

The Journal of the Coalition of Essential Schools

horace

Innovation in Education

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY PROFILE IN COURAGE AWARD

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District Change to Support Essential Schools

How do school districts support Essential schools? School district case studies from Boston, Massachusetts, Humble, Texas, Mapleton Public Schools, Colorado, and Indianapolis, Indiana demonstrate compelling contrasts and similarities in the attempt to bring small schools – small schools that take advantage of their smallness to create academic engagement and achievement – to scale.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

In-depth interviews with Ted Sizer, Warren Simmons, and Eric Nadelstern on imperatives for district change to support personalized, academically vibrant, and equitable schools

Choosing Small

An excerpt from *Choosing Small: The Essential Guide to High School Conversion* by CES staffers Jay Feldman, M. Lisette López, and Katherine G. Simon

Where to Go for More

Resources for More on District Transformation

Go to the Source

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

Book Reviews

- "Teachers Have It Easy": *The Big Sacrifices and Small Salaries of America's Teachers* by Dave Eggers, Daniel Moulthrop, and Ninive Clements Calegari
- *What It Takes To Pull Me Through: Why Teenagers Get in Trouble and How Four of Them Got Out* by David Marcus



Quest junior Matt Bissonet doing service learning with Kingwood College theater arts program building props for productions

Embrace Resistance

The journey to schools that are thoroughly restructured for maximum personalization and relevant, challenging teaching and learning has, of course, had its frustrations, such as Humble's 2001 refusal to pass the school funding bond measure. Some also may see the district's commitment to small learning communities for most students – rather than small schools like Quest district-wide – as a compromise to the necessary demands of economies of scale. But the district has committed to using its challenges to evolve and inform its vision of what its schools should and can be. "I have a big sign in my office that says, 'Embrace resistance.' That philosophy," reflects Paula Almond, "has helped us get where we are." ■

The Coalition of Essential Schools Dissertation Scholars Program Grants CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The Coalition of Essential Schools announces its new CES Dissertation Scholars Program. The program's goals are:

- 1: To stimulate research on CES schools and practice
- 2: To increase our understanding of the effectiveness of the Common Principles and CES practice
- 3: To encourage a new generation of scholars and educational researchers examining the CES philosophy.

CES invites dissertation proposals that examine the implementation and effectiveness of CES practices and CES schools. Dissertation Grants are available for doctoral students writing their dissertation proposal or before conducting their research. Applicants must be candidates for the doctoral degree at a graduate school within the United States. CES will provide up to five awards of \$2,000 to \$4,000 each. In addition to the grant, award winners will receive a stipend to attend and present their research at the Fall Forum, CES' Annual Conference. Researchers of color are strongly encouraged to apply.

Proposals for CES Dissertation Scholar Grants will be reviewed twice a year. Upcoming deadlines for proposals are December 1, 2005 and April 20, 2006.

For more information, visit www.essentialschools.org or contact Jay Feldman (jfeldman@essentialschools.org) if you have questions regarding the application or submission process.

Horace Talks with Ted Sizer: The History, Limitations, and Possibilities of School Districts



Ted Sizer, founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools and now its Chair Emeritus, discussed his frustrations with school districts as they typically operate with Jill Davidson, *Horace's* editor.

Horace: Do you believe that schools work better within systems than as islands?

Ted Sizer: Schools came before districts. Formal education in this country started in somebody's kitchen, then somebody's church, then a schoolhouse was built. Schooling was highly localized, familial, and, in many communities, closely associated with comparable emerging organizations. One has to ponder why these collections of schools started and at what point people (or some people, usually in government) felt that citizens needed to think more broadly, beyond merely a neighborhood school.

RELATED RESOURCE

Report from the National Commission on Governing America's Schools
"Governing America's Schools: Changing the Rules"

<http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/11/72/1172.pdf>

This is why Horace Mann is so important. He saw education, in part, as a state responsibility, transcending a local worthy end; and, in time, Mann had counterparts across the country, thereby, by the mid to late nineteenth century, transforming schooling from something that any and every family might desire to an institution that would serve democracy writ large.

"System" as the One Best Way, however, is a modern concept. And some of us,

now, say, "Really? Who says that schooling in a democracy has to be 'systematically' managed, wholly, uniformly so?"

Horace: So you don't necessarily believe that schools work better within systems. Given your experience with Charter schools, what light does their existence shed on the workings of municipal or regional districts?

Sizer: In drafting our Charters here in Massachusetts, the law allows us to ignore the existence of districts. This is important, as many Massachusetts districts represent socioeconomic and racial enclaves. At Parker [Charter Essential School] and North Central [Charter Essential School], we draw kids from every quarter, not just inside a particular city's or town's limits. North Central is likely Fitchburg's most ethnically and racially "integrated" public school. Parker kids come from over 40 towns and small cities, representing the economic (if not the ethnic) diversity of the region. What Charters have the ability to provide are public school opportunities available *regardless*

of where kids live. And we Charter administrators cannot control the process of student selection in any way, under the law.

Some of us believe that state systems should change to reflect this. [In 1999], the Education Commission of the States' National Commission on Governing America's Schools, of which I was a member, issued a report, "Governing America's Schools: Changing the Rules." Frank Newman, then head of ECS, had organized a very diverse commission, representing a broad sweep of political and educational points of view. The Commission recommended two "model systems," one of publicly authorized, publicly funded and publicly operated schools – which is what we generally find in this country – and the second of publicly authorized, publicly funded, and independently operated schools. The fact that this politically diverse commission put forward both models as politically reasonable and educationally defensible notions suggested that there are far more reservations among political leaders about the status quo than generally is believed.

Horace: What would the second system, that of publicly authorized, publicly funded and independently operated schools, look like?

Sizer: Let's start with "standards," and assert that there must be high standard schools, *no two of which necessarily look alike*. There is danger in such diversity; but there is greater danger in autocratically imposed uniformity.

Yet – as you and I know – we can go from one terrific school to another terrific school and realize that in many ways that these places – whatever "system" they represent – are often quite different. Of course, what central authorities say must happen may often morph in application. Most successful principals and teachers are magnificent breakers of the rules. They are wonderfully creative in the ways they choose to apologize when they get caught. These people are loath to spend their time fiddling what is – alas – all too often, an impossible, even mindless, system, however well intentioned.

In a free democracy, within a broad framework of the common good, appropriate, democratically inspired differences are essential.

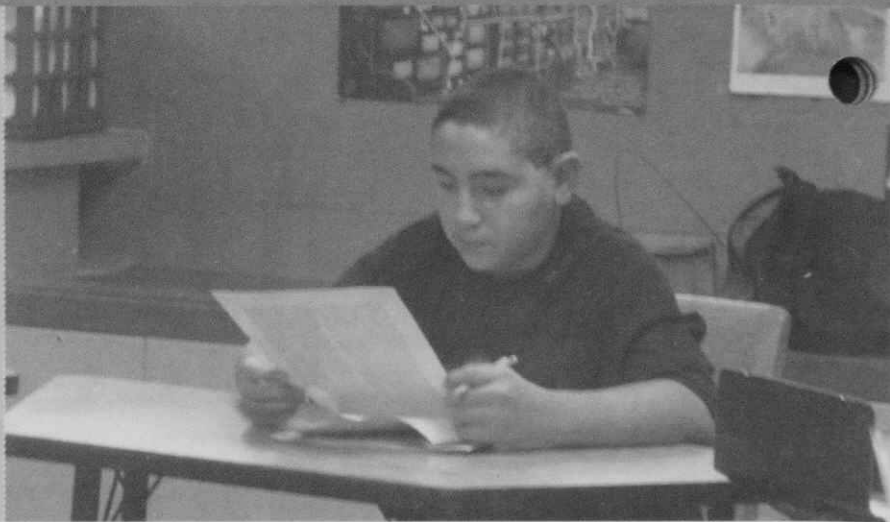
Horace: Schools now are under tremendous pressure to "produce results." What can districts do to shelter schools, to allow them to develop their cultures, practices, standards, and habits?

Sizer: District leaders should demand of each school clear goals, these within a broad district (and state) framework, and a sensible means to assure these goals. And districts (and state authorities) should sensitively inspect these schools on the basis of these goals. Again: there is strength in the inevitable tensions that arise from diversity. **H**

The Stars Aligned: A Study of System Change in Colorado's Mapleton Public Schools

by Jill Davidson

Skyview Expeditionary Learning School student



B By 2007, Skyview High School, which educates nearly all secondary students in Mapleton Public Schools, a 5,700 student district serving several communities on the northern urban fringe of Denver, Colorado, will no longer exist. And by 2007, the district will offer its students the choice of seven distinctly different small high schools. But this is not, despite what it may seem, a high school conversion effort. It's one aspect of district-wide reinvention that also includes eliminating middle schools, extending the grade range of several current elementary schools through 8th grade, starting some secondary schools at 6th grade, and transforming a middle school to a K-12 school. Across grade ranges and neighborhoods, the district will divide large schools to create smaller schools, increasing from eight schools in 2002 to sixteen in 2006.



In 2006-2007, the redesigned Mapleton Public Schools small secondary schools will be:

Opened 2004-5:

Skyview Expeditionary Learning School (6-12)
Skyview Big Picture High School (9-12)

Opening 2005-6:

Skyview Learning Through the Arts School (6-12)
Skyview Academy High School (9-12)
Skyview New Technology High School (9-12)
Skyview Early College High School (9-13)

In 2006-7, after both Mapleton middle schools are closed:
York School building will house K-12



Charlotte Ciancio, the district's superintendent since 2001 – born, raised, and a longtime teacher and administrator in the Mapleton district – says that the urgent need for high school improvement sparked this wholesale restructuring. But, Ciancio notes, "You can't do high school reform without reforming a school district. The kids won't be ready if you don't adjust what's happening at middle, elementary, and preschool levels. When we asked, 'What's the effect on the rest of the system,' we created a district reinvention roadmap that has changed everyone's work throughout the district."

Impetus for Change

In large part, the district decided to create an "enticing menu of learning opportunities," as Ciancio says, in order make the district's schools more compelling in the face of competing alternatives, including other school districts, to which Colorado students are entitled to transfer. In 2001, such was the case; the district suffered from long-term declining enrollment – it had already closed one of its high schools in 1988 – and faced disappointing test scores and other academic indicators, among them the fact that Skyview High School enrolled 400 9th graders and graduated fewer than 200 seniors annually. "The situation was frightening," remembers Mapleton School Board member Norma Frank – herself a graduate of Mapleton, along with her grandfather, parents, husband, and children. "It was pretty overwhelming."

"We'd dry up as a school district if this continued," says Ciancio, who credits the first steps toward assessing the district's challenges and identifying solutions to her predecessors, Dr. Mike Severino and Tom Maes, together with exhaustive strategic planning sessions led by nationally known planning guru, Dr. Bill Cook. Ciancio continued the district's work toward improvement by instituting a listening campaign shortly after her arrival in 2001, surveying 800 district voters and parents to find out what the community thought of its schools' work. Ciancio and her colleagues discovered that while most participants had a favorable view of Mapleton Public Schools, there were calls for smaller high school class sizes, more mentoring for students, and hands-on high school options. The district

was also serving an increasingly heterogeneous student population; once a primarily Italian, farming, and working class community, Mapleton Public Schools were becoming more Latino and more economically diverse. This demographic change also prompted the district and community to think about how its schools were doing business.

To gather ideas for next steps, Ciancio convened a planning process in January 2002, gathering 150 people to identify the strategic direction, mission, and characteristics of an environment that would allow them to achieve the district's goals. Ciancio remembers, "We started hearing the mantra in the community that what we're doing today isn't working. We knew we had to do something different." Something different, the group realized, meant creating a variety of small, personalized secondary learning environments that challenged and engaged students, supporting high standards for all within a variety of learning environments. Jamie Kane, longtime Skyview High School principal, recalls, "What we did had to be very significant. It couldn't be rearranging the deck chairs. It couldn't be a pilot. It had to be something big that we really believed would make a difference to every student in the district. It is not okay to have some good schools and some not so good. Our school board was adamant that we change the way we were doing our work but that we not experiment with our children."

In order to investigate possible programs and partners for the new small Mapleton high schools, the district turned to the Colorado Small Schools Initiative (CSSI) for a planning grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for travel and professional development. CSSI Executive Director Van Schoales, knowledgeable about what was happening in the American high school reform scene, served as a connector and advisor, pointing district and school staff, students, families, school board, union, and community members to potentially resonant school sites and educational programs around the country. Ciancio and others in the district describe these trips to Oakland, Chicago, Boston, Providence, New York, and elsewhere as a tipping point. "We saw amazing things," recalls Ciancio. "We were compelled to change; it would be unethical to continue with the practices we were engaged in knowing there was a better way."

CES Legacy

Though the district eventually connected with a number of partners with which it has created its new small high schools, it had the advantage of prior connection with the Coalition of Essential Schools. Mapleton was, in the 1980s and early 1990s, one of the earliest adopters of CES principles and practices. Billy Hufford, a 36-year district veteran, former high school principal and district administrator, and current Mapleton reform coach, describes how the initial CES affiliation produced a proposal to subdivide Skyview High School that the then-superintendent and high school principal rejected. The proposal didn't survive, and initiative and passion among a group of CES-inspired teachers faded away. "This time, the stars aligned for us. It was undone work that we are now having the chance to do," says Hufford. "It's such a pleasure." This time, one of the district's new small high schools, Skyview

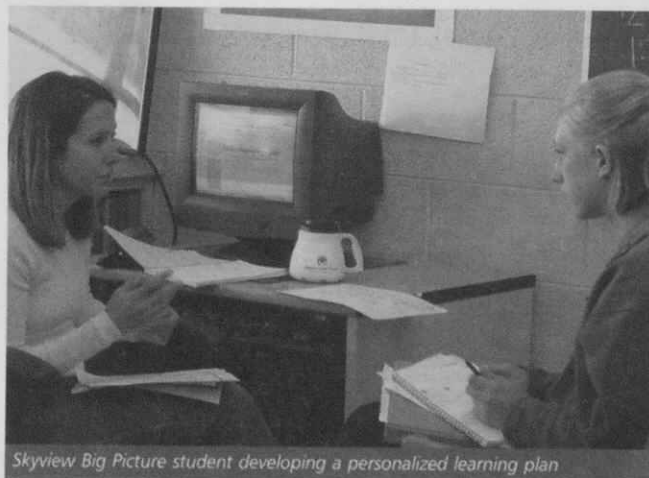
Academy High School, is an Essential school, a participant and grant recipient in CES National's Small Schools Project.

Considering Mapleton's prior CES history of structuring challenging, personalized small high schools that run counter to prior district practice, Jamie Kane doubts the success of making change within a system without all stakeholders committed, commenting, "We've talked with lots of individual high schools that are fascinated with what we're doing, but unless they chartered, I don't know how they could do it. It's crucial to have everybody – the school board, the superintendent, central administration, high school folks, the teachers' association – in the same reform mindset before you do something as all encompassing as what we're doing."

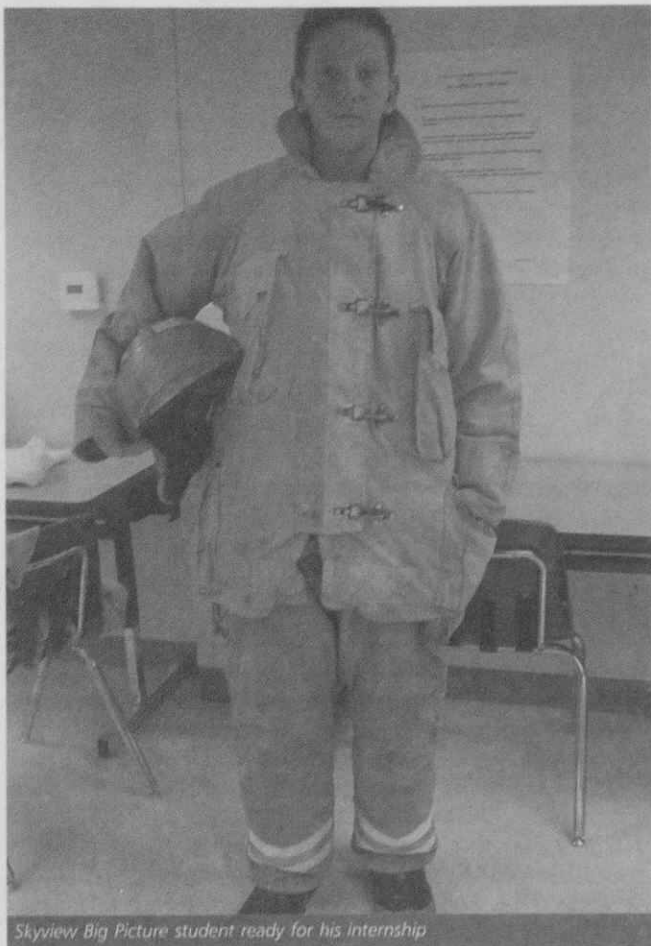
Reflecting on the district's CES legacy, Ciancio says, "The principles of the Coalition provide a proven path for getting to student achievement. They match our beliefs about how kids learn, about choice options, and about what we're trying to become as a community. The complexity of the principles causes a school district to change; you have to be willing to have difficult conversations and change practices. You can't go down the path successfully without adjusting the way you do your work. Most importantly, you can no longer lead from the top. It becomes the district responsibility and superintendent role to engage everyone. You have to adopt the belief of 'student as worker, teacher as coach' in a district context. My job as superintendent is to facilitate the system, not direct the system."

Agency and Autonomy

Although the new small school and district leaders draw on their CES legacy, they're cautious about the term "autonomy," often associated with Essential schools and a tenet of agreements with districts in which they are thriving. Ciancio says, "We have been trying the words 'agency' or 'autonomy plus.' You can't really be autonomous and also be part of a school district. Conversations about autonomy divide us into us and them. We are one system, one organism." While many decisions are still in process, the district doesn't see each small school as a completely free agent; it is committing to a suite of services that the schools automatically receive – among these, secretarial support, transportation, janitorial and maintenance services. And while the district still has a hand in its



Skyview Big Picture student developing a personalized learning plan

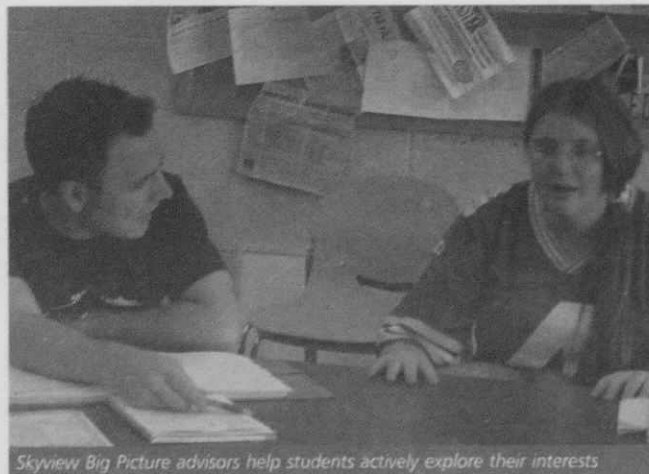


Skyview Big Picture student ready for his internship

individual schools' curriculum and assessment programs, Ciancio sees the bulk of decisions about teaching and learning under the control of the district's schools. "I cannot control what happens in the classroom," Ciancio says. "Many of the things I once wanted to control, I've had to give away. How do you balance the responsibility of a school district to remain a system while allowing others to take on the ownership?" Jamie Kane refers to this process as "strategic abandonment. What are those things you no longer do as you take on new responsibilities to close your gaps? How do you get rid of sacred cows?" Even as the new small high schools continue to open – two in the 2004-5 school year and four in 2005-6 – Kane says that they still have big issues to work out with the district, including appropriate attendance, graduation, and assessment policy adaptations.

Starting Now, Every Student Ready for College

In addition to the six new small high schools and the district's K-12 school, the original Skyview High School still exists for those members of the 2006 and 2007 classes and those teachers who chose to remain. But it, too, is different, with a sharpened focus on college readiness through participation in the College Summit program. CSSI's Schoales says, "This sets an example for the rest of the district: it says change now for students now." This gradual rollout of small schools also makes it possible for Skyview staff members to decide their next steps at varied paces. Some early adopters transferred to the two new small schools that opened in 2004. Others will



Skyview Big Picture advisors help students actively explore their interests

join one of the four that will open in 2005. Some are committed to the original Skyview High School 2006 graduates – and some will, inevitably, leave the district.

Because it anticipates increased student retention from 9th through 12th grade, the district is upping its annual teacher hires. Cooperation with the teachers' union and modification of the teachers' contract has made hiring outside the district easier, allowing earlier consideration of national applicants to attract new teaching candidates. The district engaged the union at the outset as a full partner, encouraging union participation in all phases of discussions and on school visit trips, resulting in a contract that preserves the district seniority and pay scales while allowing individual work conditions in the various school settings. Mapleton also looked to its own pool of administrators to swell the teaching ranks. "There were certified adults out there who were not teaching," says Ciancio. "Their work was about management and punishment. That is in conflict to our work. We have to dismantle those structures and make them instructional."

Early Days for New Ways

Mapleton Public Schools is still in the early days of their sweeping changes and has yet to resolve a number of key dilemmas – among them, finding appropriate permanent facilities for all of its new small schools. The district has begun conversations throughout the community reframing "schools" as groups of people learning together rather than buildings. With a vote on a bond issue likely in November 2006, the district is assessing and planning now, but Ciancio and the school board are clear that a reform plan has to precede the facilities plan, knowing that if they can demonstrate some success, the bond measure would be more likely to pass. Early indicators are promising. Hufford says, "What we're initially seeing in the two small schools that started last fall is an increase in attendance, a decrease in disciplinary action, and an increase in engaged parents coming to individual learning plan conferences." As Norma Frank says, "The more we looked at it, the more it made sense that the old way wasn't working. That big gigantic high school isn't going to meet people's needs anymore." ■



Skyview High School and College Summit: Change Now for Students Now

For many Mapleton Public School students - and many low-income students nationwide - college readiness is connected to expectations. High school graduates who come from families that have the know-how and skills to get them through the college admissions and financial processes have a cultural advantage that College Summit founder J.B. Schramm identified while working with students at a Washington D.C. housing project in 1993.

Today, College Summit is headquartered in Washington, D.C., with local offices in Chicago, St. Louis, Colorado, California, Washington D.C., and West Virginia. Aiming to increase the college enrollment rate of low-income students nationwide, College Summit offers school districts the opportunity to enroll students in a four-day College Summit workshop. The workshops take place on college campuses and, during the summer prior to senior year, prepare students to face the college admissions process. Students write essays, complete applications, learn about financial aid, and do what's needed to start senior year college-ready. College Summit workshops students also become agents of change at their schools, teaching their peers the skills they need to navigate college admissions.

College Summit also prepares a district's teachers for college guidance responsibilities, provides partner colleges and universities with advance looks at the College Summit participants for recruitment, and involves the community by training volunteers to serve as College Summit workshop writing coaches. Twice as many College Summit workshop participants apply to and enroll in college as their peers from the same income levels and communities; most stay in college.

Mapleton Public Schools educators, dedicated to college readiness for all graduates, have involved in College Summit those students who chose to stay at Skyview High School for their junior and senior years. College Summit is playing a crucial role in changing the district's culture in specific and immediate ways, providing a way for Skyview High School students to set the pace for the entire district - a remarkable phenomenon for a school that could easily be seen as an artifact of the past that's on the way to being phased out.

Interested in College Summit for your students? Contact College Summit through your district's superintendent's office.

College Summit National Headquarters
1763 Columbia Road, NW, Second Floor
Washington, DC 20009
Telephone: 202/319-1763 or 866/266-1100
Email: info@collegesummit.org
www.collegesummit.org



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Eagle Rock School
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TEACHING & LEARNING

SCHOOL PRACTICES

ASSESSMENT

LEADERSHIP

Cohort 2 Mentor Schools Now Online!

See how the newest ChangeLab Mentor Schools exemplify CES principles in action, visit www.CESChangeLab.org.

CES ChangeLab, designed to exemplify CES principles in action, welcomes its second cohort of Mentor Schools!

Visit www.CESChangeLab.org for images, discussions, and resources from:

Eagle Rock School, Estes Park, CO

El Colegio Charter School, Minneapolis, MN

High School for the Recording Arts, St. Paul, MN

Harmony School, Bloomington, IN

Parker Charter Essential School, Devens, MA

School of the Future, New York, NY

Wildwood School, Los Angeles, CA

These schools join Boston Arts Academy, Humanities Prep, Federal Hocking High School, Boston Arts Academy, Fenway High School, Urban Academy and Quest High School to provide a behind-the-scenes look at the CES Mentor Schools.

CESChangeLab



Horace Talks with Warren Simmons: "Smart Districts"

Horace editor Jill Davidson spoke with Dr. Warren Simmons, Executive Director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Established at Brown University in 1993 as an outgrowth of the work of the Coalition of Essential Schools, the Institute's current mission is to generate, share, and act on knowledge that improves conditions and outcomes in American schools, particularly in urban areas and systems serving disadvantaged students. Dr. Simmons joined the Annenberg Institute in 1998, bringing a rich history of work on urban education issues at foundations, school systems, various projects focused on school change, and just prior to his work at Annenberg, as head of the Philadelphia Education Fund.

Horace: What can we learn from what's happening in some of the country's large urban districts? Specifically, what is notable at the system level as opposed to the individual school level?

Warren Simmons: How do you take reform to scale and create a community of successful schools? The only way I think you can deal with it effectively is begin to map out school change at a level larger than the school so it is equitable and promotes excellence. You can't plot that out at school level. You have to plot that across groups of schools. If you focus on individual school attainment, the success of one school can occur at the expense of others. When you look at the progress of some school networks in Philadelphia or even the Boston Pilot Schools, those schools are successful, but as a result, there are equity concerns. They're not serving a proportionate number of students in special education, English language learners, or others who are performing significantly below grade level. The same thing happened in New York City when they started instituting their small schools. As the number of small schools increased, problematic students were being deflected back into large comprehensive high schools, thereby increasing both their burden and internal community opposition to small schools.

Horace: You're describing how to ensure equity for a whole community, which is something that's out of the hands of individual schools.

Simmons: Here at the Annenberg Institute, we're increasingly agnostic about whether the district is the entity that has to do this. But we argue that you need a "smart system," which is to say that whether your system is an independent network of schools, a charter-management organization, or a traditional district, you have to think about how you allocate your

human resources to ensure that you have well-trained, highly motivated and credentialed teachers and school leaders. And how do you adjust the allocation of your fiscal resources so all schools get the resources they need within the larger limits of the system? That requires fundamental transformation of district policies and contractual agreements.

Horace: What are some specific ways that is happening?

Simmons: One of the things we all have to take responsibility for, whether we're standards-based reformers or bottom-up reformers, is that both camps did very little thinking about systems. Standards-based reform totally ignored the district, and the bottom-up reform path of the Coalition of Essential Schools has walled itself off from the district. That's one of the reasons why we convened the Task Force on the Future of Urban Districts [2000-2003]: we had learned from the Annenberg Challenge that if you don't pay attention to the district, even the greatest innovation will be marginalized and eventually revert to previous practice because that's what the district reinforces and supports.

What seems to be appearing across the country to spark the redesign of the system is that rethinking is being catalyzed at the school level and supported by an external partner that acts as an advocate, collecting data and supporting the vision inside the system that leads to the system's transformation. How do you redesign supports for schools on a smaller, more efficient, more effective scale to enhance equity, excellence, and accountability and to build ownership in the community and capitalize on community resources? If you ask a different set of questions, you'll get a different design.

What Philadelphia, New York City and others are struggling with is to redesign the system. The newest notions are to redesign these school districts so that they support "portfolios" of school networks. Philadelphia is the most advanced model, with networks that are led by different providers. The University of Pennsylvania and Temple University run networks. Nonprofits like Foundations, Inc. use their knowledge of after-school work to design a network of schools, as do community development corporations such as Universal Companies, which comes from record-company owner Kenneth Gamble. The district has to figure out how it adjusts its contractual agreements, teacher and principal assignment policies, human resource systems, fiscal allocation systems and accountability systems so that you get innovation within a framework of accountability and you also get some coherence. Given the mobility of teachers, principals and students, you don't want a situation where a child experiences radically different standards and learning experiences simply by moving a few blocks.

Horace: So this is more than portfolios of schools within a district?

Simmons: The districts that are stretched in terms of their capacity will be better able to operationalize a portfolio of school *networks* than they will a portfolio of schools. Think about New York City with a thousand schools. Do they want a portfolio of schools or portfolio of school networks? Ultimately, it's about creating a job that's manageable, effective, and innovative.

The only way you're going to close the achievement gap is if educational opportunities in the school are aligned with and reinforced by educational opportunities in the community. We have to think about opportunities for education that exist inside the walls of school and also interface with opportunities for education outside the walls of schools. If you look at how small schools are developing in New York, Oakland and Sacramento, they're developing in partnership with community organizations such as the Harlem Children's Zone. The important point is that it's happening on the scale of a network of schools, not on the scale of individual schools.

Also, I'm interested in finding good educational pathways from kindergarten to high school. The job of the district is to create those pathways. If you do that differentiation at the individual school level, there's no guarantee you get a pathway. It may be harder to get the interface with community institutions that you need to support extended learning.

Horace: So what advice do you have for CES to create a system that will support the change that's happened at the school level in so many Essential schools?

Simmons: If we're wholly dependent on charismatic school leaders to get this done, we won't get it to scale. So unless we have a strategy for making everyone into a charismatic leader, and I haven't seen that strategy yet, how do you develop the tools so you can create a set of scaffolds to allow the people who are in the schools now to perform well and develop over time? If you want to sustain the initiative and take it to scale, you have to develop the capacity to document the work, develop systems and tools so that new teachers and continuing educators refine their craft over time. I think that education in large part suffers from the romanticism of the craft. We all are in love with the individual enactment of teaching and learning and we underplay the importance of systems and tools. Sometimes when I say "tools" or "systems," people think I'm taking about bureaucracy. The idea of relying solely on individual creativity to unleash the human spirit – that's a much more labor-intensive human-transmission model than is necessary in the information and technology age. ■

CES Essential Visions



Coming Soon CES Essential Visions DVD 1: Classroom Practices

The CES Essential Visions DVD project brings the Common Principles to life with real stories and tools from today's most successful small schools.

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on September 30, 2005

CES Essential Visions

Indianapolis' Commitment to Small High Schools: Finding New Ways to Say Yes

by Jill Davidson

Dr. Virginia Hardy, Small School Coach for the Arlington High School campus



Indianapolis Public Schools operates some of the worst dropout factories in the nation. Hundreds of students each year quit school, most landing in dead-end jobs or prisons. In some families, dropping out has become a way of life with neither parents nor children completing high school," begins the first paragraph of a May 2005 eight-part editorial series published in the *Indianapolis Star*, which pegged Indianapolis' graduation rate between 28 to 47 percent, "depending on the formula used" – a shocking statistic, even in the best case estimate. Produced in cooperation with Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) district officials, the *Star* series aimed for public engagement in district's plight of school shortcomings and student failure.

As the *Star* published its disturbing series, IPS, in conjunction with the Center for Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) at the University of Indianapolis and the City of Indianapolis, was propelling all of the city's comprehensive high schools toward one of the most dramatic small school conversion efforts yet attempted in a large urban district. Building on a planning year during which Indianapolis' five large comprehensive high schools were structured into small learning communities in order to shift cultures to maximize readiness for small schools, the large high schools are slated at the start of the 2005-6 school year to divide into a total of 21 autonomous high schools with a maximum of 400 students

each. In addition, IPS and various partners, including the Indianapolis Mayor's Office, are debuting a range of new small start-up high schools, bringing the city's total of small high schools to more than 30.

As *Horace* goes to press, the conversion and most new small schools are not yet open; this story, then, is not about results. Rather, it explores how a troubled urban district is attempting to leverage intensive professional development

designed and led in part by the National School Reform Faculty (known for promoting the use of Critical Friends Groups), support from external partner CELL, a well-timed community passed facilities bond measure, and student leadership to establish a foundation for district-wide small high schools designed for equity, academic challenge, and personalization.

How Indianapolis School Transformation Began

In 2003, CELL's Small School Initiative, known as the Network of Effective Small Schools in Indianapolis (NESSI), received an 11.3 million dollar grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for creating small schools in the Indianapolis region. CELL invited the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), based at the Harmony School (a CES Mentor School) in nearby Bloomington to join the effort as a professional development partner. Daniel Baron, NSRF's co-director, says, "We brought the NSRF small schools theory of action with us to the table. One of the components of that theory of action is the co-construction of design with the people you're serving." Starting in 2003, NESSI and NSRF trainers worked with a small district leadership team comprised of the associate superintendent, the IPS director of professional development, small learning communities directors, and high-level union leaders to develop the parameters for schools to become involved. Subsequent district leadership teams included the leaders of most of the teaching divisions of the IPS central office, the five large high school principals, and a senior union representative from each campus. According to Baron and other regional reform leaders, union participation and leadership has remained a key constant as the IPS small schools work has moved forward.

Reviewing data collected during district leader interviews, student achievement data, and teacher questions, the district leadership teams used a collaborative process to organize issues into five workgroups: District Transformation and Moral Imperative, Autonomy, Roles and Responsibilities, Teaching and Learning, and Equity. The workgroups, each with up to 12 participants, met monthly, using NSRF protocols to construct policy recommendations to the district to support the proposed small schools. The workgroups eventually made over 50 recommendations for change, of which IPS accepted nearly all.

RELATED RESOURCE

To see the full *Indianapolis Star* series on the city's schools, published May 2005:

www.indystar.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050515/OPINION/1505150317/1002



Indianapolis Conversion and Start-up Schools

2005 Conversions (these 5 sites will become 21 small schools)

Arlington High School
 Arsenal Technical High School
 Broad Ripple High School
 Emmerich Manual High School
 Northwest High School

Start-ups opening in 2004, 2005, and 2006

Archdiocese of Indianapolis
 (to-be-named urban preparatory school)
 Charles A. Tindley Accelerated School
 (Mayor-sponsored charter school)
 Decatur Discovery Academy
 (Metropolitan School District – Decatur Township)
 Fairbanks Recovery High School
 (Mayor-sponsored charter school)
 Flanner House Higher Learning Center
 (Mayor-sponsored charter school)
 George Washington Community School
 (Indianapolis Public Schools)
 Harrison Center for the Arts
 (Mayor-sponsored charter school)
 Indianapolis Lighthouse Charter Schools
 (Two pre-K-12 charter schools)
 Indianapolis Metropolitan Career Academies #1 & #2
 (Mayor-sponsored charter schools)
 Lawrence Early College High School
 (district/community college partnership)
 T.C. Howe Academy
 (Two schools – Indianapolis Public Schools)
 21st Century Charter School at Union Station
 (Mayor-sponsored charter school)
 21st Century Charter School in Fountain Square
 (Mayor-sponsored charter school)



As this process unfolded, the five large high schools formed small learning communities to create the structure for their conversion to small schools the following year. An academic dean and a facilitator of teaching and learning were chosen for each small school, with the building principals remaining as campus administrators and supervisors. Engaging in leadership training throughout the 2004-05 school year, these 42 new leaders honed their skills and prepared for their new roles and responsibilities, working within the existing small learning communities to establish structures, norms, expectations, policies, and school culture. As well, small school design teams and workgroup participants traveled to see examples of conversions and new school start-ups in New York, Boston, Chicago, Oakland, and elsewhere.

Professional Development and District-Level Engagement

From the outset, responding to its high schools' immediate crisis, the school board and the union supported IPS's decision that all of its five large high schools undergo simultaneous conversion. Undertaking such a massive conversion effort without this support – and without access to considerable professional development and facilities funding – would have been futile. But in many stakeholders' minds, given such support, simultaneous conversion would create a necessary, tremendous jolt to the entire system and ensure equity. "It was important for IPS to move forward with the district-wide conversion," says Margaret Means, Small Schools Coordinator at Arlington High School. "It's not equitable to make some wait. We have to do it together and support each other. We can't afford to lose any more students."

But how would the IPS central office transform its own attitudes and practices from top-down to collaborative? As small school leader and teacher training commenced, says NSRF's Baron, NSRF staff worried about how to include the district in planning, concerns complicated by the fact that though there was grant-generated funding for educators' professional development, "there was no district money. But as we started to work with district, it became obvious that they intended to convert all five of their high schools all at once, and this was a transformation that couldn't be done in the absence of full district engagement. So we paid an extraordinary amount of attention to district development despite a lack of grant money." The decision to place the words "Moral Imperative" in the District Transformation workgroup was, Baron says, an intentional reminder for all of this crucial aspect of the process.

As the small school leaders met for training and planning sessions, they were joined by district personnel charged with listening, planning, and recreating district management to support the new small high schools. As Brandon Cosby, CELL/NESSI Senior Fellow for High School Conversions, says, "It was important that we have central office personnel in the room so they could see how their work would have to change to support this. The expectation for central office staff is to co-construct, to be as engaged as small school leaders are. In most systems, there's a top-down, central office bureaucracy that tells schools what to do. We're trying to interrupt that practice and get those folks engaged so they have an opportunity to hear what schools are going to need and how their departments can bring resources to bear on helping accomplish that. The initial response, sometimes, is, 'We can't do that; we don't have the capacity.' One of the norms we operated by is finding new ways to say yes."

Jerry McLeish, co-director of IPS's Office of School Transformation, the district office heading up small school-related communication and coordination, agrees that the effort to increase cooperation between the schools and the district has already begun to change the usual ways of doing business. For example, small school teachers and leaders requested new and different ways to access student data to guide their work. "Previously," says McLeish, "The management information systems mechanism was utilized at the principal and district

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, CA, with 21 CES affiliate centers across the country.

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

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

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

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

In addition to individual schools, we also need to create the conditions under which whole systems of schools will become equitable, personalized, and intellectually vibrant. To affect these whole systems, CES National supports affiliate 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 affiliate centers, and affiliated schools. Interested schools, organizations, and individuals are invited to the website for more information about affiliating with CES National.

The Common Principles

Learning to use one's mind well

Less is more, depth over coverage

Goals apply to all students

Personalization

Student-as-worker, teacher-as-coach

Demonstration of mastery

A tone of decency and trust

Commitment to the entire school

Resources dedicated to teaching and learning

Democracy and equity



Emmerich Manual High School Small School Coach at Summer Leadership Institute

levels, but not necessarily at the classroom level. This year, we engaged in new ways of systems thinking to get data to classrooms to inform instruction. We asked our Information Technology department for certain kinds of data that small schools leadership, teachers, and parents need to help them make good, viable decisions on behalf of the learners. We made requests month by month to help them figure out what information was important, and the technology data system has been one of the first divisions that began to move and become sensitive."

Fortuitous Facilities Funding

Another impetus for change was that at the time the district committed to small high schools for all students, all Indianapolis high schools were under renovation or construction, funded by two school facilities bond measures totaling over a billion dollars; \$450 million is aimed at high schools. "It was almost like the planets were in alignment," says Barbara Gillenwaters, co-director of the Office of School Transformation. Leadership teams were able to work with architects to describe small school requirements. Gillenwaters' colleague McLeish elaborates, "The most recent bond campaign was linked with IPS K-12 transformation with an emphasis on reforming high schools. Our community still believes in the public school system, so it's our job to honor their aspirations."

Arlington High School's Small Schools

Engineering, Health Services, and Sciences School
Academy of Business, Industry and Entrepreneurship
School of Fine Arts and Communication
School of Technology
College Preparatory Accelerated School

Each of the five existing large high schools is being reconfigured to house several small schools. Jacqueline Greenwood, campus principal of Arlington High School, says that Arlington's renovations, due to be completed in 2007, will include many shared resources such as new air conditioning, new foreign language and science labs, and a new home economics area. Specific renovations to create distinction among the small schools include the use of specific colors for each school on lockers, ID cards, signs, and other features.

RELATED RESOURCE

For more information on student participation in planning Indianapolis' small schools:


www.nsrharmony.org/vista_studentled_research.html

www.harmonyschool.org/www/pdf/connections/2005.spring.students_center.pdf

Student Leadership – What Kids Are Capable Of

According to Gillenwaters, students have played a vital role throughout the commitment to create small schools in Indianapolis. "Student-led student congresses helped decide what the small schools will look like and helped other students understand what being a part of them will be like." The student congresses came out of work based at the Harmony Education Center through the Harmony/VISTA Service Learning Demonstration Project exploring how student voice could be a significant part of school culture. "At the start of the small schools teacher training," says Daniel Baron, "These students had come to know much more about small school philosophies, theories of action, and different projects around the country than their teachers did."

Baron continued, "When the project began in October 2003, there were student facilitators at every table. Freshman and sophomores, kids of color from the inner city schools, were leading conversations about small schools. At those tables were the superintendent of schools of the state of Indiana, the IPS superintendent, the head of the Urban League, superintendents from outlying districts, lots of movers and shakers. When that evening was over and the students joined back up as a group, we knew by looking at those kids that they could accomplish anything that they put their minds too. The sense of efficacy was absolutely palpable. It demonstrated without any doubt what kids are capable of. These are the same kids that teachers and administrators believed were not capable of very much, whose schools had failed them miserably." Subsequent student-led research on student engagement and attitudes about school has continued to play an active role in influencing the small schools planning process.

As the Indianapolis Public Schools hurtle toward creating a radically different structure for their high schools intended to support personalization, challenge, and equity, the imperative to create a better future for Indianapolis' young people remains the central inspiration in the midst of uncertainty and tremendous challenges. "It will work, but we have to start thinking about what is best for children," says Jacqueline Greenwood. "We already know that what we've been doing hasn't worked, so if this is going to mean that more children will graduate and able to go to college and feel good about coming to school every day, won't this be powerful?" 



Small school leaders plan for the 2005-6 academic year

The Coalition of Essential Schools Small Schools Project, a five-year initiative funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is pleased to announce its newest Mentor Schools, Conversion Team, and New School Design Teams.

The newest Mentor Schools are:

The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, Peace Street Campus, Providence, RI
 High Tech High, San Diego, CA
 Leadership High School, San Francisco, CA
 Amy Biehl High School, Albuquerque, NM
 Young Women's Leadership Charter School, Chicago, IL (Emerging Mentor)

The newest Conversion Team is:

Olympic High School, Charlotte, NC

The New School Design Teams are:

Capitol City Upper Charter School, Washington, DC
 CES/Mills Experiential Learning Academy, Oakland, CA
 Connections Public Charter High, Hilo, HI
 Memphis New Small School, Memphis, TN
 Bayview Essential School of Music, Art, and Social Justice, San Francisco, CA

Congratulations to all!

For more information on the CES Small Schools Project, please visit us at www.essentialschools.org.



Horace Talks with Eric Nadelstern: New York City's Autonomy Zone

Eric Nadelstern addresses Autonomy Zone principals

To learn more from a uniquely informed perspective on how Essential schools can thrive in large urban districts, Jill Davidson, *Horace's* editor, interviewed Eric Nadelstern, the Chief Academic Officer for New Schools at the New York City Department of Education in charge of the city's 30 school Autonomy Zone. The founding principal of the International High School at LaGuardia Community College, a longtime Essential school, Nadelstern has also served as the Deputy Superintendent of New and Small Schools in the Bronx, the Deputy Regional Superintendent of Region Two in the East Bronx, and citywide Senior Instructional Superintendent for school improvement and restructuring at the city's Department of Education.

Horace: What can districts do to increase the success of Essential schools?

Eric Nadelstern: School districts have exactly the kinds of schools they're designed to have. If you want something different to take place at the school level, then something different has to take place at the district. We encourage our new small schools to create cross-functional interdisciplinary teams responsible and accountable for a cohort of students. This is opposed to the more traditional high school model where subject area departments stand in isolation with little articulation across disciplines, which leads to something less than a coherent experience. School districts are organized similarly, as different departments that don't articulate with each other. And when you ask people in those organizations which schools they are accountable for, the likely response is, "All of them." We are finding ways to create much more clearly defined lines of responsibility and accountability. When I was Deputy Superintendent in the Bronx, we were creating district office cross-functional teams that were responsible and accountable for no more than four to six schools. After initial resistance, the people involved felt much more connected to the reality of what kids and teachers were experiencing.

Horace: Tell me about the Autonomy Zone.

Nadelstern: We opened in September with 30 schools in the Autonomy Zone: 14 new small schools, 13 existing schools, all secondary schools. The remaining three were charter schools that already had autonomy and chose to work with us because they wanted to be part of something larger with like-minded schools. Those schools recognized the value of affiliation, an interesting development in history of charters in the city.

The charters already had contracts with the state, but the other 27 schools signed contracts that made them accountable for student achievement, educational equity, fiscal integrity, equity – they should represent the population, not skew toward better prepared students – and academic achievement. What they get is freedom to choose their own methodologies – they can create longer instructional periods and deviate from curriculum sequencing dictated by citywide curricular mandates. They can figure out within state parameters the broadest possible flexibility to grant credit for project-based work and non-seat time school experiences.

Horace: So the schools in the Autonomy Zone have supportive expectations?

Nadelstern: They want to be held accountable – they're professionals. And there are broader conversations about nature of accountability. Principals of older Coalition schools would like a more descriptive, less quantifiable form of accountability based on more complicated forms of assessment. The older small Coalition schools have had a very hard time adapting from a non-high stakes testing environment to a high-stakes testing environment. That's easy to understand – we felt we were losing something seminal in what made our high schools effective and unique. But the Autonomy Zone isn't an initiative to forward everyone's agenda. What it is, most narrowly defined, is an opportunity to demonstrate that if you give principals a chance to make the important decisions that they and their teachers need to make about how kids learn best, then more kids will be more successful. It's an opportunity for school faculty to be prepared to be held accountable for those results.

Horace: The success of the schools in the Autonomy Zone seems to depend heavily on skilled leaders.

Nadelstern: If you want a proactive leadership where school leaders exercise their best judgment, then you have to create the circumstances for that to happen. Perhaps there isn't a leadership shortage – perhaps there's a shortage of opportunities to exercise effective professional judgment and leadership.

As a principal, I learned that the position where people bring their problems to you and you spend your day solving their problems is very seductive and powerful, but in the final analysis, it's not the job of an educator. The job of an effective educator is to provide people with the encouragement, opportunity, and moral support needed to understand that

they and their colleagues hold the solution to most of their problems. To support that, we then have to create positions and organizational structures outside of schools that don't drain the schools of resources.

Horace: Is the Autonomy Zone the right structure for all schools? Could all schools function with this level of autonomy?

Nadelstern: That's the 64 thousand dollar question. Is autonomy a reward or a prerequisite? Most of my colleagues believe that autonomy is a reward, that you have to earn it. I believe that autonomy is a prerequisite, that the people closest to kids and the classroom – principals, teachers in consultation with parents, and at high school level, the kids themselves – are the people who are best positioned to determine what kids need to learn, how they can best learn it, and how to assess that learning. This needs to be scalable to the entire school system. There is no school that would not benefit from this relationship, even if it means that as a result of this construct it was determined within a few years that a school doesn't deserve to exist and should be closed down to give other people an opportunity to do a good job. Even that is a valuable contribution.

Horace: Is the Autonomy Zone a threat to the existing bureaucracy?

Nadelstern: The mistake most people in my position make is that we come in thinking that if we're only smarter, better intended, and more hard-working, then we will do a better job than the people who came before us. The people who came before us were also smart and hard-working. The resulting structure isn't a result of people interfering with what's going on in schools. It's what happens when people attempt to support what's going on in schools. The Autonomy Zone demonstrates an entirely different way of thinking about the legitimate role of the school district. The Autonomy Zone has only four administrators, all of whom have other responsibilities. Nobody has fulltime direct commitment to the Autonomy Zone and that's how it should be – we're using our resources effectively.

Horace: So what is the legitimate role of a school district if a school has the structures in place to govern itself and evolve?

Nadelstern: The Chancellor says he's not interested in creating a successful school system – he's interested in creating 1,300 successful schools. If you follow that thought through, the legitimate role of the school district would be to channel available resources directly to the schools as much as possible. Anything you create in terms of structures outside of schools diminishes resources available to schools. The current New York City restructuring initiative to transform 40 districts into 10 regions has saved a quarter of a billion dollars a year that now go directly to schools. The purpose of the district is to channel the resources available, recruit the best people we can find to be school leaders, hold them accountable for results, support them, incent them, and protect them.

Horace: How has your long connection with CES informed your current work?

Nadelstern: I have deeply held educational beliefs, most of which are reflected in Coalition principles. But that's irrelevant in my relationship to schools. It informs the dialogue that I have with schools, but it's irrelevant in the sense that schools with wildly different philosophies have an opportunity to develop as such, are supported, and the only real measure is what happens to the kids. Are they coming to school, are they staying in school, are they passing their courses and assessments, are they making regular progress, are they graduating, are they going to college? If they are, then the only questions I ask around the educational philosophy are designed to create some kind of internal coherence.

When I was Deputy Superintendent in the Bronx, I helped principal Barbara Kirkweg initiate Bronx Aerospace Academy. Despite having spent five years in college trying to keep the Air Force off campus, my karma in life has been to collaborate with the Air Force to start a small high school. Barbara's been able to establish direct lines of responsibility and accountability between small cross-functional teams of teachers. Over 90% of her kids pass the English Regents, which is phenomenal. My job is to support that.

Horace: Ultimately, this kind of district structure supports different schools for different students.

Nadelstern: What unites all quadrants of the political spectrum around this issue is the concept of a portfolio of different kinds of schools. The portfolio model resonates in an era when folks are trying to apply good business practices to public service. The question for us moving forward is around scalability. We've got a long history in New York City of doing interesting work along these lines and then marginalizing it – look at the case of the alternative high school superintendency. The advantage this time is that it's not off to the side. The work is located at the central office reporting directly to the Chancellor. The hope is that as a consequence, we can figure out how to translate this into something that benefits all kids. **H**



RELATED RESOURCE

For more on the New York City Public Schools' Autonomy Zone, see

http://www.insid-eschools.org/nv/NV_autonomy_feb05.php

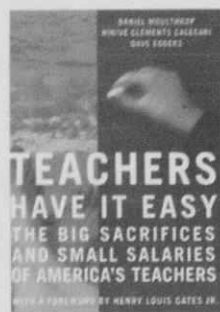


Summer Reading Without Guilt

Teachers Have It Easy: the Big Sacrifices and Small Salaries of America's Teachers by Daniel Moulthrop, Ninive Clements Calegari, and Dave Eggers (New Press, 355 pages, \$25.95)

You will want to bring these books to the beach or the couch – even though they're about education. *Teachers Have It Easy* will make you feel entirely justified in putting on more sun block and leaning back in comfort. *What It Takes to Pull Me Through* reads like a paperback thriller and will make you remember why you are going back to school in the fall.

There are so many books and articles that seem designed to make teachers feel inadequate. It's a great relief to read one that argues that your salary is inadequate. The authors of *Teachers Have It Easy* enthusiastically bash myths and point out ironies, with chapter titles like, "Look, Dad, My Biology Teacher is Selling Stereos at Circuit City!" and "It's Not a Bad Salary If You're Single."



There's nothing in this book that you don't already know, but it's satisfying to read your own frustrations and anger articulated with humor and a good dash of political outrage. One of the book's most important points is that Americans still "see teaching as essentially altruistic...Ask a teacher how many times they've had this conversational exchange: 'What do you do for a living?' 'I'm a teacher.' 'You're a teacher? Oh, good for you.' " What's wrong with this well-meant praise? It is part of a circular logic which holds that because teachers don't go into education for the money, we must not really need it. The myth of teacher saintliness actually works against us.

The book uses teachers' own voices to make its argument. Tish Smedly, a pre-K teacher in Nashville, says, "You get used to it and you go on and you do it, because you know that's what the kids need...If you plant seeds, you've got to buy seeds. If you are going to plant seeds, you've got to buy dirt." This is not a lovely metaphor for education; this is about a teacher shopping for dirt because her district won't pay for it. After you're finished reading this book, lend it to someone who is NOT a teacher – they need to get angry, too.

In *What It Takes to Pull Me Through*, journalist David Marcus follows four teenagers through their experience at the Academy at Swift River, a therapeutic boarding school. He describes the insane lives the kids were living before they came to the school: having sex with strangers, using seven different kinds of drugs in a month, or being so depressed that they skipped school and slept all day. The sex-and-drugs stories are the

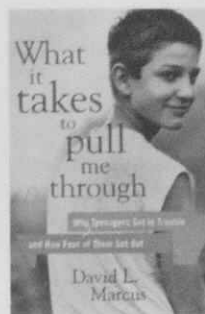
What It Takes to Pull Me Through: Why Teenagers Get in Trouble and How Four of Them Got Out by David L. Marcus (Houghton Mifflin, 352 pages, \$25.00)

ones everyone assumes push kids over the edge, but two of the kids Marcus writes about are in every bit as much trouble without ever doing drugs, drinking, or having sex. One of them, D.J., spent most of his time playing video games and ran away to meet someone he encountered on-line. When a Swift River admissions officer asks him what he thinks is good

about himself, he answers, "I don't know." When she asks "What would you want to accomplish here?" his answer is the same.

The common themes are not found in substances or behavior: these kids are miserably unhappy and don't have a safe way to express it.

The book is as exciting as any teen movie, and as real as the kid you see writing DEATH on his arm with



a Sharpie every day in class. The teenagers in *What It Takes* are reminders of what "at risk kids" means. At risk for what? It's so simple: these kids are at risk of dying. Helping kids in trouble is saving their lives, and as teachers we have to acknowledge this, even when it feels absurd and melodramatic to see ourselves as saviors.

Mary-Alice, one of the profiled teenagers, is asked to write down the risks she took in her life before coming to Swift River. She writes about sexual, social, physical, and other risks. Facing the topic "Life Risks," she writes "everything I did was a life risk." I had to love this girl for her honesty, even when her behavior, described unsparingly by Marcus, made me want to slap her.

As the book chronicles the crazy one-step-forward, two-steps-back progress of these kids through their fourteen months of school, wilderness survival, and intensive therapy, we root for all of them, and thus the fact that many don't make it is hard to take. Marcus tells the real, messy, ambiguous stories, without making the kids into heroes or villains.

As a CES teacher, I found this book confirming the importance of the way our schools are structured, since knowing kids well and helping them know each other well, in a safe environment, is exactly what the teachers and counselors at Swift River do. By paying close, deep, and caring attention to the students we teach – knowing them well as we help them learn to use their minds well – we are doing, according to the teenagers in this book, what it takes to pull many of them through.

Sarah Mayper teaches Arts and Humanities to 7th and 8th graders at the Parker Charter Essential School in Devens, MA.

Where to Go for More: Resources for District Transformation that Supports Essential Schools

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform

Based in Baltimore, Denver, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia, and Seattle, the Cross City Campaign gathers educators, community activists, union and civic officials, students, district personnel, funders, and others to focus on urban school transformation based on remaking school districts so that school and student needs drive district agendas. Cross City's projects include conferences, publications, technical assistance, school visits, workshops, and more. Of particular interest is the Cross City Campaign's emergence as a strong advocate for the kind of small, student-centered, community-based, equitable, and academically exciting schools that Essential schools exemplify.

www.crosscity.org/index.html

Schools for a New Society – Carnegie Corporation of New York

Founded in 2000 and funded by the Carnegie Corporation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Schools for a New Society (SNS) initiative focuses on reinventing the urban high school experience through district reform and community involvement. Seven cities – Boston, Chattanooga, Providence, Sacramento, San Diego, Worcester, and Houston – are participating in the effort. With documentation of the work as it has unfolded, the SNS web site provides examples of specific district restructuring efforts aimed at urban high school improvement, district-community partnerships, and advocacy efforts within communities to create demand for better schools.

www.carnegie.org/sns/index.html

Atlas Communities

In 18 urban, suburban, and rural sites nationwide, the ATLAS (Authentic Teaching, Learning, and Assessment for All Students) Communities effort encourages school districts to develop preK-12 educational pathways, creating an integrated educational experience for students and meaningful professional learning communities for educators. The ATLAS Communities project offers a district design strategy for pathway and Whole-Faculty Study Group implementation.

www.atlascommunities.org

Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University

The Annenberg Institute employs a strategy of civic, system, and teaching and learning supports to promote improved conditions and outcomes of American schools, particularly those in economically disadvantaged urban areas. Among the Annenberg Institute's many projects are two resources of particular interest: the "Smart Districts" issue of its VUE publication (available at www.annenberginstitute.org/VUE/archives.html) and the School Communities that Work task force, an Annenberg Institute project accessible at www.schoolcommunities.org. School Communities that Work offers a portfolio of tools designed to develop urban districts that can support and sustain school improvement, providing frameworks for change in central office design, budgeting, partnership development, curriculum, and human resources.

www.annenberginstitute.org

Center on Reinventing Public Education

Based at the University of Washington's Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, the Center on Reinventing Public Education examines how urban school systems can provide strong schools that create equal opportunities for all children through conducting research, providing tools and guides to practitioners, and proposing new models for school-related governance and philanthropy. CRPE's resources range far and wide across the systems reform landscape; of particular interest to *Horace* readers may be CRPE's free collection of guides, available on the site's Publications section and downloadable as PDFs, to starting new small schools which address forming partnerships, new school incubators, and options for starting charter schools.

www.crpe.org/index.shtml

Council of the Great City Schools

A coalition of 65 of the nation's largest urban public school systems, the Council of the Great City Schools hosts annual conferences, publishes reports, prints the magazine *Urban Educator*, lobbies Congress to advocate for issues of concern to its members, sponsors a range of initiatives aimed at improvement in urban schools, coordinates with dozens of universities to create transitions to college, and coordinates five task forces on issues of concern to educators in large urban systems. With an active advisory panel of big-city superintendents, the Council of Great City Schools is one of the best places to take the pulse of urban K-12 education.

www.cgcs.org

Creating a Climate for Change: Essential Schools in Louisville: *Horace* Volume 17, Number 5

This 1991 issue of *Horace* examines the dynamics of district-wide change to support Essential schools in Louisville, Kentucky. While Louisville is no longer a center of CES activity, "Creating a Climate for Change" tells the story of a focused, long-term superintendent's commitment to the work needed to implement the Common Principles, focusing on professional development, district leadership strategies, and community involvement as keys to a student-centered urban school district.

www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/100

GO TO THE SOURCE: More about the Schools and Other Organizations Featured in this Issue

Note from the editor: Customarily, this section provides contact information for each school featured in *Horace*. Due to the focus of this issue and the sheer number of schools to which the text refers, we're providing links to districts and school networks discussed in this issue, through which you can find information about particular schools. If you require assistance, please don't hesitate to contact *Horace's* editor, Jill Davidson, at jldavidson@essentialschools.org

Boston, Massachusetts

Boston Public Schools

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The Boston Pilot/Horace Mann Schools Network

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

Leadership

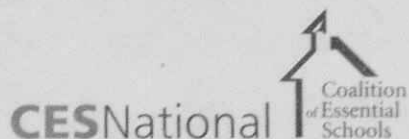
What kinds of leadership are necessary to transform schools into more humane and intellectually rigorous environments? How can the change process be sustained? Topics include: governance, distributed leadership, and managing the change process.

Community Connections

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

Next Issue

How have Essential schools influenced local and national education policy? *Horace* 21.4 will focus on ways that Essential school communities have contributed to political action to create policy environments that support the CES Common Principles.



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Notes on This Issue

In the past, *Horace* has most often focused on classrooms and schools where the daily push, pull, relationship building, resistance, revelation, and other elements of teaching and learning happen. But in this issue, *Horace* takes a wider view, asking what kinds of systems, particularly school districts, do Essential schools require to emerge, grow, thrive, adapt, and sustain?

Horace 21.3 looks at four school districts, each at a different stage of developing small high schools dedicated to personalization, equity, and academic intensity and excellence: Boston, Massachusetts; Humble, Texas; Mapleton Public Schools, Colorado; and Indianapolis, Indiana. Taken together, these districts' stories demonstrate compelling contrasts and similarities in the attempt to bring small schools – small schools that take advantage of their smallness to create academic engagement and achievement – to scale.

In addition, three education reform leaders provide perspectives on the role of the district. CES's Ted Sizer, Warren Simmons of the Annenberg Institute, and Eric Nadelstern, a leader for school change in New York City's public schools, don't always agree, but their views serve to challenge and deepen CES ideas on what districts supportive to Essential schools should do.

For the most part, this issue focuses on what school districts are doing to improve high schools. Many of us can't help but ask, "Why isn't there more emphasis on change throughout the system? How should preK-8 experiences prepare students for academically challenging high schools?" In particular, high school improvement ought to raise the question of how districts can create educational pathways and craft a coordinated experience from grade to grade and school to school. Taken this way, high school reform should be not only an end unto itself but also a lever on the entire system.

This issue is truly a result of many collaborations, both with those interviewed and quoted in these pages and many others who shed light and helped me understand the role of the district in Essential school change. Many thanks to all to whom I spoke for your generously shared experiences, which will push other districts to consider how they, too, will scale up and make the most of small schools. For those of you focused on district-level change, if this issue resonates with you – or if you don't agree with what you find here – let us know by emailing your comments and experiences to jddavidson@essentialschools.org.

As always, many thanks to *Horace* subscribers and CES affiliates. Your commitment to CES makes it possible to share practices and ideas to strengthen our work, our schools, and the CES network. For more information on CES affiliation and *Horace* subscriptions, visit us online at www.essentialschools.org or call 501/433-1451.

Jill Davidson
Editor, *Horace*

Conditions for Small School Success in Boston: Lessons from the Pilot Schools

by Jill Davidson

Retired Boston deputy superintendent Juliette Johnson with Boston Day and Evening Academy graduate Faruq Hassan



W

hen the Boston Public Schools (BPS) open for business in the fall of 2005, 25 out of 34 Boston high schools each will enroll fewer than 500 students. Seven of those schools will be brand new, the results of the conversions of Hyde Park High School and West Roxbury High School. And the momentum to establish small schools in Boston remains strong, with clear district commitment to additional large high school conversions, an articulated vision of how small schools will increase student engagement and success, strong community and business partnerships, and funding for small school development from the Carnegie Corporation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Another factor, unique among cities using a small schools strategy to improve their high schools, is the existence of the Boston Pilot School Network. Boston is well known within the CES network for its Pilot schools, a group of 19 schools that model educational innovation and serve as sites for research and development for effective urban public schools. The Pilot school network is coordinated by the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE), CES's Boston affiliate center. The Pilot Schools (which include two Horace Mann schools, district-sponsored charter schools that belong to the Pilot School network to share knowledge and benefits) have autonomy over budget, staffing, governance, curriculum, and the school calendar – autonomies that create the conditions the schools

need to become the best places for teaching and learning for their unique communities. At the same time, they are full-fledged members of the Boston Public Schools district and educate the same cross-section of students that attend the rest of the city's high schools. Their documented academic successes have helped them fulfill their mission of influencing district policy, and the proliferation of small schools in the city is an obvious result.

Can Small Schools Be Successful without Pilot Conditions?

A decade of effort to secure the autonomies that make possible the Pilot schools' conditions for teaching and learning – not to mention the work of determining specific policies and relationships with the Boston Public Schools – has been challenging, detailed, and intense. Some policies have taken years to hammer out, and much of the work of negotiating with the district is, necessarily, ongoing. For many in Boston, this raises a question: how will the city's new small schools be as successful as the Pilots if they aren't in the Pilot school network and therefore don't benefit from the Pilots' autonomies? As Dan French, executive director of CCE, puts it, "How do you scale up while maintaining the integrity of the original concept and provide the intense support that pilots need?"

"A centralized, mandated reform process for all schools is antithetical to the Pilot philosophy. Urban school reform faces an uphill road unless schools get more control over their resources in exchange for increased school level accountability, with the teachers' union and district recast in a service provider role for schools. Those are conditions they need – all schools should have access to Pilot conditions, even though not all may want those conditions," continued French.

Larry Myatt, former headmaster of Fenway High School (a CES Mentor School and one of the first Pilot schools) currently works out of the Boston Public Schools Office of High School Renewal, also known as the Boston Small Schools Network. Assisted by partnerships with CCE, Jobs for the Future, the Boston Plan for Excellence, and the Boston Private Industry Council, the Office of High School Renewal coordinates and supports the work of the city's existing and emerging small high schools. Myatt notes, "For so long, the district has been about standardization, consistency, and uniformity, and now, to some extent, the culture is shifting. I hear from some people that they are reluctant to relinquish control because they worry about their own ability to address, accommodate, and answer questions – but this is a human foible, a natural anxiety. Right now, each deputy superintendent has 50 schools to worry about. What do they care about when they go to the schools? They don't get down to issues of organizational development, culture, or subtleties."

RELATED RESOURCE

For more on the Boston Pilot/Horace Mann Schools Network, see the Center for Collaborative Education's resources at

www.ccebos.org/pilotschools/bostonpilotschools.html



RELATED RESOURCE

The BPS High School Renewal and Boston Small Schools Network's website provides a powerful collection of resources that describe the ongoing small schools work in Boston, including links to approved small school design proposals, detailed working documents, information about programs and initiatives, school profiles, and a wealth of other resources that would help any community seeking to create small schools.

www.highschoolrenewal.org



Suggesting that just as teachers personalize for students and principals personalize for teachers, districts should personalize for schools, Myatt acknowledges, "It's hard at the district level to think of schools and their needs as idiosyncratic and differentiated, even though the district is building a portfolio of schools that respond to different student needs." Even at Fenway, with its Pilot autonomies, Myatt and the school's staff collided with the district's attempts to serve all of the schools across the board rather than on an "each according to its own needs" basis. "In the mid-90s, Fenway High School assessed its technology needs and did training," recalls Myatt. "The very next fall, the district came out

with a technology initiative setting out what everyone should get trained in. There was no assessment of where the schools were at or what they needed. It was a great idea, but ended up being an example of how schools are either not ready or more than ready for what the district gears up to do."

Boston Day and Evening Academy Head of School Meg Maccini advises small schools to be proactive and to understand their value in the system. "You have to form positive relationships, because it's not like the district is out there looking for ways to make your life easier." Boston Day and Evening Academy (BDEA), a Horace Mann charter school, is designed for students who are overage for their grade, parenting, dealing with obligations that make school attendance during customary hours challenging, or have otherwise not met success in more traditionally structured high schools. BDEA enrolls 190 students between the ages of 16 and 23. Maccini notes, "Boston Day and Evening Academy is a benefit to the district. We serve students for whom education hasn't worked, and in all kinds of ways, we need flexibility. We take repeaters, disruptive students, and kids who are behind the 8-ball off the hands of the district; we take responsibility for them. The district sees the need for us and leaves us alone, but we can opt into district programs such as their programs for English Language Learners, a district hands-on chemistry science initiative, and free computers in the classrooms for technology education. There are so many neat things that go on in Boston, as long as you're not mandated to do them if you know they won't work with the population that you're serving."

Planning at the Capillary Level

In order for the Pilot schools to benefit from the relationship with the district that BDEA enjoys, French and Myatt describe the hard, slow, but eventually successful work of creating agreements and policies, work that Myatt describes as "planning at the capillary level. We built back policy so the relationship was productive rather than just benign neglect. What books to buy? What services to get? We created policies about course titles and curriculum." In a similar vein, French describes crucial negotiations with the district to support narrative assessments that, as French says, "didn't fit onto the district mainframe. District computer programs shouldn't drive Pilot assessment. CCE and the Pilot schools collaborated with the district to engineer a fix that would support the assessment practices of the Pilot school within the district system."

In another show of support to Pilot school practices, the district modified its graduation policy. Starting in 2005, graduates can follow one of three graduation pathways: 1. the traditional course sequence, 2. a modified sequence in which humanities courses equal standard English and history requirements, or, 3. as the policy states, "A school can develop its own list of required courses that meet state standards and are approved by the Boston Public Schools." As Myatt says, "Thomas Payzant, our longtime superintendent, knows that we're hemorrhaging kids of color. Kids are not being promoted due to over-reliance on tests and lockdown promotion standards, so we have 18-year old eighth graders. We wanted to cut through that with a more developmental policy that allows



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you to be promoted in the areas where you've demonstrated competence and allows more innovation at the school level. It's the result of a couple of hard, slow, tedious years looking at data. The benefits are that the district trusts schools to remediate and get kids up to speed in all areas. Schools can embed values and collaborations into classrooms, and that's what makes teachers passionate."

However, the third graduation pathway allowing school innovation is currently open only to a select group of schools that includes the Pilot Schools, the Horace Mann charters, and any high school in the district that meets the criteria of adopting

a set of competencies and curriculum that meets or exceeds the rigor of the conventional district graduation requirements and course sequence. This may include the newest small schools in the city that were created as the result of conversions as long as there is ample support to assist schools wanting to adopt the third graduation pathway. The worry, says Myatt, is that "the central office

isn't engaged at the capillary level to ensure that small schools aren't big schools. The district still provides tools for large schools and uniformity."

"It's the conditions, not the specific tools and practices, that enable greater innovation to occur," says French "It took the district a number of years to get that the primary lesson was the concept of providing schools maximum control over resources in exchange for increased accountability. Now the district is supportive of more schools voting to go Pilot. At the same time, with the small high school rollout initiative, the district is beginning to recognize that there are some practices worth looking at: focusing the majority of resources on the core academic program, advisories, and more integrated curriculum."



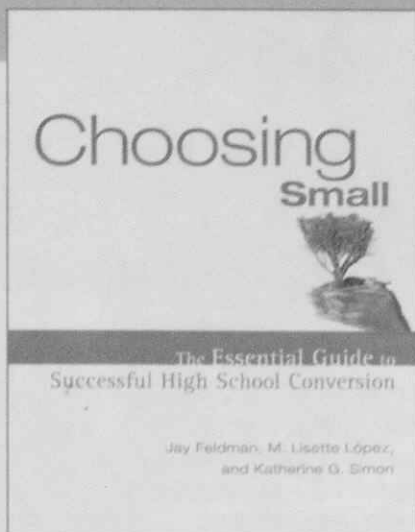
Teacher Eileen Bouvier with BDEA graduates Christine Berzevill and Janelle Bowers



Boston Day and Evening valedictorian Laura Gibau celebrates with one of her twin daughters

In response to the contrast between the Pilot schools' autonomies and the more traditional district conditions into which the city's newest small schools are emerging, French suggests that the new small schools will have to find ways to network and represent their needs to the district in unified ways. "In 1997, a CCE budget analysis demonstrated that six of our then nine schools were underfunded – that's what prompted the Pilot schools to form a strong network and speak with one voice. And over time, the network has created allegiance and the opportunity to share practices through monthly leadership meetings, shared professional development, and Pilot school youth gatherings. And though there is still more work to do, we've developed district capacity to support school change." ■

An Excerpt from *Choosing Small: The Essential Guide to High School Conversion*



In October 2005, Jossey-Bass releases *Choosing Small: The Essential Guide to High School Conversion* by CES Director of Research Jay Feldman, and former CES staffers M. Lisette López and Katherine G. Simon. In *Choosing Small*, CES draws on its long-time experience in school design and research on completed school conversions to provide strategic

and practical guidance, offering those creating new small autonomous schools information for achieving the complex process of dividing large schools into small schools that effectively educate all students.

The Role of a Transformed District

By providing schools with autonomies and flexibility, the district moves from mandating and monitoring reforms to keeping schools focused on their own unique missions and visions and on improving their instructional practice. The district leads and facilitates policies and practices that enable schools to use their autonomy effectively and make decisions that are central to their vision of instruction. The district must reorganize its whole relationship with schools – its policies and its responsibilities – if it is to provide small schools the conditions and autonomies they need to be successful. We see two new roles.

First, district central offices buffer noninstructional issues, mediate conflicts, and provide those services that are not cost- or time-effective for schools to do on their own or are not part of their core mission. Districts can do work that is easier to do centrally and that takes away from a school's ability to implement its vision.

In one sense, the district becomes a service provider. The district makes many central office costs discretionary, and so becomes more accountable to the needs of each school.

Schools can choose to access certain discretionary services or they can instead have the per-pupil funds that the service would cost placed in their lump sum budget. The district needs to work with schools to assess the value of the services on offer and make decisions about which services to staff and fund, which to restructure, and which to phase out because too few schools regard them as valuable enough to buy.

Katrina Scott-George, special assistant to the state adviser in the Oakland Unified School District, which has given significant autonomy to schools, believes that districts need to evaluate their operations: "all of the decisions that we're making about where services are located or who has control over those services to determine who is best positioned to fulfill that role." Schools want to have a say over their lives: the "actual high-leverage decisions and things that the schools need to control as opposed to those that just bog them down in administrative and operational tasks that somebody else could do better."

Too often districts provide poor services to schools and so schools believe that if they could only get control over that activity, they would receive better service. This is not necessarily the case; given equal care and attention, some services really are best provided centrally rather than locally. But it may take the threat of competition to inspire the district to develop an organizational structure responsive enough to support improving teaching and learning.

Second, the district provides services and support to enable each school to achieve its stated goals and mission. Its staff co-create policies with schools that help schools focus on instruction. For example, districts can manage school accountability practices, helping schools to implement continuous improvement cycles and working with schools to use data effectively to identify and address needs. In the process, districts should model both the types of practices expected and the relationships that it wants to have in schools. For example, if we want to see engaged, hands-on learning in classrooms, superintendents should model this approach when they meet with principals, who in turn model this in their faculty meetings. You would then expect to see teachers doing the same in every classroom in the school. By reorganizing the district with this approach, school and district staff can develop relationships and deep understandings of one another. ■

When We Know Better, We Do Better: A Study of System Change in Humble, Texas

by Jill Davidson

Quest High School students Katie Barnes, Tiffany Moore, and Lisa Cummings at Jesse Jones Park and Nature Center during a water quality service project



In the Humble Independent School District, the road to restructuring has become Highway 59, a refurbished highway running north from Houston. Connecting suburban Humble, Texas to Houston, it has encouraged significant growth in the affordable housing sector and corresponding demographic change for Humble, according to Assistant Superintendent for Learning Cecilia Hawkins. Highway 59 delivered sheer numerical expansion and a new diversity of students, characterized by more English language learners and students with varied levels of preparation for formal schooling. In response, in 2002 Humble passed a \$230,000,000 bond measure to build Atascocita and Kingwood Park High Schools and redesign its existing elementary, middle, and high schools. Scheduled to open in 2006, Atascocita is designed to relieve severe overcrowding at Humble's two currently jam-packed comprehensive high schools, Kingwood High School with 3,900 students and Humble High School with over 4,000 students. Kingwood Park will occupy a fully renovated existing building and open in 2007. As you think about those numbers, be aware that they keep on coming – the district anticipates 10,000 additional students within the next decade.

Bigger and Better

For many communities, simply keeping up with this precipitous growth would be an achievement. Humble employed the impetus of demographic change to create and enact a vision of meaningful, personalized and academically challenging teaching and learning. The 2002 bond measure was not, in fact, the first response to the community's growth; a \$217,000,000 bond measure was defeated earlier that year because it didn't include plans for high school expansion and improvement, specifically the addition of new high schools to ease overcrowding. Knowing that this meant that they had to pay closer attention to concern about the community's attention to the condition of the district's high schools, Hawkins and her district colleagues created the High School of the Future Task Force, a community-wide conversation that led to a vision of challenging, engaging, personalized education and, ultimately, the 2002 funding measure.

The High School of the Future Task force succeeded in leveraging the community's call for more high schools with its commitment to improved K-12 education. Inspired by its experience with the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Houston Annenberg Challenge (now the Houston A+ Challenge) through Quest High School, a 400-student CES Mentor School, Humble has not only put into place a process to remake its high schools but it has reorganized its entire district, creating vertical educational pathways for all students, planning backwards from high school through middle school and the elementary grades to create consistent communication and expectations from start to finish. "We knew we could not let this massive growth distract us from the core business of learning," says Hawkins, who left Quest High School after four years as principal to take an assistant superintendent position leading the High School of the Future Task Force. In her current role, Hawkins oversees the attendance zone anchored by Humble High School, one of Humble's three vertical educational pathways.

Economies of scale prevailed, and Atascocita High School will serve 2,400 students grouped in six houses, each a self-contained small learning community with its own leadership, professional learning community, and culture. The bond measure, which was followed by another in 2005, also provides funds to renovate all of Humble's high schools to foster service learning integrated with academics, advisories, and other hallmarks of small, self-directed, collaborative, and academically challenging learning communities. When Kingwood Park High School joins Atascocita, Kingwood, Humble and Quest in 2007, the district will complete a gradual rollout of an entirely remade high school experience. "Our political reality is that we can't have schools of 500 students, but we can't use the excuse of largeness not to do our best work," observes Paula Almond, Kingwood High School's longtime principal. "When we know better, we do better."

Form Follows Function

Lawrence Kohn, principal of Quest High School, stresses that the design of Atascocita and redesign of the existing high schools will create new school structures that will allow the district to achieve its goals of personalized, challenging, equitable education. "I know a lot of districts are doing conversions," Kohn notes. "But I don't know how many tear out the insides of the schools to create the structures so the culture can grow to support what we envision."

Necessarily, the district redesign also affects positions and roles within the schools and central office. Kohn describes, "A principal and a counselor will be assigned to each small learning community. Rather than a typical assistant principal who does 'books, butts, and buses,' that role will shift to being a facilitator of learning for teachers. Those people will be instructional leaders, proactive as change agents, rather than seeing kids in trouble all day." By focusing more intensely on academics, this role shift at the school level echoes the district-level changes produced by the district's vertical pathway reorganization.

Quest is the Space Shuttle

Almond and Hawkins credit Quest High School as a catalyst for its vision and implementation of personalized, relevant, and challenging high schools. Almond describes Quest's role in *Star Trek* terms. "People have said that Quest is a space shuttle, continually spanning the horizon for what's new out there and Kingwood is the Starship Enterprise to which the space shuttle brings information and ideas." Almond values an ongoing collaborative relationship between Quest and Kingwood, citing Quest's frequent invitations to Kingwood personnel to the Fall Forum and other CES gatherings as well as intra-district conversation and influence. This local and national exposure to Coalition principles in practice established the necessary groundwork for Kingwood's shift in teaching styles and accompanying new professional habits and demands. "We're starting to see a culture shift which matches the research that says in a large school, change will take seven to ten years," says Almond. "We have brought this to our school in tiny baby steps. People thought they didn't have to change – our school was perceived as successful, but we weren't serving students as well as we could or in the ways that the future demanded."

District-Wide Culture of Learning

As a result of changed expectations for teachers, Almond describes some staff turnover, but believes that the kind of high schools Humble is creating will attract strong teaching candidates. As Texas teachers do not have collective bargaining, the union has not been a factor – positive or negative – in teachers' input about their working conditions. In fact, Humble's educational changes are very much "home grown" – the district has a strong history of creating compelling career paths for its long-time employees, thus preserving and effec-

tively utilizing investments and knowledge. Quest principal Kohn was recently tapped to become Atascocita's new principal, following in Hawkins' tradition of taking innovation from Quest to scale in the district. Kingwood principal Almond is moving to an assistant superintendent slot, overseeing the vertically organized educational pathways anchored by Atascocita High School.

"We constantly have to be looking at changes happening in the district," notes Assistant Superintendent Hawkins. One of Humble ISD characteristics is its habit of creating systems for preserving, analyzing, and making wise use of knowledge about its demographic, cultural, and other conditions that affect educational quality. "Demographics, standardized assessment, governance, more transportation needed because of special needs programs – we have to constantly be watching for those indicators," Hawkins continues. "What are the implications of additional Hispanic students? What if our test scores are not in line with the 10-year trend of scores? What does this tell us about the nature of how we're doing business? We know we need to evaluate those factors on a deeper level."

Along with this central office habit of proactive, data-based decision making, principals Kohn and Almond attribute commitment to the recommendations of the High Schools of the Future Task Force as a key factor in the district's educational revamp. "They are very visionary and not scared to take risks," says Kohn. "Quest is a tremendous risk, and they have always supported us." Kohn also cited as a crucial success factor Superintendent Dr. Guy Sconzo's ability to stay in touch with the schools' ongoing conditions and needs through a regular schedule of extended visits, open communication policy, and support for the district's vision, which was in the process of development as Sconzo joined the district from the Oklahoma City interim superintendency. Almond agrees, noting, "When the people running the school district are learners also, you don't have to worry about student achievement and learning – it will happen. Central office personnel and school board members in Humble are committed to their own learning."



Quest facilitator Alyssa Howell works with seniors Jessica Gamez and Tara Haladyna on a precalculus physics project