community, the hope that makes it possible to engage in self-review and self-criticism, the hope that is essential to renewal, growth and success.

We believe that violence seems necessary only to those denied the skills and intellectual strength to negotiate, and the optimism that frames and supports the ability to do so. The personal and cultural disaffection that can accompany school failure and that are not adequately addressed in the traditional school environment are incitements to verbal, mental and physical violence. We model respect, encouraging student-teacher relationships that embody mutual esteem and concern. We model harmony, challenging the prejudices and abuses rooted in ignorance such as racism, xenophobia, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and misogyny. In reinforcing the commonality of purpose between education and the well-being of the larger community, we seek to expand our work with community institutions that bring positive values to life.

Furthermore, we stress the values of gentleness, consideration and sensitivity. The specific inclusion of poetic, musical, dramatic and artistic expression in all of our course offerings serves this end. In our community meetings, advisories, individual counseling sessions, and classes, we constantly seek ways to give clear emphasis to these values....

Every student can be a thinker, a learner, an artist, a leader. We seek to educate all students to the highest level of intellectual, scholarly achievement. We agree with such diverse thinkers as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Erick Erickson that adolescents are naturally idealistic, and we believe that idealistic expectations for a better, more just society are the true wellsprings of intellectual accomplishment. We hold that the traditional educational system tends to undermine this natural idealism. It is the task of educators to offer a meaningful alternative to the excessively materialistic and anti-intellectual cultural climate confronting us all....

In our work in schools, the pressing and present are ever-present and ever-present. So it can be hard to find time to step back. But we recommend it, and we write this as a reminder to ourselves to do the same. It is important to turn to the works and words and texts that inspire us. These works will vary from group to group, and place to place – for every community has a different cultural inheritance, a different reservoir of feeling, idea, and ideal from which to draw.

There's no prescription or canon, other than that the narrative, your story of identity and mission, speak a deep respect for all humanity. In short, and in conclusion: we encourage us, the educators and reformers of the small schools movement, to build time in our professional and personal development for the work of returning to – and of writing anew – our most important stories. We serve ourselves and our children well thereby.

Democracy is the art of thinking independently together. –Alexander Meiklejohn

Vincent Brevetti and T. Elijah Hawkes

Vincent Brevetti is the founding principal of Humanities Preparatory Academy and Co-Chairperson of the New York Performance Standards Consortium, New York City's CES Center.

T. Elijah Hawkes is an English teacher and Co-Director of Humanities Prep, as well as project director for a new CES high school. In addition to teaching in the US, Elijah has lived and worked with educators and students in Rwanda, Benin, Senegal, and Mexico.

Bio

The Nerve of Those Kids! Students As Allies in School Change

by Kathleen Cushman

Essay

16



I used to think that I spent a lot of time talking to the experts on high school change. During the twelve years that I wrote and edited *Horace*, I interviewed hundreds of teachers, principals, superintendents, researchers, and professors who knew all about the dilemmas schools faced, and had great ideas about how to address them. I read stacks of articles, books, case studies, and policy reports. I labored to translate theories into ordinary language, to balance opposing views, to illuminate Essential school principles with vivid examples of practice.

But I almost forgot the most important experts: the kids.

Once or twice, I did try focusing an issue of *Horace* on student participation in school change. As often as not, the examples slipped through my fingers before I could get the evidence onto paper. We got something started last semester, a teacher would tell me, but those kids graduated. We tried a “just community” model (or a student conference, or a student-written constitution), but it fell apart in the second year. The school board has a non-voting student representative; the student council organizes the homecoming dance; we leave it at that. Every three or four years, a high school has a whole new population. Seriously – how much of lasting importance can kids really change?

That last rhetorical question, I now believe, exposes a deep flaw in our thinking about what it will take if we want all adolescents to grow into thoughtful, engaged, knowledgeable citizens, both in school and later on. When we want kids to learn mathematics, we insist that they work on problems every day, with lots of coaching and plenty of chances to

make useful mistakes. We hope they’ll learn to read and write, so we make them come up with things to say about Shakespeare. We’ve found that they learn science best when they can get their hands on actual water samples. But when it comes to the hard realities of everyday life in school, we shut kids up and shut them down.

Is someone at your school setting fires in the bathroom? Is this week’s crisis a fight, a drug bust, an episode of harassment or vandalism? Or are the signals more subtle: kids sleeping through class, shrugging when called on, slouching past you as if they couldn’t care less? Whatever the behavior, we adults have plenty of “consequences” at our disposal. We can increase the suspensions, call in more security measures, batten down the hatches. The resistance will go underground, and we studiously avoid engaging with it. The troublemakers will be gone in a few years anyway, with or without diplomas. The student council already has their homecoming dance to work on. The last thing we would think of is giving kids real power. Yet what would happen if we did?

A couple of years ago, the nonprofit organization What Kids Can Do (WKCD) charged me with finding out. With tape recorder and laptop computer, I began going around the country, asking teenagers questions about what they think, what they do, what they want.

“What does it mean when you put your head down in class?” I asked kids from New York and Oakland, Houston and Boston, the Ozarks and the lowlands. “What are you really saying when you wear your pants that way?” I grew bolder. “If this were your school, what’s the first thing you would

The Nerve of Those Kids! Students As Allies in School Change

do?" The answers startled me with their intelligence, pragmatism, nerve, even wisdom.

Students have no illusions. They know they have to give up some of their freedoms in the interest of the group. They also crave teachers who know and care about their material and who treat them as smart and capable. They want principals who grant them respect and enough independence that they can learn to act responsibly on their own. I began to publish their insights as advice books from students, *Fires in the Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students*, and its forthcoming sequel, *Sent to the Principal: Advice for Principals from High School Students*.

In a program funded by the Gates Foundation, WKCD started giving modest grants to groups of kids, mentored by teachers, who set out to research and change some local issue that mattered to them. Students at a large Boston high school proposed to document the inequities they sensed between their own school's academic expectations and opportunities and those in three suburban schools nearby. Their videotape of interviews with students and teachers revealed stunning disparities, turning heads in Boston and around the country.

In another initiative funded by MetLife Foundation, WKCD asked teams of student researchers in five cities to survey their peers about problems in their schools. The results turned up troubling discrepancies in how urban students and teachers view their interactions with each other. More than a quarter of teenagers surveyed in some sites said there was not a single adult in their school whom they felt they could approach with a problem. While 80 percent of teachers reported having frequent one-on-one conversations with students, only 27 percent of students said they get individual attention from their teachers. Consistently across sites, only half of all students surveyed agreed that faculty and administrators value what they have to say. Among students who reported they had considered dropping out of school (18 percent), 58 percent cited not getting along with their teachers as the biggest factor; only a quarter complained about school safety or bullying.

Teenagers don't know everything that adults do, of course. But when it comes to learning, they know what matters most: meaningful partnerships among kids and adults, both in and out of school. And although their term in school is short, their expertise should carry at least as much weight as ours; in

sad reality, new teachers these days stay only three or four years themselves.

We risk everything when we deny young people the right to question their circumstances, challenge their school-keepers, and object in all the exasperating ways they can devise. Like people kept down throughout history, they usually know us better than we know them. Liberated, their voices could empower the revolution in teaching and learning that Essential school people have been seeking for all these years.

Those who trust us educate us. —George Eliot

Kathleen Cushman

Kathleen Cushman is author of *Fires in the Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students* (New Press, 2003). In 2005, Next Generation Press will publish her next two books written with students, *What We Can't Tell You: Teenagers Talk to the Adults in Their Lives* and *Sent to the Principal: Advice for Principals from High School Students*. Cushman wrote and edited *Horace* from 1988 to 2001.

Bic



What are the connections between democratic schooling and a democratic society?

Dave Lehman, George Wood, Mike Carter, Luz Padua, Dennis Littky, and Lawrence Kohn name ways that schools – specifically Essential schools – enact authentic democratic practices. How does the consistent and fundamental practice of democracy in school settings prepare both teachers and students for meaningful participation in larger democratic spheres?

Why Equitable Schools for a New Democracy?

by Dave Lehman

Essay

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On a cold November day in 1863, a crowd that grew to 20,000 began a procession out of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. They had come to participate in the cemetery dedication honoring those who had died in the battle of Gettysburg. This battle, the most decisive battle of the Civil War, left more than 51,000 dead or wounded. Renowned orator Edward Everett gave a rousing two-hour speech, and then President Abraham Lincoln rose to give one of the most elegant eulogies of all time – two minutes, ten sentences, 272 words – which ended with these now famous lines:

It is rather for us the living, we here be dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

Less than a year before, in January of 1863, Lincoln wrote the final version of the Emancipation Proclamation. A bit earlier, on December 1, 1862, faced with rising dissension in his own party, a growing peace movement calling for an end to the war, a bloody riot in New York City in response to the draft, and calls from abroad for the recognition of the Confederacy, Lincoln delivered his “Message to Congress” in which he said:

We say we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this. We know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it. We – even we

here – hold the power, and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free – honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth.” That last best hope is democracy.

Thus, more than 140 years later, in an age when public education is under attack from many sides and our democracy is in decline, we ask ourselves: what do “equitable” and “democracy” mean in the 21st century? I would like to go beyond higher test scores or better portfolios to suggest an even greater challenge for our schools – the challenge of developing an educated citizenry to participate fully in our democratic society. For education is a public good, not a private consumer commodity. All citizens must be concerned with the quality of education as preparation for democratic participation. Every child, every one of our students, not just our own children, must be able to thrive in a democracy which continually strives for the balance between the public purpose of collective responsibility and the private purpose of individual freedom. It is the public function of our schools to teach our children – all of our children, all of our students – their moral and intellectual responsibility to establish, sustain, and improve our democracy.

Our public schools are not merely schools for the public, but schools *in publicness* where the art of living together as citizens is learned. We educate young citizens for excellence, passing along and helping them find in themselves the knowledge and competence to govern in common their own lives along with creativity, imagination, critical thinking, problem solving, ability to see things from more than one perspective,

Why Equitable Schools for a New Democracy?

and inclination to become caring members of a community committed to living the principles of democracy.

To accomplish this, our young people will need to form meaningful relationships with adults. The vast majority of our young people spend this incredibly critical period of their lives isolated from anyone different in age and experience from themselves. Never in the history of our species did we raise our young to be adults in the absence of the company of adults – adults whom the young could imagine becoming, and whom they would know well enough to trust. Our democracy lives off such mutuality, because becoming democratic citizens is first and foremost about relationships.

Yes, it's about relationships! It's about adults making real connections with our youth.

This is the work of every one of us in our public schools, not just teachers, paraprofessionals, and principals, but central administrators, cafeteria workers, social workers, computer technicians, nurses, electricians, plumbers, psychologists, groundskeepers, school secretaries and custodians, many of whom already take time and care to build caring relationships with our young people.

Thus, our schools must become genuine "laboratories in civics" in which our students receive their "learners' permits" to become the future drivers of our democracy. Those of us who are involved with the Coalition of Essential Schools national school reform effort must see our tenth Common Principle as our most important, where we say that our schools, "should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies...should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school...should honor diversity and build on the strength of [their] communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity." Therefore, we must rededicate ourselves to the fundamental American belief that all human beings ~~not only have the right to become democratic citizens, but~~ have full capacity for such excellence.

I will close with an excerpt of the words of Langston Hughes, poet of the Harlem Renaissance who wrote "Let America Be America Again" in July 1936. Despite the discrimination he faced, Hughes was basically optimistic, with an abiding faith in the essential goodness of the human heart and the ultimate flowering of the democratic way of life:

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek – And finding
only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

O, let America be America again – The land that never has been yet – And yet must be – the land where every man is free.

The land that's mine -the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's all that ever has.

–Margaret Mead

Dave Lehman

Dave Lehman is an educational consultant and staff developer currently working with the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative Small Schools Project. Lehman retired in July 2004 after thirty years as principal and teacher at Ithaca, New York's Alternative Community School, which was renamed Lehman Alternative Community School in his honor.

Bio

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Rethinking Our School in the Name of Democracy

by George Wood

Essay

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Federal Hocking High School (FHHS) is located in Appalachian Ohio. The district it serves was created by the consolidation of three smaller districts during the consolidation craze of the 1960s. Children come to the school from the surrounding 190 square mile area, almost all by bus. And yet, as we're in a rural area, only 400 or so students are FHHS Lancers.

These kids represent the hardships and benefits of living rural Appalachia. Most of them come from families identified as "poor." Almost all of them live near relatives and hunt and fish in the open land around us. Families struggle with unemployment and under-employment. The school is the center of the district, the biggest "town" in the area when we are in session.

FHHS is not a "choice" or a "charter." We don't select our students; we are the neighborhood school – albeit without a neighborhood. We resemble, at least from the outside, the high schools attended by the vast majority of American adolescents. And for the past dozen or so years, as a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, we have worked to rethink virtually everything we do as a school.

The results are noticeable in so many ways. In terms of teaching and learning, we have gone from a traditional high school to one in which:

- All classes are 80 minute blocks
- Teachers have fewer than 75 students per day
- All of our humanities classes (social studies and English) are team-taught

- All students take a core curriculum – which is not ability-grouped
- Our science core program is inquiry-based using the local environment
- We have a freshman academy program to help with the transition to high school
- We maintain a school-wide focus on literacy throughout the curriculum

In terms of the school day our students experience:

- An hour-long lunch when all students activities occur
- An internship program involving students during the school day in working in the community in a variety of professions
- An advisory program with advisors guiding students through their high school career

In terms of assessment our students:

- Produce a graduation portfolio which they defend before a graduation committee
- Design and carry out a Senior Project as a graduation requirement
- Find that in every class they are evaluated on what they can do with what they know

Rethinking Our School in the Name of Democracy

And our school culture embraces participation through student sharing with faculty an equal voice in:

- The hiring of teachers and staff
- All curriculum and governance committees
- Directing all student affairs

The result of these changes have been clear: more students going to college and graduating, greater student and staff satisfaction with school, improved attendance and a drastic drop in discipline referrals. But these were not the main reason we engaged in rethinking and restructuring our school. No, we thought about the type of neighbor and citizen we would graduate from FHHS, and everything we have done has been oriented to this goal.

The American high school is best thought of as "democracy's finishing school." It is our last shared social experience, and one of the last chances for the culture to provide the young with the habits of heart and mind that make democracy possible. Our job is not to provide colleges or industry with raw material. Instead, it is to provide our democracy with the type of citizens that make democracy possible.

For that reason we created a place for teaching and learning so that every young person is engaged with a curriculum that makes critical and analytical thought possible. What we teach is geared to help young people make sense of and, when necessary, change the world. Tools that every citizen, regardless of vocational or education future, needs in order to engage in the world as a political equal.

In order to help our students develop the personal responsibility that democracy requires, we provide a school day that gives students responsibility. Student interns come and go during the day to such places as doctor's offices, architectural firms, and wildlife study areas. Students structure their own lunch times. And advisory guides students in learning to make choices. To learn responsibility takes exercising it.

We assess our students on what they can do – because that will be the measure they face in life after school. In the world outside school, no one cares about your test scores or your high school grades. What matters is what you can do – a lesson young people should learn while in school, not after it.

And to act democratically requires practice. For most high schoolers, the only decision they make during their four years of school are the colors for their senior prom. Then they graduate and are expected to decide on everything from county taxes to the leader of the free world. We give students decision-making power at FHHS not because they will always make good decisions, but because they learn to make decisions by making them.

A strong democracy requires strong public schools, which, like our democracy, are necessarily unfinished, ever-evolving projects. Schools where young people develop the habits of heart and mind they will need to be active democratic citizens. FHHS, supported by our friends at CES, works to be such a school.

Working here isn't a job. It's an adventure!

–John Wryst, FHHS teacher

George Wood

George Wood is principal of Federal Hocking High School and Director of The Forum for Education and Democracy (www.forumforeducation.org). He has authored a number of books, including *Schools that Work* and *A Time To Learn*. Recently, with Deborah Meier, Wood edited *Many Children Left Behind*. He has two fine boys, Michael and John, and is married to one of the best kindergarten teachers he knows, Marcia Burchby.

Bio

Who Runs This School Anyway? Student Voice, Accountability and Decision-Making that Is Real

by Mike Carter

Essay

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We believe that decisions are best made when the people who will be responsible for implementing them have a voice in those decisions."

"Students need to work on real problems, exercise choice, be responsible to others, share their learning, and use their knowledge to contribute to the community."

These statements, from the Poland Regional High School (PRHS) and Bruce M. Whittier Middle School (BMWMS) Governance Charter, probably sound familiar – they are similar to declarations found in many school mission statements. Most educators today would agree that one of the primary roles of education is to graduate informed, skilled, caring, active and involved citizens. But making this an integral part of each student's learning experience is, as the old saying goes, easier said than done. How does one make this goal a reality? How does one create real opportunities for students to practice and hone their skills in these areas?

Although there are many possible answers, PRHS and BMWMS have created both formal and informal ways to involve students in real, substantive decisions, to give students a true voice in those matters that impact their lives, and to hold each other accountable for contributing positively to the school community. These are accomplished through the democratic governance system, regular activities such as State of the School Day, and the student judiciary board.

Created six years ago, PRHS and BMWMS are public schools in Poland, Maine that have a governance system whose stated purpose is to be "inclusive of all constituencies in the school community." Built on trust, it provides students with numerous opportunities to participate in the decision-making process.

Students submit proposals to be considered, serve on committees that research and recommend a proposal, and sit on the actual decision-making body (known as the Vision Keepers). The Vision Keepers consists of an administrator, nine teachers, six students (one from each grade level, 7-12) and two community members (one of whom is a school committee member). Student group members are elected by their peers. Student empowerment is increased by the fact that all decisions made by this group are done by consensus. In effect, students have an equal voice in the decisions. A student has the same opportunity to block or approve a particular proposal as any adult. This process leads to lots of discussion and compromise so that the best decision gets made. In the past the Vision Keepers have made decisions involving grading policies, new course proposals, late work policies, progress report content and structure, and changes to the daily schedule, to name a few.

In addition to this very formal way of involving students in decision-making, these schools have a number of other practices and traditions to increase student voice. Not only do students serve on all of the governance committees at all levels, they also are responsible for planning, publicizing, and executing events and activities that promote a positive school culture. This Student Event Team (SET) also, through the regular governance structure, makes recommendations regarding existing and new events and activities. For example, the SET is responsible for Student Recognition Nights, Student Leader of the Month Awards, Winter Carnival and Homecoming and Spirit Week. The membership of this group is an equal balance of students and adults.

Who Runs This School Anyway? Student Voice, Accountability and Decision-Making that Is Real

In order to elicit input from all students, these schools set aside a day each year to gather data and reflect on their progress toward the mission and vision. This "State of the School" Day has generated student-initiated proposals that brought about changes in the grading and incomplete policy, the dress code and the further development of honors challenge options for students. The "State of the School" Day is a clear message to all students that the schools truly value student voice. Even in a day and age when there is continued pressure to "cover more" because of external expectations and testing, these schools take time out of the normal routine to send the message to students that their views, opinions, thoughts and needs are as important as the content being taught.

Lastly, the Student Judiciary Board provides students with yet another way to impact directly the culture and climate of the school. Providing students with the opportunity of a fair hearing and structured and timely

consequences, peers, teachers and administrators evaluate student behavior and dispense consequences when necessary. The Judiciary Board, made up of three faculty members and five students elected by their peers, hears cases referred to it, decides the appropriate consequence, and recommends action to the Dean of Students. The decisions are made by a majority vote of those present with the faculty chairperson voting only in the case of a tie. Use of the Judiciary Board process is optional for the student defendant who may elect to waive the hearing and submit the matter directly to administration.

Schools need to create specific and meaningful ways for students to be good stewards of their communities. Structures such as the Student Judiciary Board actually give students the opportunity to practice these skills and habits, and they are essential to the functioning of the school. The process also sends a clear message that following the honor code is not just an expectation that comes from the adults in the school community. Fellow students expect a safe, respectful and purposeful school climate and culture.

Despite these opportunities for student voice and true student decision-making, PRHS and BMWMS are not utopias. Yet they have made enormous strides towards the Coalition of Essential Schools' tenth Common Principle, which says, "The school...should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school." The democratic governance structure and student judiciary board are both strong examples of what it might mean to put this principle into action in a school setting.

However, the work is never done. As the student body and faculty change each year, there is a need to revisit and reaffirm the mission and vision of the schools. The "State of the School" Day is evidence that reflecting on the school structures and culture is an on-going commitment and necessity. As one student explained, "They [adults] don't just say they value our opinions and want our input. They show it by giving us the opportunity to make school a better place for us." Putting words and vision into practice in formal and informal ways is the only way we will get the kind of knowledgeable, skilled, caring and involved citizens we need in our democratic society. It is the best hope we have of achieving our goals.

The essence of education is not to stuff you with facts but to help you discover your uniqueness, to teach you how to develop it, and then to show you how to give it away.

—Leo Buscaglia

Mike Carter

Michael Carter has been a Humanities teacher at Poland Regional High School in Poland, Maine, for six years. He also teaches at the University of Southern Maine. Prior to PRHS, he taught for thirteen years at Gorham High School in Gorham, Maine. He is also a past member of the CES National Board.

Bio

Teachers and Power

by Luz Padua

Essay

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Thinking how much public education can be improved might cause one's head to explode. Large districts, prescribed curriculum, budget cuts, lack of family involvement in some cases...the list goes on. These are several factors that can stifle a child's development; factors that often are beyond our control as individual educators. As educators we all struggle with issues of control to some degree, and while it is important to work on these factors as a collective group, it is just as important, if not more important, to focus on something we can control: ourselves.

We need to realize the amount of control we do have yet do not use appropriately. How often do we stop and reflect on the ways we stifle children's growth – intellectual, emotional, and behavioral? How often do we allow children to guide us in their development? How often do we complain about the educational system yet forget to vote or neglect to write to our legislators? How often do we willingly expose our knowledge, or lack thereof, for public critique? Yes, we have a lot on our plates as educators, but we must not forget that we also have a lot of power. It is time to exercise that power for the benefit of the children. After all, that is why we are educators, or at least that is why we should be.

Let us look at our individual acts and how they affect children. Have you ever let a child's behavior get the best of you? Have you ever had a one-sided conversation with students, *telling* them how they *will* act instead of asking them how they like to be treated and why? Sometimes our own humanity gets the best of us and we miss opportunities to grow and

help children grow. Instead, we disengage the child by yelling, lecturing, punishing, or ignoring. Yes, we are teachers, but we do not have all the answers, nor are we always right. Perhaps that is the hardest lesson for us adults to learn. Do not misunderstand the point: we have plenty to offer our students, but THEY have more to offer us – constant opportunities to become better people. If we are to create equitable schools and a new democracy, we NEED to make space for children's voices. We need to put our egos aside and allow our students to guide us as we grow together. This is not an easy task, but it is worth the hard work.

"Those that can, do and those that can't, teach." Clearly this is an erroneous belief about the majority of those in our profession. Yet as a group, we have allowed ourselves to be disregarded, disrespected and pushed around. We have the ability to create meaningful change if we truly organize ourselves. We can learn a lot from U.S. senior citizens. They are a powerful force to be reckoned with. They are politically organized and fight for their rights. As educators, we too have rights. Why should we give up our civil liberties in order to teach? Educators have as much right to protest educational policies as parents do, yet often we fear our employment may be jeopardized if we do. We have to be political in spite of what the system tells us. If we want a new democracy, then we have to exercise our individual rights. It is not enough to talk about the injustices our profession endures when we are around the water cooler. And it is not acceptable to expect our students to be critical thinkers and agents of change if we are not willing to do the same. If we want our students to think critically and question the world in order to change

Teachers and Power

it, we have to serve as role models. Whether we like it or not, teaching is about modeling and it is not always easy.

Teaching is one of the toughest professions. It is a profession dedicated to child development. Yes, content is the *means* we use to help our students grow, but it is not the end. The end is child development – mind, body, and heart. It is critical to design curriculum based on children's developmental stages. Consequently, child development should be at the center of our conversation. Many of us may be better versed in our specific content area than in child development. Both are important if we are truly going to change the face of education. If we are going to help develop a new citizenry who cares deeply about the world in which it lives, we need to develop whole beings, not

just brains. Of course, that is a daunting task, but one that need not be done in isolation. Therefore, it is essential to be public about our work so that we can learn from each other.

Again, we must model what we expect from our students: in this case, lifelong learning and exhibition of personal work. Displaying one's work for public critique is not easy for anyone of us, but it is what our students need us to model. When we learn from our mistakes our practice improves. When our practice improves our students benefit.

Most educators enter the profession to help children grow. However, sometimes that passion gets muddled with all that is on our plates – ELLs, IEPs, SATs, and so on. In the midst of it all, we must remember that change is not easy, but surely within our realm of possibility. If we are going to improve our schools we must start asking the essential question "Is this policy, lesson, rule, etc. good for the children?" Let us include their voices as we develop *their* educational experiences. The next time you catch yourself yelling at a student, ask yourself if it is the best strategy possible for that student's development. The next time you gripe about changes in educational policy, ~~write a letter of complain to the policy makers.~~ And the next time someone critiques your practice, submerge your ego and fears and take the opportunity to grow from the experience. If we can begin to take a critical look at ourselves as individuals and make the necessary changes to improve our work with children, we can slowly change the world one school at a time. That is the collective power of educators, we truly can change the world if we embrace our power and not shy away. It is time to embrace our power and *lead* the national educational discourse on behalf of our children.

And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others. –Marianne Williamson, for Nelson Mandela

Luz Padua

Luz Padua is the Founding Principal of CityLife Downtown Charter School. She previously taught at Fenway High School in Boston where she also served as Assistant Principal and Interim Headmaster.

Bic

Voting for Homecoming Queen Does Not Prepare Students for Democracy

by Dennis Littky with
Samantha Grabelle

Essay

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CIRCLE, an organization focused on the political participation of young Americans, found that in the presidential election year of 2000, only 42% of all 18-24 year-old citizens voted, and in the non-presidential election years of 1998 and 2002, just over half as many voted in local and state elections. CIRCLC cites that nationally, youth voting declined by 13 percentage points from 1972 to 2000.

Why don't young people vote? I'll tell you. By the time traditional high school students turn eighteen, they have had minimal contact with democracy. They have not experienced, as it is defined by Webster's, an "equality of rights, opportunity, and treatment," nor participated in any form of "a government by the people." In school – the place where young people spend so much of their lives – they have virtually no say in the real decisions that affect their lives. Okay, sure, they may get to decide what play the theater troupe will put on this year, or what the theme will be for the Spring dance. But by the time they are old enough to cast their first political vote, most kids have had absolutely no say in the kind of political and policy decisions that are made every day by principals, superintendents and boards of education. They have had no say in how the school budget is spent, no say in the school's rules, no say in the way they're treated. And, more importantly, they have very little say in anything to do with the reason they spend all those hours in school in the first place – *their own learning*. When it comes to democracy in schools, student council elections and homecoming queen ballots are not enough to prepare our youth to become active citizens of a true democratic system. We are failing our students when we give them these "fake" exercises in

democracy. We are failing our future when we graduate millions of young people who have so little understanding of what it means to take control of their own lives that they don't even bother to show up at the voting booth when important decisions are being made about how they will live those lives.

So how do we bring real democracy into our schools? The most important way is by giving kids an equal voice in determining the education they will receive there. Students must be given the opportunity to help determine their own curricula. All students must participate in the development of their own individualized learning plans. With the support of teachers and others, students must be allowed to decide how they will reach the learning goals set by the school and how they will reach their own personal learning goals. At The Met schools in Providence (and our similarly-modeled Big Picture Schools around the country), every student sits down with his/her teacher and family and develops a learning plan based around the school's formal set of learning goals – goals encompassing social, empirical and quantitative reasoning, as well as personal qualities and communication – that have been determined to be the student's best route to success in college and the real world. These learning plans form the basis of a personalized curriculum that allows students to identify and work on their academic weaknesses, while developing and participating in real world learning experiences that match their strengths and interests.

Notice that I said the family is there too, contributing to the development of their child's learning plan. While we believe

Voting for Homecoming Queen Does Not Prepare Students for Democracy

and respect that the child's own voice must be the loudest because it is their life and their future, we also respect the parent's right to participate in determining their child's learning. If we truly believe that the parent is the child's first teacher, then we must respect them enough to allow them to continue that role throughout their child's schooling. Their right to help decide what happens to their child should not be taken away once their child climbs aboard their first school bus. And it goes further. When The Met opened in 1996, it was our first group of parents who decided (within the confines of state and local policies, of course) many of the structures we now take for granted. They were the ones who voted that school should start for their children at 9:00am. They were even the ones who decided that they and their children should be on a first-name basis with all school staff. That is what the majority of them wanted, and in a democratic school, that is what they got.

Every Met school operates as a democracy, not just in its relations with parents and in the development of each child's curriculum, but in the very day-to-day structures and cultural practices. This year, one Met school made it clear to the students on the very first day that this was *their* school, and it would be run only with their *full and committed participation*. By the end of that August day, committees had been formed to focus on everything from school spirit to discipline. From that point forward, these students will know what it means to live, and vote, in a democracy. They will be asked to make real decisions about the issues that affect them and their fellow students. They will vote for change, and they will decide when things are working well just the way they are. And they will see the results of their decisions (including some repercussions they may not have anticipated). What better learning experience to prepare students for what it means to live in a democracy, and more importantly, *participate* in one?

To create a democracy within a school, those in power must the school was built in the first place, and this must not be viewed as a loss. Teachers and principals who witness students taking control over their own learning have always spoken of these times as some of their greatest achievements. A school dedicated to creating a system of democracy is a school that will graduate eighteen-year olds who will not only understand the value of voting, but will believe in the power of their own voices to determine the course of their own lives, the health of their community, and the future of society.

The most important attitude that can be formed is that of the desire to go on learning. —John Dewey

Dennis Littky

Dennis Littky (Doc) is the cofounder of The Big Picture Company and the director of the Met schools in Providence, Rhode Island. While he was principal at Thayer Junior/Senior High School in New Hampshire, it was one of the founding schools in the Coalition of Essential Schools. With Samantha Grabelle, he is the author of *The Big Picture: Education Is Everyone's Business*.

Bio

The Quest for Democratic and Equitable Schools: Creating Freedom to Learn

by Lawrence Kohn

Essay

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In *Freedom to Learn*, the great humanist psychologist Carl Rogers writes of interpersonal relationships in the facilitation of learning, discussing three essential qualities facilitators should possess: *realness in the facilitator of learning, prizing, acceptance, trust, and empathetic understanding*. When educators bring these attitudes alive, they not only achieve significant learning with their students, but they also create the necessary conditions for democracy and equity in their schools. At Quest High School in Humble, Texas, our democratic and equitable learning community authentically facilitates affective and cognitive education for our students. As we approach our tenth year as a small high school, we have tuned two essential structures that cultivate democracy and equity: our family advisory system and our service-learning program.

When the design team began creating Quest in 1994, research on small high schools indicated building relationships with students while challenging them with authentic pedagogy could combine to create a powerful learning context for all learners. Thus, designers made two initial decisions. First, Quest would have an advisory program that would *deeply* personalize learning for students. We call this structure “family” at Quest, and family is our cultural spine. We have nine families of approximately 25 students, mixed in age (grades 9-12) and gender and supported by two adults. Family meets daily for 40 minutes, and students remain with the same family all four years at Quest. Once a week, academic advisement occurs as each adult advises her half of the family – academic progress is discussed and communication with parents occurs. These discussions about learning help to build relationships

with the students and their parents, but it is truly the other aspects of family where deeper personalization occurs.

We meet as a faculty to plan and support family every other Tuesday, and family has a curriculum that includes time-tested activities to build trust and relationships and to allow student voice. Family helps develop the *learner behavior* aspect of our curriculum and includes objectives and proficiencies in the areas of problem solving and critical thinking, self-discipline and social cooperation, wellness, communication, and citizenship and concern for the environment. As students engage in these activities over time, the typical “cliques and barriers” found in many classrooms and schools fade. Rockers, grunge, prep, nerds, black, white, Christian or Jew – whatever the labels students begin with melt away and the families become extremely tolerant and accepting of their members and all others at Quest. Each spring we do a comprehensive survey on family. We ask, “For you, what family experience was the most valuable this year?”

Character, because if you know your own character, then you know how to act and respect others.

Talking about problems and have discussions on how they can be solved because it makes me feel like a better person.

I liked our family discussions. It was interesting to hear other people’s opinions about everyday things.

When trusted to have voice and opinion, students realize more about themselves and others, become empowered and confident, and help build democracy and equity throughout the school. For example, students propose policy and initia-

The Quest for Democratic and Equitable Schools: Creating Freedom to Learn

tives in family when they see a need for change or improvement. In our early years, students in family helped create myriad policies and procedures still used a decade later. We continue to focus on "Keep a clean and safe environment" and "Respect yourself and others in word and deed," expectations students wrote and had for themselves. More recently, students in family sparked a discussion to create the current privilege system at Quest based on academics, attitude and attendance. Furthermore, students engage in trust-building activities, ROPES initiatives, and family "discussions" about school, community and national issues. Family provides opportunities for students to engage actively in responsible and positive behaviors and is a key reason why the Character Education Partnership named Quest a National School of Character in 2002.

The Quest High School designers also created a service-learning program; Quest's 225 students serve in over 40 different community sites in our demographic area every Wednesday from 8:30-11:30. While family is the center of our school's culture, our service-learning program allows students to learn through the most authentic pedagogy I have experienced in over two decades as an educator. The Quest Service-Learning Partnership Program is a process of learning through the experience of rendering service in the school or community and actively reflecting upon the experience. The program, embedded within the school's curriculum framework, conveys the concept of learning by giving. It enriches the lives of those served as well as promoting academic, personal, intellectual, and social growth for students. It also provides opportunities for civic engagement and responsibility and for career exploration. Most young people have critical needs in each of these areas, and participating in service-learning experiences assists in their development. We believe that service-learning provides students with an authentic education while they make a positive difference in the community, and that the skills and behaviors learned while experiencing service are life-long and life-changing.

Students' reflections concerning their service projects combined with the evaluative feedback we receive from our partners indicate civically engaged young people who are tolerant and learning about the "real-world" and themselves in a consistent and meaningful fashion. Furthermore, we provide an opportunity to deepen this learning as part of the senior exhibition process. Students create and implement a sustainable social action plan that tackles a social issue or problem

related to the topics they are researching for their exhibitions. Students consistently describe the design and implementation of their social action plan as the most essential and significant learning of their high school experience. As they interact with non-profits and government agencies to make their projects come alive and benefit the community, students "live" democratic processes. Past graduates often express that the social action plan has vaulted them into a lifetime of service. As Rogers stated, "Let's dedicate ourselves to provide learning communities that kids love and that are so rewarding to adults. To accomplish that goal, we must step back and trust our students and ourselves and give us all the *freedom to learn.*" Service learning as a pedagogy provides what Rogers

"The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn and change."

—Carl Rogers

prescribes and what schools need to elicit democracy and equity – trust and freedom within the context of learning.

Family and service learning help create a school with democracy and equity at its heart. We work hard to personalize learning and to engage students in authentic experiences to help them to learn and grow into caring, aware, engaged and productive citizens. We think Carl Rogers would appreciate the freedom to learn our students possess.

Lawrence Kohn

Lawrence Kohn is the Principal at Quest High School in Humble, Texas. An educator of 23 years, he helped design Quest in 1994 and became the principal in 2003. As principal, he helps support the professional learning community at Quest by focusing on learning and by working to keep the culture positive and proactive. He is also an adjunct professor at University of Houston, facilitating a course called Curriculum Theory.

Bic



How do we define
democracy and
equity in schooling?

Afterword

Reflections from Mirko Chardin: Essential School Graduate, Essential School Teacher

As I reflect on my experience as a student at Boston's Fenway High School, a Coalition school, my mind is flooded with the memories of innumerable aspects of the school's culture that have powerfully impacted my life. I think of habits of mind and how they have shaped my ability to think critically, I think of the relationships that the school's various teachers and co-directors were willing to develop with me and sustain years after I was no longer one of their pupils. I think of portfolio-based assessment and how it taught me about my strengths and weaknesses as a student. And I think of the unsure young boy I was when I first entered Fenway High School and of the young man I had become when I graduated.

There was definitely something magical about attending a Coalition school. Through the lenses of my experience, that magic was rooted in the environment and climate of the school that, more than anything else, challenged me to grow in just about every way possible, while also supporting that growth, so that I was comfortable grappling with new ideas.

As I was searching for my first teaching position two summers ago, a school that had the potential to develop an environment like this was exactly what I was seeking. I wanted to be in a place that encouraged students to excel and allowed them to feel completely supported as they were challenged. I found that place and am now teaching at New Boston Pilot Middle School.

While at Fenway, I felt that I owned the school, that I needed to be there, that my input mattered in the classroom, in the hallways, and even in the offices. I felt valued in a very sincere way. And the fact that I could be encouraged, taught and made to feel comfortable all at the same time has had an impact on my life that no other collection of experiences has ever had or perhaps ever will have.

My experiences at Fenway were important to me specifically because of what I was dealing with in my life outside of school, as a person in the midst of their early to mid adolescence. Being a young Black male growing up in urban America meant being faced with many challenging circumstances. The support and encouragement I received at Fenway helped me deal with the issues that were unfolding in my life in a positive way and to see a successful future.

We have a tremendous amount of work ahead of us – the world needs more Coalition schools so that someday more individuals will be able to share the richness of what I was able to experience as a student and what I will continue to experience as an educator working in one.

These reflections were adapted from remarks delivered by Mirko Chardin at the 20th Anniversary of the Coalition Of Essential Schools Reception at the Brown University Faculty Club on March 13, 2004.



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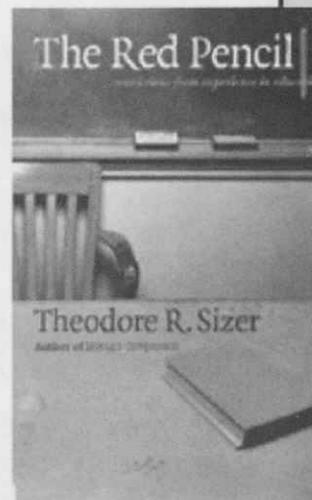
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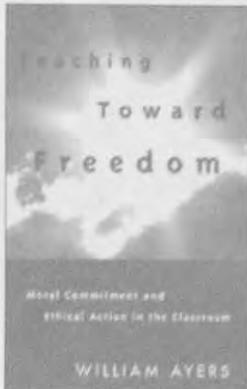


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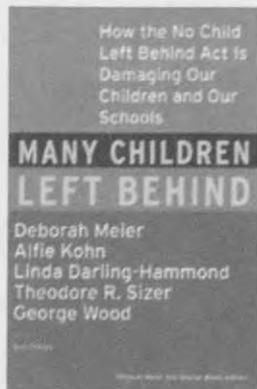


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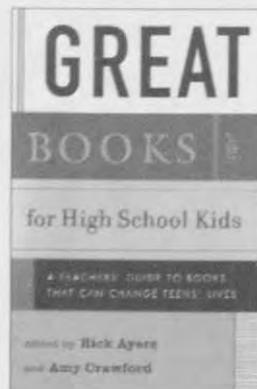
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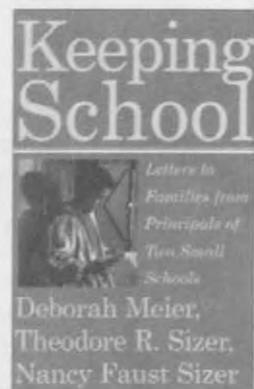
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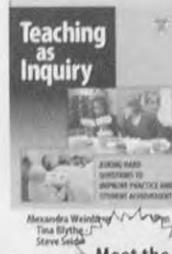
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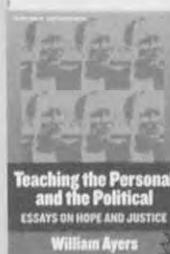


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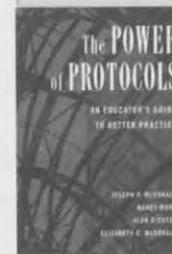


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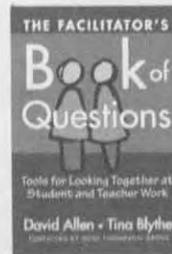
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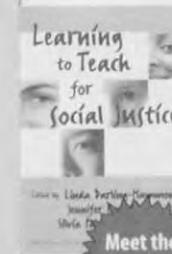
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Equitable Schools for a New Democracy

Responses from the CES Network

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Ted Sizer, Peggy Silva, and David Montes de Oca define and refine the terms. What does equity mean? What should equity mean? How do you infuse equity with deep significance so that it is a call to action? And how do you resist the deeply ingrained norms of behavior that cause us to lose sight of equity? How do you keep the faith?

Equitable Schools for a New Democracy

by Theodore R.Sizer

Essay

01



"Equitable" for us Americans – at least as I believe CES National is using the word – clearly does not imply a single, rigid, precise standard for all situations, with every school to be precisely the same as every other, *equal to every other* as if a clone, *equal schools for a new democracy*. Place and circumstance reasonably affect both the character of equity and thus the immediate practical expression of the word.

It is in this sense that the word *equitable* begins to have practical shadings. This is neither a surprise nor a sin. Most important ideas are subject to different interpretations or applications, in different settings and at different moments. Equity for you may not take exactly the same form as equity for me; both your and my actions must be situationally equitable; the expression of equity in your community may poorly serve my community; places will differ even if goals do not.

The word *equitable* and the idea it represents provide us a consequential standard: *fundamental fairness to and for all*. However we choose practically to express the concept, we must meet that demanding norm, albeit in the way most appropriate for our settings. To assure equity, we must offer equitable schools that reflect informed, principled variety. Overly literal people may find this a paradox. In fact it is strength.

At CES' twenty-year mark, we must look carefully not only at the meanings of the word "equitable" but also how its representation might take practical form. It is here that the word *democracy* is crucial. Education in the United States is assumed by the federal government, mandated by the states, and, in

most places, left for execution to local or regional authorities. For a variety of political reasons (some of them ugly, some unavoidable), this division of labor is not consistently respected.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, for example, makes detailed national demands on states and localities, whether they like it or not. So (perhaps ironically) do federal and state civil rights laws.

Mandates from state and federal levels profoundly affect the tax policies and thus the budgets of local communities. A town may have the right to tax its citizens in any way it wants, but it must – as a first obligation – meet revenue needs assessed on it by higher authorities.

An individual school may say that it will function as "a democracy," but at the same time it is expected to meet regulations from local, state, and federal governments which severely restrict its ability to be a reasonable self-governing democracy.

Thus is the concept "Government by the People" a mare's nest of complications and contradictions. As most of us CES colleagues work at the bottom of the political hierarchy, we are forced to live with the worst of that condition, one that has dramatically deteriorated over the last half decade. It should not be so. There should be a principled balance among local, regional, state, and federal governments – and respect for individuals and families.

Where might a counter-offensive on behalf of equitable schools in a democracy start, indeed the invention of a *new democracy* for elementary and secondary schools?

Equitable Schools for a New Democracy

First, by truth telling. The democratic arguments in favor of equitable schools, including the facts and figures, beg for illumination – and not only for the benefit of schoolpeople. We must press the case beyond our own professional groups into a wider arena, to elected officials, to the mass media, to influential folks from every quarter.

For example: at the 2003 Fall Forum at Columbus, Ohio, a first step in this direction was taken with the creation of the Forum for Education and Democracy, a free-standing not-for-profit organization which includes CES people and like-minded allies. Forum members (and we hope that our numbers increase) are buttonholing prominent political leaders, pressing on them and others facts and arguments through a website (www.forumforeducation.org), carefully sited Op-Ed pieces, hearings in Washington and elsewhere, and with the publication by Beacon Press of *Many Children Left Behind*, edited by Deborah Meier and George Wood.

Second, we must focus on some of public education's Sacred Cows. One – the practice of school districting – is so familiar that it is all too easily overlooked. There is no truly "public" access to most public schools. You go to school in the jurisdiction in which you live. Many such jurisdictions – districts, as they have evolved in most regions – represent class, racial, and ethnic enclaves. Not surprisingly, the districts serving the wealthy usually have more money per student than districts serving the less wealthy. The inequities in many states are breathtaking. Challenges to this system sit in the courts and legislatures in many states – seemingly forever. In the name both of fairness and of freedom, we must highlight this structural discrimination and make practical suggestions for its replacement.

If public schools (which in our system are the creatures of state government) are truly public – a *public good* – then all should be open to all. There are obvious practical problems here, but these do not trump the claims for truly *public* schools. In a *free* society that (paradoxically) *demand*s that its young citizens attend school, the options for such attendance should be numerous and varied. Such would be policy that is *equitable* for families.

Third is the matter of responsibility – the obligation of "higher" governments that impose mandates on "lower" governments both to respect wise varied regional conditions and fully to finance that which they demand. Governmental duties passed down place obligations on the passer as well as on the

receiver. The failure of both the federal and many state governments to resist "passing the money buck" down is rarely defensible. Legislation can make this a requirement: no demand can be imposed that is not clearly and equitably financed. We must insist on such a change.

And so, let us be very clear on just what we mean by *equitable* schools in a respectful, resurgent – and thereby "new" – democracy.

And let us be heard.

It is discontent with the present that leads clever minds to extend the frontiers of human imagination. –James D. Watson

Theodore R. Sizer

Theodore R. Sizer is the founder and Chairman Emeritus of the Coalition of Essential Schools, University Professor Emeritus at Brown University, and Visiting Professor of Education at Brandeis University and Harvard University. Sizer was a founder and acting co-principal of the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School in Devens, Massachusetts, a convener of the Forum for Education and Democracy, and the author of many books, including *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*, and most recently *Keeping School: Letters to Families from Principals of Two Small Schools* co-authored with Deborah Meier and Nancy Faust Sizer and *The Real Pencil: Convictions from Experience*.

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