

The Journal of the Coalition of Essential Schools

horace

Innovation in Education



Using Advocacy and Communication to Create and Sustain Essential Schools

Challenging Bad Education Policy: Making the Pendulum Swing in New York State

Ann Cook and Phyllis Tashlik of the New York Performance Standards Consortium discuss the challenges presented to performance-based assessment by the New York State Department of Education and the path to a significant victory – important both in New York and nationwide – against the dominance of high stakes standardized tests.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Small School, Big Influence: Amy Biehl High School Tells Its Story

Albuquerque's Amy Biehl High School developed a communication and advocacy strategy that has resulted in key legislative changes and the financial and political capital to make the school building of its dreams a reality.

Horace Talks with Steve Jubb: How BayCES Has Built Alliances and Challenged the Status Quo

CES National's Brett Bradshaw talks with Steve Jubb, Executive Director of the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, about how to create alliances to change district policies.

Strategic Communication for Essential Schools: Advice from Christine Heenan

Christine Heenan, CES National Board member, suggests strategies for creating powerful messages about your school or affiliate center's mission and accomplishments.

Where to Go for More Resources for More on Using Advocacy and Communication to Create and Sustain Essential Schools

Book Reviews

- *Sent to the Principal* by Kathleen Cushman
- *Taught by America* by Sarah Sentilles

While much of the Consortium's recent work has been characterized by an anti-high stakes standardized tests stance, focused on the legal challenges that schools using performance-based assessment face, its main work has been the creation of a broad-based system of performance-based assessment that calibrates expectations and standards not only within a school but among schools. Such a system ensures validity and reliability while preserving autonomy for individual teachers and schools. The Consortium suggests that to support performance assessment as a whole-school based accountability system, schools need to implement six components:

Active learning:

- Discussion-based classrooms
- Project-based assignments
- Original research and experiment design
- Student choice embedded in course work

Formative and summative documentation:

- Transcripts of previous school history including attendance and grades
- An intake process that includes interview and writing samples
- Cumulative documentation: attendance, course performance, tests
- Student reports
- Parent teacher conferences
- Staff review of work patterns and work products

Strategies for corrective action:

- Feedback on written work
- Narrative reports
- Student teacher conferences
- Parent teacher conferences
- After-school homework labs
- Peer tutoring

Multiple ways for students to express and exhibit learning:

- Writing: literary essays, research papers, playwriting, poetry, lyrics
- Oral presentations: discussions, debate, poetry reading, dramatic presentation, external presentations
- Artistic renderings: sculpture, painting, drawing, photography

Graduation level performance-based tasks aligned with Learning Standards:

- Analytic literary essay
- Social Studies research paper
- Original science experiment
- Application of higher level mathematics

A focus on professional development:

- School-based and Center-based workshops that strengthen inquiry-based teaching
- Sessions reviewing student work and teacher assignments
- Opportunities to critique student presentations and scoring procedures
- Mentoring of less experienced teachers by master teachers
- Refining rubrics and reviewing performance assessment processes
- Support for school-based research

Adapted from the New York Performance Standards Consortium website: <http://www.performanceassessment.org/performance/pcomponents.htm>. In addition to these components, the Consortium's website provides sample rubrics, curriculum resources, and more information aimed at creating and sustaining performance based assessment systems.

will demonstrate over time that students can succeed when teaching and curriculum, rather than testing regimens and punishments, define assessment.

The lessons of this hard-won, improbable victory are clear and urgent:

- Attention must refocus on the classroom: on texts, not testing manuals; on critical thinking skills, not testing drills; on complex writing assignments, not formulaic essay tests; on advanced math skills and scientific problem solving, not rote memorization; on probing discussion and debate, not platitudes and clichés.
- Teachers, other educators, and parents must reassert the centrality of the classroom as the starting point for education policy, not the dead-end for top-down orders. As Doug Christiansen, Nebraska Commissioner of Education has said, the classroom is the heart of the education system. We must "provide educators with the ability to take the leadership" for unless we do, "change isn't going to happen."
- Policymakers need to promote alternatives that work. They need to visit more schools; listen to those who work closest with children about their experiences; study the abundant research that has been published on good teaching practices; and ensure that policies permit flexibility to meet the diverse needs of children and school communities.

Bad education policies damage children. The victory in New York shows us that changing bad policy is something worth fighting for. Despite formidable opposition, change can occur and people just like us – teachers, parents, students, and allies from every corner – can make it happen. ■

Notes and references:

Information about "Average National ACT Score Unchanged in 2005; Students Graduate from High School Ready or Not" is available at <http://www.act.org/news/releases/2005/8-17-05.html>

"The Elderly Man and the Sea? Test Sanitizes Literary Texts," by N. R. Kleinfeld, New York Times, June 2, 2002 is available at http://performanceassessment.org/articles/pa_elderlyman.html

"Pencils Down! The State Edits the Classics," by Rebecca Mead, The New Yorker, June 10, 2002 is available at http://www.newyorker.com/talk/content/?020610ta_talk_mead

The New York Performance Standards Consortium's Center for Inquiry Regents exam critiques are available at <http://performanceassessment.org/consequences/ccritiques.html>

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.



Interested in starting a new, small Essential school with the CES Small Schools Project?

Now in its third year, the CES Small Schools Project has grown to include a network of more than 35 schools including CES mentor schools, start-up schools, new schools created from large comprehensive high schools, as well as new school design teams. Many of the leading small schools educators from exemplary CES schools across the country are involved in the project.

We are looking for our third cohort of new school design teams to come on board the summer of 2006 to design and plan to open schools in the fall of 2007. The call for letters of intent will be released on December 1, 2005 and are due January 13, 2006. Visit www.essentialschools.org for details.

Join us as we create the next generation of Essential schools!



Small School, Big Influence: Amy Biehl High School Tells Its Story

by Jill Davidson

May 2005 press conference kicking off Phase II of Amy Biehl High School's renovation project. Tony Monfiletto, ABHS CEO and co-founder is at the microphone. With him are Luisa Casso, President of the Downtown Action Team and Katherine Slick, Director of the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Department.

Amy Biehl High School has developed a clear message about its mission and program, allocated resources for communication and outreach efforts, joined a consortium of schools with common goals, found help when possible and as needed, and involved everyone schoolwide in spreading the word about its accomplishments and goals. As a result, the school has raised nearly four million dollars for a new school building, has helped change facilities funding policy for charter schools statewide, and has begun to raise expectations in its community for what high school students can achieve.

In 1999, Tony Monfiletto and a small group of educators eager to act on opportunities presented by New Mexico's newly enacted charter school legislation founded Amy Biehl High School (ABHS) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. As 2005 draws to a close, the school has 21 teachers and staff members, 200 students, and is preparing to graduate its third class. It features a college co-enrollment program – to graduate, students must pass two college classes. ABHS has a waiting list of 80 students and has been named a CES Mentor School. In January 2006, the school is moving into a completely renovated historic building at the center of Albuquerque's downtown revitalization, the first downtown school in 30 years. ABHS has also become an advocacy leader among New Mexico's charter schools, weaving lobbying and outreach efforts into its educational mission to create better policy and legislative conditions for the state's charter schools.

ABHS has raised nearly four million dollars from federal, state and private sources to secure its new home, a 1908 federal post office and government office building. At the same time, the New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools, a statewide charter school consortium in which ABHS has emerged as a leader, lobbied for and achieved 20 million dollars over five years in lease subsidies for charter school facilities statewide, a key policy change to support and sustain the state's growing charter school movement.

ABHS balanced the tremendous demands of starting a new school, taking on a major fundraising effort, and modifying legislation by clearly, strategically, and consistently communicating its goals, practices, and needs to legislators and the local community. Monfiletto and other ABHS founders knew that the school's survival depended on deploying their limited resources toward the goal of understanding, acceptance, and support – financial and otherwise – from New Mexico's politicians and policymakers and the Albuquerque business and nonprofit communities.

Externally, ABHS secured assistance from outside the school community from political and communications professionals – pro bono and paid – sympathetic to the school's goals. Internally, ABHS found ways to spread its message within its own school community, empowering its students, staff, board, and community of family and friends to advocate and build relationships on the school's behalf.

About the School

Co-founded by Tony Monfiletto and Tom Siegel, previously teachers at a large, comprehensive Albuquerque high school, ABHS filed the first charter school application in New Mexico. Monfiletto and Siegel seized the opportunity to create a new small school dedicated to academic success and community service. ABHS educates a diverse population representative of the Albuquerque public schools: 50% Hispanic, 10% Native American, and the remainder white or multiethnic. Twenty percent of its students receive special education services and 40% come from low income households. The school uses an application and lottery system for admissions.

ABHS operates as a year-round school, starting the academic year in July. In addition to requiring concurrent college enroll-

Amy Biehl High School was named for Amy Biehl, a young woman who attended high school in New Mexico and later died tragically while working to end apartheid in South Africa. State Senator Jerry Ortiz y Pino says, "You have to give credit to Tony [Monfiletto] and Tom [Siegel] when they selected the name Amy Biehl. Whenever they retell the story, you watch the students' eyes get wide. It's powerful and influential and is in no small measure part of their success that they named the school for someone who was so inspiring."

Learn more about Amy Biehl's life and work at <http://www.amybiehl.org>.

ment, the school expects its students to earn an average of 75% or more to pass a class and requires twice-yearly demonstrations of learning for students to demonstrate what they know and can do. The values and practice of community service are infused into its structure and curriculum, culminating in a service-based senior project.

Getting Professional Help: Working with a Lobbyist

Before embarking on this teaching career, Tony Monfiletto, ABHS's co-founder, worked in politics and policymaking as a staff member for the state's Legislative Education Study Committee as a finance and budget work analyst. That experience prepared him for the political realities that the state's first charter school would face. Monfiletto says, "We knew right away we'd need help. I came in with a high competency but even with that, I couldn't run the school, raise money, and keep state policy environment favorable. I knew we needed people who are smart, see the big picture, and want to help."

Nearly immediately, ABHS faced funding and facilities challenges. The school incorporates civic participation into its curriculum, frequently requiring students to work outside of the school building, but was located in a leased building far from many opportunities. Making matters worse, the state funding formula provided no relief, requiring charter schools to pull funds from their operating budgets to lease facilities, draining resources from salaries and programs.

Monfiletto turned to Mike Puelle, a lobbyist who, with partner Eric Griego, runs Engaging Communication, a political consulting firm. Puelle agreed to lobby on behalf of ABHS and the approximately 40-member New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools. Puelle planned to harness the "logic of collective action" so the charter schools could achieve their common goals. By pooling their resources, they were able to secure Puelle's lobbying services, establishing a sustained presence at the state legislature to represent their concerns. Puelle notes, "All of the other interests have people up there all the time. School districts, school boards, teachers – they all have lobbyists." New Mexico's charter schools realized that they needed similar representation, and Monfiletto, with his prior policy-



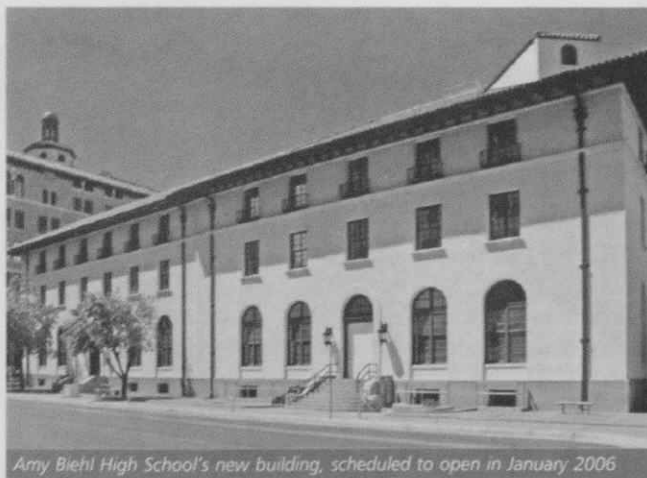
Amy Biehl High School sophomore Erin Crooks in math class

making experience, provided key connections between school leaders, necessarily focused on the daily demands of running a school, and the bigger political picture in which they operate.

When Puelle first met with the New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools in 2001, his immediate need was to understand the schools' most pressing concerns. "A professional obsession of mine is priority setting," says Puelle. "Issues in education, like health care, are large and complex, full of nuances and conflict, and require incremental prioritization. So you have to identify the key issues. You can't talk about eight things. Legislators are dealing with thousands of things. When we get our little bit of attention, we need to know our key message that we will leave them with." The matter of lease subsidies emerged as the charter schools' top priority. After building relationships and solidifying a presence, Puelle and the schools successfully lobbied the legislature to pass the charter school lease program in 2004, and increased the per pupil maximum payment in 2005 to ensure that all funds were being used.

Amy Biehl High School's New Home

While the larger question of how charter schools would pay for facilities was being resolved, Amy Biehl High School looked for its own suitable, long-term home, eventually setting its sights on an unused but historically significant federally owned building centrally located in downtown Albuquerque. The building's location allowed students and staff to use pub-



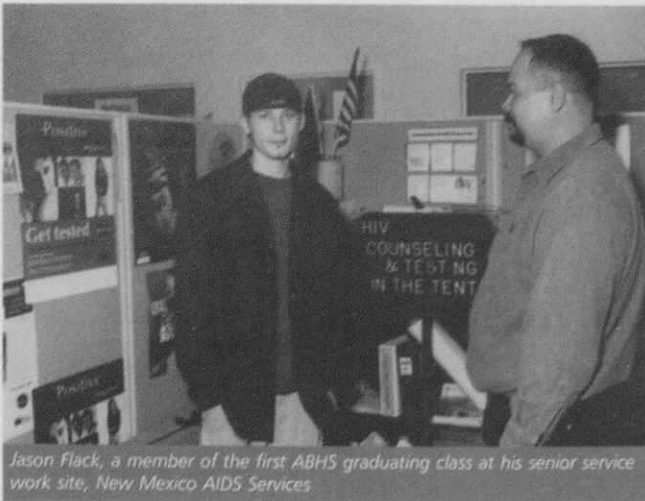
Amy Biehl High School's new building, scheduled to open in January 2006

lic transportation and was ideal for the school's focus on community service and outreach, with downtown businesses, community services, and arts organizations within easy reach. But the building was in rough shape; not intended for school use, it required asbestos and lead paint removal, system updates, and seismic retrofitting.

While finding funding for such extensive renovation – not to mention the lease payments – was a formidable obstacle, the school elicited two million dollars over three years from legislative appropriations. Twenty-two legislators, half Democrats, half Republicans, and the Governor's office made contributions. State grants and funds from the public school capital outlay council comprise the remainder of the funding. In addition, the newly created charter school lease subsidy program freed up \$120,000 a year in operating funds.

The legislative fundraising effort focused on spreading the word about the school's academic strengths as exemplified by its concurrent college enrollment requirement, a key distinguishing factor that set ABHS apart. "All of our students have to transition to college. No matter how they've been labeled, they all do it. While it's a risky endeavor to set a graduation standard that's so finite and tangible, it allows us to communicate our vision really well. It trumps any standardized test or compilation of credits. People get it: it's clear, nonpolitical, equitable and accountable, and it defines success. There may be better standards, but I don't know of one," says Monfiletto.

Responses from the school's internal and external audiences demonstrate that the message is getting through. Former Albuquerque Public Schools superintendent and current ABHS board member Jack Bobroff says that the school is not only changing lives but also minds about what high school can be. "We've come to realize that in a charter school, with a smaller setting, it's possible to do something with students that isn't going to happen in a larger high school of 2,000. Amy Biehl provides a setting for those kids to find themselves and be involved in something worthwhile. The pupil-teacher ratio is small enough, and there's a commitment on part of our staff to meet the needs of kids." Jerry Ortiz y Pino, an Albuquerque Democratic State Senator, agrees that ABHS's has shifted public opinion toward expecting more from all high schools. "College co-enrollment has created a new standard for charter schools in New Mexico," says Ortiz y Pino. "Many have



Jason Flack, a member of the first ABHS graduating class at his senior service work site, New Mexico AIDS Services

adopted policies of requiring or at least encouraging college. Amy Biehl has influenced charter schools – and public schools – by showing that students are ready for so much more. Yet it's still not common for students to get more from the public schools." Charter schools educate 20% of Albuquerque's students, so their practices may well create higher expectations for high schools and their students throughout the district.

State Senator Ortiz y Pino says, "Amy Biehl High School got legislative funding because their reputation is so excellent and because what they're doing is so neat. They are both restoring a landmark building and are becoming a real force for the revitalization of downtown Albuquerque." Ortiz y Pino says that ABHS's grasp of the political process and persistence made the funding possible. "Tony [Monfiletto] has become well respected by the governor, by the staff of the public education department, and by key decision-makers in the state. For seven years he's gone to meetings. His advice has been good and his counsel has been wise; people trust him. The nitty-gritty of building policy demands cooperation. You get results not just for the volume of the position but how well thought out it is and how consistent you are in sticking to it."

Mark Boitano, a Republican State Senator from Albuquerque, agrees and notes the value of ABHS's new location. "In terms of downtown redevelopment, Amy Biehl High School has created a vision of the role of a world-class education downtown. I sell homes for a living. A school like Amy Biehl changes the impression that families will have about the downtown area. Good education influences economic development and growth downtown."

Emphasis on Communications and Fundraising

Puelle also advised ABHS on its communications strategy. "You have a thousand things to do, but one thing on the top ten has to be getting the good news of your school out to the community." But, as always in schools, time and capacities are sorely limited. "Most schools understand that it's important to build relationships and tell their story," says Tony Monfiletto, "But often it's the last thing to get done and it's an add-on. You have to treat it as the way you work. Communicating about why and what you do is an important function of the school that enables you to get work done. We communicate

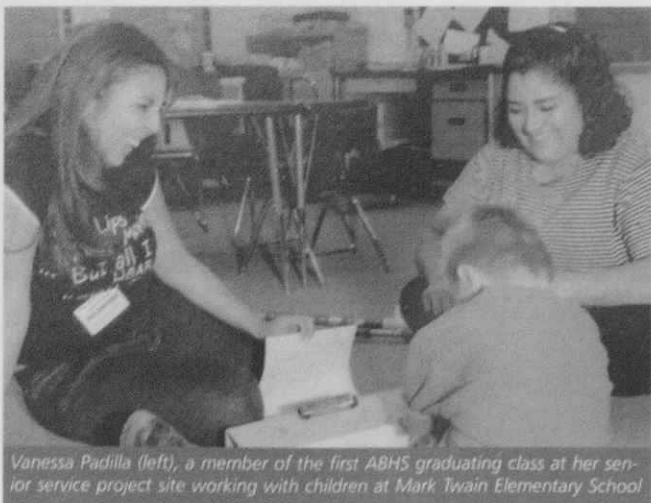
Tony Monfiletto, CEO and co-founder of Amy Biehl High School, offers additional thoughts on the components for ABHS's capital and civic successes:

"The board of Amy Biehl High School has been instrumental to our success. They are a group of tireless community leaders who have given the school much-needed heft with the legislature, city council, and philanthropic community. Most importantly, they have helped by giving me good counsel when dealing with very complicated and politically charged issues. Board development is crucial: schools need experienced and seasoned community leaders from multiple sectors who will roll up their sleeves and lend their credibility to get something great done. We literally would not be at this place at this time with the building and community at large if not for these business, legal, political, and community leaders."

our vision because we needed a building. But no one gives you money for a building. People give money for what the school is about and what it is doing."

ABHS staff realized that such work was crucial to the school's future, and hired Lisa McCulloch as Advancement Director in 2003. A close ally to the school – McCulloch's husband Frank McCulloch is an ABHS humanities teacher – McCulloch focuses on communications and fundraising for the move into the new property. The fundraising task was formidable: though the legislature and governor came through with funding, the school's capital campaign has raised nearly two million dollars above and beyond the state funding. McCulloch observes, "Tony was wise in realizing that a head of school couldn't do it all; our resources are in the classroom and we're really thin administratively. The year before I started, he was pulled away from school every day. Now I can also represent the school at receptions, conferences, wherever we can cultivate relationships. My role is to serve as a voice for the school in the community." Currently, McCulloch's salary is funded by foundation grants dedicated to assisting with the expenses of moving the school. As the school finally moves into its new space at the start of 2006, her role will likely evolve into more of an advocacy and fundraising position for the school's education reform initiatives.

The kind of consistent positive public attention required to raise such significant funds doesn't just happen on its own, says McCulloch. "People aren't going to know about what's happening unless you make a concerted effort to get the word out. We have gotten extraordinary media coverage because of incessant press releases and good relationships. My goal has been to make the cover of every local daily and weekly." Mike Puelle agrees, suggesting, "Regularly invite legislators and reporters to your school events, but don't just invite them to preplanned events. Ask them to the school for a special tour. Build relationships. Sooner or later, you'll strike gold. You want to do this for positive reasons, because you're



Vanessa Padilla (left), a member of the first ABHS graduating class at her senior service project site working with children at Mark Twain Elementary School

doing wonderful things and deserve to share them, but when weirdness does happen, you don't want that to be the first time your school makes the papers."

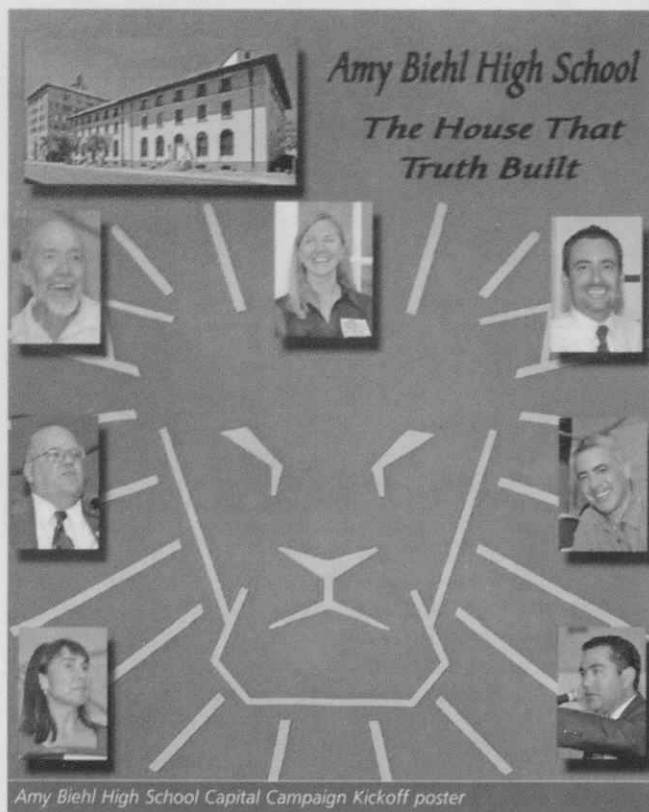
Impact on Students

ABHS's emphasis on speaking out and community service make advocacy a natural pursuit for its students, and among the causes they have embraced is the secure future of their school, often accompanying McCulloch, Monfiletto, or Puelle on lobbying, public relations, or fundraising efforts. Tina Garcia-Shams, teacher and senior project manager, believes that ABHS students' ability to speak about their school experience has made a tremendous difference. "Our ability to get into the new building, not just financially but being accepted by the community, has a lot to do with when the kids spoke at a city council meeting. People see that what we're asking for is not a political ploy but is real life impacting kids, and they are much more willing to listen to what students have to say. They had a big impact on what legislators decided."

Barbara Bradbury, a sophomore, participated as a lobbyist at the state capital's Charter School Day, meeting with lawmakers and telling them about ABHS. The political education was real and immediate as she realized the necessity and challenge of staying "on message" in a heated political environment that included a march for gay and lesbian rights. "A few of us

got involved with the march," recalls Bradbury. "That wasn't smart on my part. I was representing my school and that might have affected the way they looked at us. I began to understand that when trying to pass my bill, I can't get involved with issues that are really controversial. I learned how to support my ideas without getting involved in separate issues. When I am lobbying for my school, my goal has to be to raise

"To make a great dream come true, the first requirement is a great capacity to dream; the second is persistence."
— Cesar Chavez. Posted in Amy Biehl High School math teacher Shalini Shanker's classroom.



Amy Biehl High School Capital Campaign Kickoff poster

enough money for my building. I can't just be there to represent my own ideas."

Garcia-Shams draws the connection between ABHS's academic requirements and students' advocacy work. "Twice a year, our kids are required to stand up, present their work, think on their feet, and interact with a panel answering questions. Those skills have been necessary and important in the work that they do outside of the school. So many kids think, 'I'm just a kid. I make no difference.' When they work for what they believe outside the school, they see that young people can participate and make a difference. That is what creates citizens who understand that they have the responsibility to be heard." **h**

Developing your news-making capacity: workshops and other hands-on services

Many Essential schools and affiliate centers seek ways to garner positive media coverage and to be known well – and accurately – in their communities. Here are some resources for deepening your school or organization's capacity for press and public relations so you can get your message out in the way you want, when you want. The organizations featured here are a sample of what's available; while many are regionally based, offering hands-on workshops, all are useful to Essential schools nationwide. If these organizations aren't in your area, call local university communications departments, talk to local communications professionals, and use the Internet to find local resources that can help.

The Community Media Workshop

Based in Chicago, the Community Media Workshop helps nonprofit activists and journalists tell the stories of "the neighborhoody Chicago, the gritty real Chicago, where problems linger, and solutions are created by citizens noisily exercising their democratic rights." With a strong focus on Chicago-area school reform issues, the Community Media Workshop sponsors frequent workshops on getting into the news, and offers resources useful to education activists nationwide. Its "PR Tips" section is useful to any organization seeking to improve its communications; its "Guided Press Release Creator" walks you through writing a press release is a real gift. The site's Resources section includes a nationwide guide to similar organizations.

<http://www.newstips.org/>

The Spin Project

Based in San Francisco, the Spin Project serves Bay Area and national nonprofits seeking to improve their communications capacity and effectiveness. The Spin Project features the Spin Academy, a five-day summer retreat aimed at helping activists craft messages and frame debates – a useful event for many CES educators from the Bay Area and beyond. As well, the Spin Project's Resources section includes online tutorials in Strategic Communications Planning, Developing Relationships with Reporters, Community Organizing and Strategic Communications, and News Releases. The Resources section also features a useful strategic communications plan generator, an online tool that can provide a framework for building a long-term communications strategy.

<http://spinproject.org/>

Assessment Reform Network's Media Guide

This online guide, produced by anti-high stakes standardized testing FairTest, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, guides activists through the process of building relationships with media organizations, looking at the pros and cons of various tools including press releases, calendar listings, public demonstrations, press conferences, and more. Because FairTest focuses specifically on the education world, its media guide is particularly useful to school people, and it is general rather than particular to a region.

<http://www.fairtest.org/arn/ARNmediaGuide.html>

Media Awareness Network

This organization, based in Ontario, Canada, provides lesson plans and other resources for developing media literacy among students and adults, a key component in a school community seeking to become press-savvy.

<http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/index.cfm>

Communications Consortium Media Center

The Communications Consortium Media Center (CCMC), located in Washington, DC, focuses its work on helping nonprofits use communications strategies to create policy change. While it does not offer in-person workshops, the CCMC website provides extensive suggestions and ideas for getting your message into the media, particularly in its Media Tips and Training Section. Don't miss "A Guide for Placing Op-Eds and Letters to the Editor," a concise and practical overview of how to get into local and national newspapers; this section includes contact information and specific instructions for placing op-eds and letters to the editor in the top 100 newspapers in the United States.

<http://www.ccmc.org>

Media Relations Toolkit - Benton Foundation

This 2002 guide from the Benton Foundation provides a multifaceted and multisourced overview of creating lasting relationships with various forms of media, including digital/online media outlets. This toolkit links to "Strategic Communications in the digital age," a related guide that steers an organization through the steps and strategies of planning and executing a media campaign. The Benton Foundation's toolkits broadly present the practice of communications, suggesting ways to work not only with online, radio, print, television and other media but also offering suggestions for creating partnerships with community groups, foundations, and other nonprofit entities.

<http://www.benton.org/publibrary/toolkits/mediarelations.html>



Strategic Communication for Essential Schools: Advice from Christine Heenan

Educators have to wear many hats. Should they add that of communications professional to their collection – and if so, what are the best ways for them to spend their limited time, money, and other resources on creating the capacity for clear, effective communication in their schools?

Christine Heenan, a CES National board member, has been a communications consultant to education reform efforts from Seattle to Maine, as well as points in between. Her firm, Providence, Rhode Island-based Clarendon Group, has worked for CES National and several of its affiliate centers, the National Turning Points Network, author and educator Tony Wagner, the Great Maine Schools Project, the Maine Superintendents Association, Rhode Island Commissioner of Education Peter McWalters, the Big Picture Company and the Met School.

Prior to founding Clarendon Group, Heenan was director of Community and Government Relations at Brown University, and served as a senior policy analyst on the White House Domestic Policy Council staff in the Clinton Administration. She is an adjunct assistant professor of public policy at Brown University, where she teaches about the role of communications in policymaking.

More about Clarendon Group and Heenan's work is available at <http://www.clarendongroup.net>.

What kinds of communications work has Clarendon Group done with the CES network to help schools and centers refine their message to influence policy?

We've been privileged to work with hundreds of schools in the CES network, primarily through our work with CES Centers in Maine and Ohio, but also through annual workshops at Fall Forum. We've tried to help schools identify their audiences, forge workable strategies for their school communities, and simplify their communications around reform, which can be heavy on jargon. For some schools, we've developed community engagement strategies. For others, we've helped them think through roll-out plans for new initiatives like creating freshmen teams. In Maine, we helped frame and launch a Gates-funded high school reform effort called the "Great Maine Schools Project." For the Met and Big Picture Company, we've done everything from book parties to press releases to anniversary events.

What comes to mind when you think of effective communication in the world of K-12 public education?

Effective communication in K-12 public education follows the same guidelines as effective communication anywhere: be clear, accessible, compelling, and persuasive. Whether the target audience is students, parents, community members, faculty, or a combination, the same strategies apply – know your audience, research formally and informally, and target your message accordingly. Unfortunately, I think, those with the cleanest, clearest message in K-12 have been for-profits like Edison Schools and Channel One. The KIPP organization (Knowledge Is Power Program) has managed media coverage extremely well.

What resources can Essential schools consult to build their capacity to develop and implement a communications strategy?

There are many good resources out there. The world of politics turns out good books on communications: George Lakoff has written *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate: The Essential Guide for Progressives*, an important book on the concept of framing. My old colleagues Paul Begala and James Carville wrote *Buck Up, Suck Up...and Come Back When You Foul Up: 12 Winning Secrets from the War Room*, a very readable and useful book. A more academic book is Howard Gardner's *Changing Minds: The Art and Science of Changing Our Own and Other People's Minds*, and in my course I use a book called *Influence* by Robert Cialdini that really helps explain communication psychology. And of course there are great nuggets all over the web if you Google well.


How can a school find communication and public relations help and support in its community?

Use all the resources available – have high school students do a project in which they email parents about a levy vote for a proposed new school. Poll parents to see if there are PR and advertising professionals who would volunteer some of their time. Contact local firms and ask about their policy for doing pro bono projects. Communications professionals are like most people – they like to talk about their work and they care about kids.

Any thoughts on how schools can – or should – teach their students, staff, and family communities how to spread specific messages about school mission and goals?

Involve everyone. Make sure parents, students, and staff understand the importance of effective communication, through example as well as through coaching. Make sure everyone knows what specific messages, missions, and goals are. Use school branding opportunities like t-shirts, signage, and newsletters to reinforce efforts.

Any specific tips for building relationships with local media?

Try hard to understand their environment. They work within increasing pressures to boost the bottom line, and there are fewer “content specialists” on most papers’ reporting staff – the reporter covering your school board meeting may have been writing about the local river clean up effort the day before. Don’t assume they understand what you’re trying to do – walk them through it on background. Reporters have less time to pursue stories and are under pressure to generate stories that will get people talking, so learn how to package stories that meet those needs but serve your message too. Create camera-friendly backdrops to events you want them to attend. Give them something different. Also be respectful of deadlines. That’s important. 

Professional Development Opportunities

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The CES Small Schools Project and CES Mentor Schools

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Visit us online at: www.ceschangelab.org

CESSmallSchools



Tips for Successful Communication from Christine Heenan

Capture Attention

We’re all bombarded with new messages and information every day – from the weather forecast on the morning news to the billboard on the way to work to dozens of emails waiting for us on our computers. Our society is literally awash in information, and advertisers and marketers continue to develop new, more invasive ways to capture the attention of consumers. Is the best way to reach parents sending a note home in backpacks, or is it circulating a flyer at the big basketball game in the school gym? Is email the best way to reach students about planning for college, or is a “college night” at school? Figure out what gets through, even if it’s not what you’ve always done, and do that.

Hone Your Message

Okay, so you’ve got their attention. Now what? What’s your point? In order to reach and motivate your community, to move them from awareness to interest to engagement, you need to explain your effort in ways that are clear, compelling, and true. While school reform is complicated stuff, it can and must be talked about in simple, soluble ways that speak not only of the “what” that you’re proposing, but also the “why.”

Ban the Gobbledygook

Heterogeneous groupings. Multiple measures of assessment. Teaming. Education reform has a whole language of its own, and while you may know what you mean, what passes for common parlance to educators might as well be Greek to most parents, lawmakers, and students. It’s not fair to expect your audience to decipher or guess: speak English. Don’t talk about “heterogeneous groupings,” talk about blending kids at different levels in one classroom. Don’t talk about “authentic assessment,” talk about “evaluating work kids really do in school.”

Know Your Audience

Who is the most important audience for you to bring on board with your effort, and what do you know about them? In our work with schools, we’ve found that the most important audience is often overlooked. For example, we worked with a school in Maine working to adopt cross-disciplinary teaching and freshmen teams. At the outset, parents and incoming freshmen were assumed to be the most important audiences for this initiative, but when we talked it through, the school reform leaders realized that the biggest key to success would be convincing veteran teachers this was worth doing, and having them serve as validators to parents and other teachers. Our whole strategy shifted.

Rely on Research

Everyone knows that multiple choice tests are a weak and imperfect measure of student or school performance, right? Wrong. Polls show that an astonishingly high percentage of parents think testing is a great way to measure performance. Any right-minded parent would want their child to aspire to a college education, no? Well...no. Focus group work with parents and teachers in northern New England revealed that many held a notion of “college” as unrealistic, unattainable, and not for everyone, and that a statewide effort to boost post-secondary achievement would be compromised if it put “college” at the center of its campaign. Progressive school reform efforts often require questioning conventional wisdom: know all you can about your audience’s biases, attitudes, and assumptions when wading in to the debate.

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 23 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



Horace Talks with Steve Jubb: How BayCES Has Built Alliances and Challenged the Status Quo

Brett Bradshaw, CES National's Director of Strategic Communications, spoke with Steve Jubb, Executive Director of the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES), a CES affiliate center, about the advocacy work that BayCES has done in the communities of Berkeley, Emeryville, and Oakland, California. BayCES assists schools, school districts, and community groups in the work of creating or redesigning schools to elevate overall achievement. A network of equitable, high performing, small public schools, BayCES has taken the lead locally and in the national school reform movement in three key areas: equity through data-based inquiry and collaboration in classrooms, schools, and districts, personalization through small schools, and community partnerships to leverage district-level policy change and to build authentic school-community connections. BayCES has a staff of 40 and was founded in 1991.

Steve Jubb has served as the Executive Director of BayCES since 1996. In 1990-91, Steve received the Richmond Unified School District's Teacher of the Year award for his work at De Anza High School, where he taught English and creative writing and served as assistant varsity football coach, teacher-leader, and trainer in Socratic Seminar. Steve has a BA in English and an MA in education from Stanford University, where he earned All West Coast honors as an offensive tackle blocking for Jim Plunkett on Stanford's 1971 Rose Bowl team. He also holds a Master's degree in educational administration from San Francisco State University and he is fully bilingual with Spanish as his second language.

Brett Bradshaw: How did BayCES go about wielding influence to take policy action in Oakland, Berkeley, and Emeryville?

Steve Jubb: For one thing, we had to develop some basic credibility as an organization. We had to show that we could actually help the districts and their communities create schools that would be better than the ones that they had. Our initial partnership was with a powerful community-based organization, Oakland Community Organizations (OCO), precisely because we thought that they could push the political advocacy agenda. Typically, what an organization like ours does is to write policy papers, talk to the right people in leadership positions, provide policy guidance, etc. We're a 501(c)3; we're not even supposed to advocate for a political side or another.

Creating alliances with powerful groups to press for the conditions that we need is a key piece of our center's work. Over the years, we have created a number of alliances and partnerships with other organizations. These alliances shift over time.

You might be really close during a particular campaign and then drift apart over another one. It's important to embrace that as part of the process. You need allies; you're not going anywhere unless you can build an informal coalition. I tend to shy away from formal ones because then the relationship can be more important than the outcome. Instead, there should be an understanding that when your interests coincide you try to collaborate and when your interests come apart, you don't waste a lot of time and energy trying to hold it together. We also build political relationships – we have relationships with the superintendents, the school boards, many community based organizations in which we work and we maintain them so when issues are identified, we can coalesce to address them.

BB: What are the tactics that you've employed to get the political work done?

SJ: One of our tactics is that we're very intentional about relationships. We don't organize in the traditional sense, but we do a lot of work in this organization to celebrate our relationships with people out in the world. This week we're having our annual network dinner, which is purely a celebration of our relationships among schools and individuals, and we always invite our funders, the districts, and community based organizations to this annual event. It's an intentional tactic: we want people to get in a room with three or four hundred people who feel a sense of connection to this organization. When we follow up later, when we need allies, we want to preserve the same three or four hundred person feeling. People generally want to be a part of something bigger than themselves and when you can convince them that there is some personal and spiritual benefit to being a part of whatever you're a part of, you're building networks and relationships that can become very important.

We also make sure we have relationships with our legislators. We make sure we have relationships with all of the key leaders in the districts that we serve. We make sure we have relationships with people who are oftentimes our opponents. We're on a first-name basis with those people. We're not friends, but we can call them and we can have our conversations of conflict when we need to have them.

Another tactic is to not get caught up in partisan politics, which is harder than it looks. Anywhere on the political spectrum, you have the possibility of doing good and doing harm. Just the fact that you have a certain set of values and a certain ideology doesn't mean that you will accomplish your goals in the ways that you profess to carry them out. So I think that staying agnostic and open to the possibility that

we can be wrong about certain things is really critical. And we look at policy from the point of view of how it helps or hinders what we're trying to get done in our schools. Whether the policy came from the state administrator that nobody likes or it came from the school board member that everybody likes, I don't care. I look at it to see what the impact will be on the schools.

BB: How does an organization like BayCES go about developing an advocacy agenda? Can you identify a couple of worthwhile outcomes?

SJ: Here in Oakland, Emeryville, and Berkeley, if we had made school system reform a left-right issue, we would be dead in the water, because neither the Republicans nor the Democrats, the progressives nor the conservatives, had everything on their agendas we believe would make a difference. As we look at school creation, at what would make a difference for success, we recognize that there is something to love and something to dislike in everybody's agenda. And I started to think of ourselves as part of the radical middle. I realized that we weren't going to genuflect and just stick with the politically correct left-speak about process and democracy and all that when we have a history in these communities of a lot of talk and no action. By the same token, we were not going to jump on board with the idea of charter schools that are based on the notion of competition reforming the educational system. We saw some value on both sides.

We realized that the only way that Coalition-style schools were going to survive in California's policy environment is if they were part of a portfolio of schools developed with a commitment on the part of the district. Choice plays a really big role. If parents and students were given the opportunity to choose among good schools, to some degree we would have to embrace internal competition as a driver of equity.

Within this structure, you would have to have multiple models that are high quality, models that are either home-grown or are imported from outside and implemented to the degree that they're competitive. Then you would have to look at the impact on the entire system. Districts, without some attention to the ways they operate, will almost always squash innovation organically. It's not anyone's decision; it's just what they do. Districts will allow change to happen, but when it starts to bump up beyond the radar, heads get chopped off because of the constraints within which districts work. But the value that a district holds – which is its best position to hold – is as the guardian of equity from neighborhood to neighborhood. Districts don't often do that, but they are better positioned than an individual school or network of schools to hold that value and act upon it.

One of the conditions in our districts for which we advocated was school autonomy. In order to get autonomy for schools, we had to learn to advocate for accountability for schools, which meant being willing to close schools, even the ones that we helped start, that we felt did not act responsibly to achieve their goals. What we've learned is that from a system perspective, you cannot have a new school strategy if you do not also include the criteria by which you'll close schools. A strategy without these criteria is not only impractical – I think

it's immoral. What you're saying then is, "We can have choice and we can create all these new schools, but we're not willing to be held accountable to the standard."

Ultimately, the action is in the classroom, and we all talk about this ad nauseum. However, in order to have the kind of emphasis on classroom practice that we wanted, we have to ask ourselves if it was reasonable to expect every single school to develop its own standards, its own assessments, and its own curriculum. In my experience, not all schools are able to do that, and if they do, if a key teacher leaves, half the curriculum leaves. I know that there are exceptions to this rule but that's the point: it's a rule, with some exceptions. In order for Coalition schools to survive and prosper, I think we do need some state-level common curriculum, common standards, and common assessments.

What we need at this time in our system are a few standards that are well-measured, that are really important, and for which we hold everybody accountable. What we have right now are too many standards than anybody could ever teach: the learning outcomes are too broad and not deep enough. Nailing down standards and benchmarks for student instruction to try to drive teacher practice is the right idea, but it's confounded by the American desire to have everything all at once. I think the TIMSS studies are a really good indicator of this. Higher-performing countries tend to have fewer topics they teach in a year and they teach them more deeply.

BB: So how can a national organization such as CES help create conditions for schools to thrive and allow practitioners to educate students in the ways that are best?

SJ: First, it's important to define the long term vision of what a transformation of the public education system really looks like. Does it look like districts of all CES-type schools? Or does it look like districts in which there's a subset of CES-type schools that coexist with other types of schools through choice strategies? Do we see our work such that we're just trying to exist as a network or do we define transformation as the world not needing us anymore?

It's so hard to imagine what a high-performing equitable school system looks like with kids who are graduating with their minds well trained and well developed to confront not only today's issues and problems but the challenges they're going to face when they grow up. It's hard to imagine that, yet I think if we don't imagine that, I feel we're on dangerous ground when we muck about in policy. We don't all think alike in this country and we don't all define similarly what an educated student looks like. Are we trying to build a platform while continuing to have a democratic debate over what an educated person is like, within which the Coalition is one voice, or are we trying to build a pluralistic system with a few things in common and a thousand flowers blooming? The answers to all of these questions determine where we go with our advocacy.

BB: You brought up a couple of issues you'd like to see on a CES national agenda. What are some other issues around which CES should develop advocacy efforts? What would help BayCES as a center and, perhaps, other CES affiliate centers?

SJ: There are some patterns that may justify a national advocacy agenda, such as looking for some way to embrace the accountability and attention of No Child Left Behind while still having some alternative assessments. I would be inclined to jump on that bandwagon if I felt that everyone understood how in some ways in the past insistence on alternative assessments legitimized a lot of bad practice in schools. I feel very strongly that if you have an idea and you try to push it on the world, you have to be responsible for both the intended good consequences and the unintended bad consequences. You have to take a hard line around quality, which at times has been a problem in our organization.

I do think that as an advocacy strand, finding ways other than bubble tests to evaluate the performance of students and schools is going to be critical to creating a high quality, democratic school system. For the federal government to be promoting choice to such a degree while being so reductionistic in terms of what student achievement actually is and how it's measured is clearly contradictory. For example, people in New York are able to choose schools that have a performance assessment system that has met some basic criteria for quality. However, by refusing to extend the ability of these schools to use this alternative assessment system to meet state accountability standards, the state is undermining the schools. The government can't simultaneously pursue a choice agenda for parents, and then distrust their choices when they choose into something that the government doesn't like. That seems to me to be the fundamental problem with No Child Left Behind. I understand why NCLB is the way it is. Policy, particularly when it's made through lots and lots of compromise, is a blunt instrument and ultimately it is always local. What matters is how people interpret the policy and the actions they use to carry it out. So I do think there's an agenda for the Coalition there.

I would like to see a sharper equity agenda which, to me, has been somewhat problematic in the Coalition. There's been an assumption that a certain kind of education inspired by the Common Principles is always going to be equitable. I think we have to question that assumption. There are plenty of cases where a CES-style reform agenda does not result in increased equity, and in my view it's because we are unwilling or unable to examine our expectations about the kids or our ideas about the families we're serving. I think the fundamental policy question for the Coalition is, beyond how we assess student achievement, what is our vision of an equitable school system, and what is our role in that?

We're at a very challenging moment in America, and I think those of us with progressive values are at a crossroads. We need to imagine and work toward a world that doesn't exist. When we talk about education for all young people no matter what their background, when we talk about having all of them be ready for work or college, citizenship, meaningful lives, we have to admit that's not the world we live in right now. Since it's not the world we live in, we are to a greater or lesser degree complicit in the inequity that exists, and if that's true, what we have set out to do is irrational. Rationally, we look around us and say, "All kids can learn...except for the ones who have really severe learning disabilities, or except for the ones whose parents are on drugs." We make exceptions in

our minds, in part, because we don't have any experience except in a very small world - maybe in one classroom - that tells us that we can actually have a system that does it differently. We all want to be humble in the face of this challenge, and responsible, kind, and good people - and at the same time we have to admit that we could be wrong about a lot of things. Yet we still have to act boldly, and we have to take the risks necessary to take action on a problem that has been in existence for a long time.

There are a lot of places where we've made great progress in education. I think our primary challenge is not really about the "what" anymore but how to get the "what" to scale. We have to work relentlessly to take to scale the things that we know are working and be ready to change course if we have to.

BB: So what does the average CES practitioner do? What should the teachers and school leaders reading this interview take away to engage in action to take this to scale?

SJ: You can't have a systemic reform under the radar. What I would say to the teachers is be really thoughtful about the person you elect to be your union representative. What I would say to parents and families is be really thoughtful about whom you elect to your site committee. What I would say to CES center people is be really thoughtful about your relationships with other community based organizations. If you got into a problem, who would come to your side and would any of them represent the communities that you think you're there to serve?

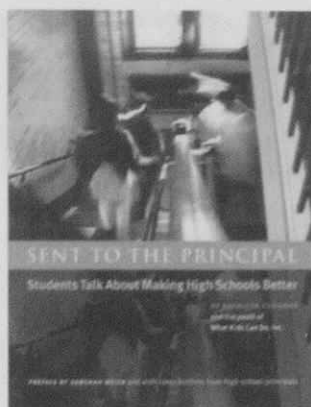
By its very nature, justice demands a political intervention of some kind. Sometimes that's working within the system. Sometimes it's working on the system. And only you - a person, team, or organization - can decide if it's time to work with, work on, or even work against the forces in your communities. Education is political and we have to pay attention to who represents us. If you're not actively taking advantage of the processes available to you for representation, then in my view, it's immoral to criticize. Everything we do that challenges the status quo is political. Equity by its definition is political, because it's going to challenge the status quo. Get involved. **H**

Sent to the Principal: Students Talk about Making High Schools Better by Kathleen Cushman and the youth of What Kids Can Do, Inc. (Next Generation Press, 224 pages, \$19.91), reviewed by Jill Davidson

A school that creates a safe and challenging setting for learning and teaching should be "a dynamic entity that we have a vested interest in making better, and more enjoyable, and more profitable for us," says student Adit in *Sent to the Principal*. A collaboration with students created and framed by Kathleen Cushman, former editor of *Horace* and current CES National board member, *Sent to the Principal's* student contributors suggest how personalization, co-creation of policies, trust, and simple acknowledgement of their complex lives can go far in creating the mutual respect that supports students' learning, persistence, and success.

Cushman synthesizes the students' reflections with reactions from seasoned high school leaders and with her own long experience listening to the many voices within schools. The students see everything, and every decision really does matter. Cushman uses students' words to demonstrate the interplay between emotion and success in school and the need to find opportunities for self-expression, demonstrating how seemingly trivial and tedious issues, such as dress codes, can be crucial opportunities for student engagement.

Much of *Sent to the Principal* is devoted to what ought to happen in classrooms, demonstrating that while principals can't always be everywhere, students know that they really are the one at whom the buck truly stops. The final chapter's discussion about the bargains students make in classrooms – what students are willing to give, and what they expect from teachers in return – vividly depicts how school leaders can see teachers through students' eyes. With the right approach and conditions, and especially with students as allies, it is possible for principals to negotiate their sometimes Sisyphean responsibilities and challenges.



TAUGHT BY AMERICA

A STORY OF STRUGGLE AND HOPE IN COMPTON



Sarah Sentilles

Taught by America: A Story of Struggle and Hope in Compton by Sarah Sentilles, reviewed by Eva A. Frank (Beacon Press, 224 pages, \$23.95)

Sarah Sentilles recalls the first Teach for America poster she ever saw, an African-American man standing in front of a chalk board facing excited students of color. No explanation. No phone number. Sentilles wanted in. Based on the poster, Sentilles

assumed that good teaching was simply the conveying of information. In hindsight, she realizes TFA depends on young, idealistic people who believe that this is true. Otherwise, she wonders, who would ever sign up for a two-year teaching stint in Compton?

Taught by America is an honest reflection by a young professional who is still grappling with the chaos, love, violence, resiliency, care, and confusion that marked her two years in two different elementary schools in Compton, California. "Deep down, though, I knew TFA was something I wanted to be able to say I had done, not something I actually wanted to do," Sentilles admits in the introduction to the book as she grapples with the early lesson that teaching in Compton was not the hard part, the hard part was learning in Compton. Her own learning. While her love for her students unfolds in the telling of their lives in and outside the classroom, ultimately Sentilles, a wonderful teacher by anyone's measures, is undone by a common ailment among new teachers – the idea that you alone must fix it all, when in reality, often, you can barely handle your own classroom. As a new teacher with only six weeks of training, running on instinct, adrenaline, and meager supplies, Sentilles captures every new teacher's exhaustion. "Felix reminded me that my students deserved the best – but instead they got me."

Eva A. Frank is the director of CES National's EssentialVisions DVD project.

Horace's Coming Attractions!

Educational Pathways: Transitions to and from Essential Schools – January 2006

How do Essential schools help students transition to personalized, academically challenging educational environments, and how do they get students ready for work, higher education, and democratic participation? This issue also examines communities in which Essential school pathways from the earliest elementary grades through high school exist or are emerging.

Also coming up:

Teaching and Learning Literacy in Essential Schools – April 2006

Youth Leadership for School Excellence – September 2006

Curriculum and Community Connections – November 2006

Where to Go for More: Resources for Advocacy and Communication

The Advocacy Institute

The Advocacy Institute's mission is to identify effective social justice advocates in the United States and around the world to strengthen their skills, broaden their networks, deepen their effectiveness, and sustain their efforts. Its website offers tremendously useful resources for creating effective social justice advocacy through five phases: building a team, creating a campaign, forming coalitions, designing effective communication strategies, and ensuring long-run success. Descriptions of each phase are accompanied by extensive and substantive assessment exercises, strategies, and examples. The Advocacy Institute's website also features publications and videos, a monthly electronic newsletter featuring advocates' work, and a well-edited resources section.

1629 K St. NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20006-1629
phone: 202/777-7575
email: info@advocacy.org
<http://www.advocacy.org>

Cause Communications

Cause Communications specializes in helping progressive, activist nonprofits nationwide refine their communication capability and effectiveness. Cause Communications shares what it has learned on its website in a section called "Forget Us...Do It Yourself" – and the resources offered there indeed make it possible for any determined group to go far in refining and spreading its message. Resources include practical information on getting and using media lists. The site also features detailed publicity guides and a provocative guerilla toolbox which, among other secrets, reveals the formula for wheat paste for late-night public space poster application and offers advice should late-night poster appliers run afoul of the law. Most of the other Cause Communications tactics are less risky but no less powerful in their detail and utility.

1836 Blake St. #100A
Denver, Colorado 80202
phone: 303/292-1524
<http://www.causecommunications.com>

News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working with the Media

News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working with the Media is a hands-on and how-to book about using media advocacy – the strategic use of news media, advertising, and community organizing – to influence opinion forcefully. Authors Lawrence Wallack, Katie Woodruff, Lori Dorfman, and Iris Diaz draw on their experience as activists and offer examples, particularly public health, between fields and demonstrate how to get coverage and influence opinion to change policy.

News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working with the Media
Sage Publications, 1999
<http://www.sagepub.com/book.aspx?pid=4767>

National Association of Elementary School Principals: "Exercising the Power of Grassroots Advocacy"

"Exercising the Power of Grassroots Advocacy," written by Sally McConnell and available online, originally appeared in the January/February 2005 issue of *Principal* magazine, published by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Short and to the point, "Exercising the Power of Grassroots Advocacy" suggests ways for school leaders to influence public officials in order to advocate for specific legislative and policy changes.

"Exercising the Power of Grassroots Advocacy,"
Principal, Volume 84, Number 3
<http://www.naespp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=1467>

Center for Community Change

The mission of the Center for Community Change, located in Washington, DC and with a field office in southern California, is to promote social justice by empowering community organizers. It works with a wide range of issues, including K-12 education; its education section features a number of useful resources including a free quarterly education organizing newsletter, an "Organizer's Guide to No Child Left Behind," an "Action Guide to Education Organizing," and much more.

1536 U Street NW
Washington, DC 20009
phone: 202/339-9300
toll-free phone: 877/777-1536
email: info@communitychange.org
<http://www.communitychange.org>

Learning First Alliance: "A Practical Guide to Promoting America's Public Schools: Values, Vision and Performance"

The Learning First Alliance, a partnership of eleven national education organizations, offers "A Practical Guide to Promoting America's Public Schools: Values, Vision and Performance," a nine-page brief on how to communicate and build alliances with the general public about your school's mission and vision. This guide offers message and action ideas in seven key areas, including values, school discipline, academics, the benefits of public education, public information, accountability, and parental involvement. Each area is divided into two sections: "What to Say," which offers suggestions for how to describe your school's efforts, and "What to Do," which details steps schools can take to spread their message. Though viewing and downloading the guide requires registration, it is available at no charge.

1001 Connecticut Avenue, Suite 335

Washington, DC 20036

phone: 202/296-5220

<http://www.learningfirst.org/publications/pubschools>

FairTest: The National Center for Fair & Open Testing

While most of the organizations mentioned in this section aren't issue-specific, FairTest merits special mention for its strong advocacy for performance-based assessment and against the overuse of high stakes standardized tests. Among the features of FairTest's website is the state-specific Assessment Reform Network (ARN), which connects interested parties with local organizations communicating and advocating locally for changes in assessment policies.

342 Broadway

Cambridge, MA 02139

phone: 617/864-4810

email: info@fairtest.org

<http://www.fairtest.org>

CES National and the CES Network

CES offers a range of ways to get involved in local and national advocacy efforts. Participation in the work and activities of regional affiliate centers – a list is available on the CES website at the CES Network tab – connects schools and organizations in a region, creating coalitions that can focus on issues of local interest. CES National, with dozens of affiliate centers and hundreds of schools, provides its network with ways to connect with like-minded schools and organizations both locally and nationally – the advocacy efforts described in this issue of *Horace* are some of the results of CES connections.

<http://www.essentialschools.org>

CES EssentialVisions

See How.

The CES EssentialVisions 3-DVD set brings the Common Principles to life with real stories and tools from today's most successful small schools.

Each DVD captures how the Common Principles have been implemented in secondary school classrooms, illustrating how students engage in their education and teachers develop as professionals.

Disc1: Classroom Practice

Available from the Coalition of Essential Schools at www.essentialschools.org.



Coalition of Essential Schools
1814 Franklin Street, Suite 700
Oakland, CA 94612
Tel 510 433 1451
www.essentialschools.org

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

New York Performance Standards Consortium
317 East 67th Street
New York, NY 10021
phone: 212/570-5394, x211
email: info@performanceassessment.org
<http://www.performanceassessment.org>

Time Out from Testing (affiliated with New York
Performance Standards Consortium)
<http://www.timeoutfromtesting.org>

Amy Biehl High School
currently:
8300 Phoenix NE
Albuquerque, NM 87110
after January 2006:
123 4th Street SW
Albuquerque, NM 87102
phone: 505/299-9409
<http://abhs.k12.nm.us>

New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools
1850 Old Pecos Trail, Suite D
Santa Fe, NM 87505
phone: 505/983-1775
<http://www.nmccs.org>

Engaging Communication LLC
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If CES stands for what you believe in – personalized, equitable, intellectually vibrant schools – we invite you to affiliate with CES National for the 2005-2006 affiliation year, which began August 1st. Affiliating with the CES network as a school, organization, or individual gives you a number of benefits, including subscriptions to *Horace* and our newsletter *In Common*, discounted fees and waivers to our annual Fall Forum, and eligibility to apply for research and professional development grants, and more. For more information about CES National Affiliation, visit

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CES National

School Design

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

Next Issue

How do Essential middle and high schools help students transition to personalized, academically challenging, schools? And how do those schools get students ready for the post-school worlds of work, education, and democratic participation? *Horace 22.1* will also examine communities in which Essential school pathways exist or are being created for students from the earliest elementary grades through high school, examining the possibility of a full preK-12 CES education.

Classroom Practice

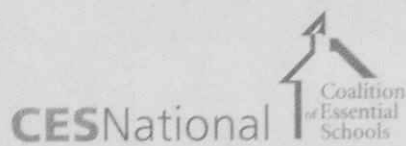
How do we bring Coalition ideas like less is more, teacher as coach, and demonstration of mastery to life in the classroom? Topics include: curriculum and instruction, assessment, and classroom culture.

Leadership

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

Community Connections

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



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Using Advocacy and Communication to Create and Sustain Essential Schools

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Using Advocacy and Communication to Create and Sustain Essential Schools

Volume 21 no.4 | Fall 2005 | Community Connections

- 02 Making the Pendulum Swing: Challenging Bad Education Policy in New York State by Ann Cook and Phyllis Tashlik
- 10 Small School, Big Influence: Amy Biehl High School Tells Its Story by Jill Davidson
- 16 Strategic Communication for Essential Schools: Advice from Christine Heenan
- 18 *Horace* Talks with Steve Jubb: How BayCES Has Built Alliances and Challenged the Status Quo
- 21 *Sent to the Principal: Students Talk about Making High Schools Better* by Kathleen Cushman and the youth of What Kids Can Do, Inc., reviewed by Jill Davidson
- 21 *Taught by America: A Story of Struggle and Hope in Compton* by Sarah Sentilles, reviewed by Eva A. Frank
- 22 Where to Go for More: Resources for Advocacy and Communication
- 24 Go to the Source: More about the Essential Schools Featured in this Issue

Notes on This Issue

Chances are, given that you're reading *Horace*, you are affiliated with the Coalition of Essential Schools (and before I continue, I must pause and note that if your school, the organization with which you work, or you are not affiliated with CES, you should be!). Membership, as we have often heard, has its privileges, and one of the most valuable privileges of CES membership is the ability to connect with like-minded educators, families, and school advocates to share strategies, create better schools, and transform education for all students nationwide.

Meeting with or reading about other CES schools creates simultaneous feelings of familiar kinship and surprising differences. CES contradictorily yet harmoniously believes that no two schools are alike; we treasure innovation, even idiosyncrasy. Each of our schools is a unique creation in a particular location with a distinct population. At the same time, we hold in common the ten Common Principles – and that commonality gives us the potential for collective power. The thousands of us that are members of the Coalition of Essential Schools need to continue to find ways to work together to influence local, state, and national policies. We have the ability to raise our voices to insist on what we believe are the best conditions for students, families, educators, and communities. And our schools and students have the evidence to persuade the uncaring, the doubtful and – we hope – at least some of the oppositional.

As it enters its third decade, CES National is developing strategies that will establish us – all of us – as leading advocates for student-centered, meaningful education that places power, judgment, and trust in the hands of teachers, students, families, and local communities. Through Fall Forum, CESChangeLab and the work of the Small Schools Project, our publications, the CES National website, and as many other venues as we can devise, we will be sharing strategies and asking for your help. Those of us at CES National feel deeply privileged to be part of a network of so many schools dedicated to helping students use their minds well. We are committed to helping all CES schools and to growing the CES network so that such schools become the embodiment of what the public expects from a great education.

This issue of *Horace* looks at schools and their advocates in New York State, Albuquerque, New Mexico, the San Francisco Bay Area, and across the CES network as they influence local, state, and national educational policy. You will come away with ideas about how to create alliances, develop communication strategies, identify your school community's strengths, and work outside your school with key partners. Thanks to all contributors to this issue – as always, working with CES educators, leaders, and families is a joy and a constant education.

Jill Davidson
Editor, *Horace*



Making the Pendulum Swing: Challenging Bad Education Policy in New York State

by Ann Cook and
Phyllis Tashlik

Student protest alerts the public to the dangers of high stakes testing.

Ann Cook and Phyllis Tashlik, educators at New York City's Urban Academy and leaders of the New York Performance Standards Consortium and The Center for Inquiry in Teaching and Learning, trace the history of the development of the New York Performance Standards Consortium, the challenges presented to schools by the increased use of high stakes standardized tests by the New York State Department of Education, and the eventual legislative victory that awarded the New York Performance Standards Consortium schools a waiver from most Regents exams. Cook and Tashlik discuss the advocacy strategies that parents, teachers, and students used to speak out against the dominance of standardized tests.

Standardized testing is currently the nation's dominant educational theme, the primary focus of schooling in the United States. Testing – which tests, how many, how much preparation needed, how much anxiety produced, the costs, the scores – daily occupy newspaper headlines. But scant attention has been focused on the profoundly negative effect testing has had on curriculum and teaching.

The irony, as a study published in August 2005 by ACT has shown, is that although more students are taking more tests such as the ACT – a requirement of many American colleges and universities – few are sufficiently prepared to succeed in college. Only half have adequate college-level skills in reading and more than half lack college-level skills in math and science. These facts are especially true for the increased number of minorities considering college.

And yet the country, and New York State in particular, remains obsessed with testing, ignoring the negative consequence it has had on what the ACT study describes as the “nature and quality” of coursework – the ingredient that can make the difference between success in college, or work, and failure. New York, for example, once considered a leader in promoting educational innovation and professionalism, has become the poster child for high stakes standardized testing. At the high school level, five Regents exit exams are now required for graduation. As a result, coursework in most New York state schools has become dominated by test preparation and lost any semblance of intellectual rigor, while the drop-out rate has climbed.

However, in a June 2005 battle described by many as a David and Goliath struggle, a small group of schools won a significant victory. The New York State Board of Regents extended the New York Performance Standards Consortium's waiver from the state's high-stakes Regents tests. The extension allows a small group of schools to continue to use its performance-based assessment system and innovative curriculum in lieu of four of the five mandated Regents exams: students would take the English Language Arts but were excused from the American History, Global History, science, and math exams.

Advocates for performance-based assessment from across the country rejoiced, for although the ultimate battle against high

stakes testing is far from over, this one triumph is regarded as the first chink in the education bureaucracy's armor. They celebrated because this victory – as localized as it is – proves that even within a highly restrictive environment, there are cracks, and this gives hope for the future.

Background

Although it wasn't clear at the time, the outlines of the battle began more than a decade ago, in 1991, when a group of small secondary schools were recognized as exemplars of secondary education by former New York State Commissioner of Education Tom Sobol. Observing their success and believing that their practices could promote “top-down support for bottom-up reform,” Sobol designated them Compact for Learning Schools and directed the State Education Department (SED) to use their expertise to assist professional development in other schools.

Several of the Compact schools – including Ithaca's Alternative Community School, Urban Academy, and others – had developed models for a performance accountability system based on an academically rich and challenging curriculum, extensive and continuous professional development, and a set of high-level performance tasks required for graduation. Dr. Sobol granted the schools a waiver from state exams and directed the Education Department to conduct annual reviews of the schools' performance.

This policy decision demonstrated continuity with other school-based reforms of the 70s and 80s, when many of the highly touted small schools were first established and innovative curriculum and creativity in teaching were much appreciated. Educators like Lillian Weber, Deborah Meier, and Vito Perrone and organizations like the North Dakota Study Group and the Coalition of Essential Schools were regarded as central contributors to the school reform movement. The educational philosophy underpinning Great Britain's approach to primary education captured the imagination of American teachers, parents, and writers as did curriculum projects like Breakthrough to Literacy; Man, a Course of Study; Nuffield Science; and the Amherst history curriculum. It was possible to create learning environments that engaged kids and promoted inquiry and exploration. The testing industry, while perhaps poised for the coming onslaught, still lacked the punch it would soon acquire.

With the 1995 departure of Commissioner Sobol, however, a new direction swiftly became clear: the Board of Regents renounced the Sobol initiatives, embraced the agenda of Richard Mills, Sobol's successor, and adopted a one-size-fits-all cookie cutter approach to assessment.

The New York Performance Standards Consortium

The struggle to protect the waiver began in 1998, when several of the Compact for Learning schools and others belonging to the Coalition of Essential Schools formed the New York Performance Standards Consortium. Teachers, parents, and schools organized to challenge what they knew was bad policy.

As teachers and educators, we understood what the headlines and published standardized test results consistently failed to

The New York Performance Standards Consortium gathers and frequently updates the information on its website, www.performanceassessment.org, which includes details about its performance assessment system, information about activism against high stakes standardized tests and in support of performance-based assessment, data about the effect of high stakes standardized tests, details on the legal and legislative proceedings documented in this article, and more.

<http://www.performanceassessment.org>

New York Performance Standards Consortium Schools

The New York Performance Standards Consortium is a CES National affiliate, with schools across New York state. A partial list of its members include:

Academic Community for Educational Success, Bedford Hills
 Arturo Schomberg Satellite Academy, Bronx
 Brooklyn International High School, Brooklyn
 Community School for Social Justice, Bronx
 Essex Street Academy, Manhattan
 Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School, Bronx
 Humanities Preparatory Academy, Manhattan (CES Mentor School)
 Institute for Collaborative Education, Manhattan
 Landmark High School, Manhattan
 Legacy High School, Roosevelt Island
 Lehman Alternative Community School, Ithaca
 Manhattan International High School, Manhattan
 Manhattan Village Academy, Manhattan
 Middle College High School at LaGuardia College, Queens
 Pablo Neruda High School, Bronx
 Satellite Academy – Forsyth Street, Manhattan
 Satellite Academy High School, Manhattan
 School of the Future, Manhattan (CES Mentor School)
 School Without Walls, Rochester
 The Brooklyn School for Global Studies, Brooklyn
 The Daytop Preparatory School, Manhattan
 The James Baldwin School, Manhattan (CES New Small School)
 University Heights High School, Bronx
 Urban Academy High School, Manhattan (CES Mentor School)
 Vanguard High School, Manhattan

acknowledge: the crucial link between assessment and curriculum. We knew that high stakes testing would devalue curriculum and teaching, thereby undermining learning. This vital link between assessment and curriculum became a central theme in the Consortium schools' struggle.

We began the struggle assuming we simply had to state the obvious: that requiring students to demonstrate in a systematic way what they could do with the knowledge, skills and information they had learned was a far more rigorous means of assessment than conventional testing. That our students, many of whom were classified as "high risk," were engaged and intellectually challenged by the curriculum we offered; that their staying in school, graduating, and going on to college was a sign of success. We assumed policymakers would notice and allow Consortium schools to continue their approach – that whatever policies were adopted, the highest priority would be given to keeping dropout rates low. We

even believed that the State Education Department would be sufficiently curious to conduct a comparative study to see which assessment system worked and why. That was, after all, what the waiver had required it to do. Our assumptions were soon proved wrong.

A Viable Alternative

We stated our position clearly. We were not just saying "no to testing." We were saying we had a better alternative – an assessment system that included student performance, professional development, curriculum innovation, rubrics for assessment, and a documented success rate for college acceptance and perseverance. Students in Consortium schools completed specified tasks in literature, science, math and social studies, all at a level ensuring they were ready for the demands of college. In addition, schools also required students to complete assessments in areas such as foreign language acquisition, creative arts, physical education, and community service. Oversight of the system was provided by an external board (the Performance Assessment Review Board), a group of 22 national experts on curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

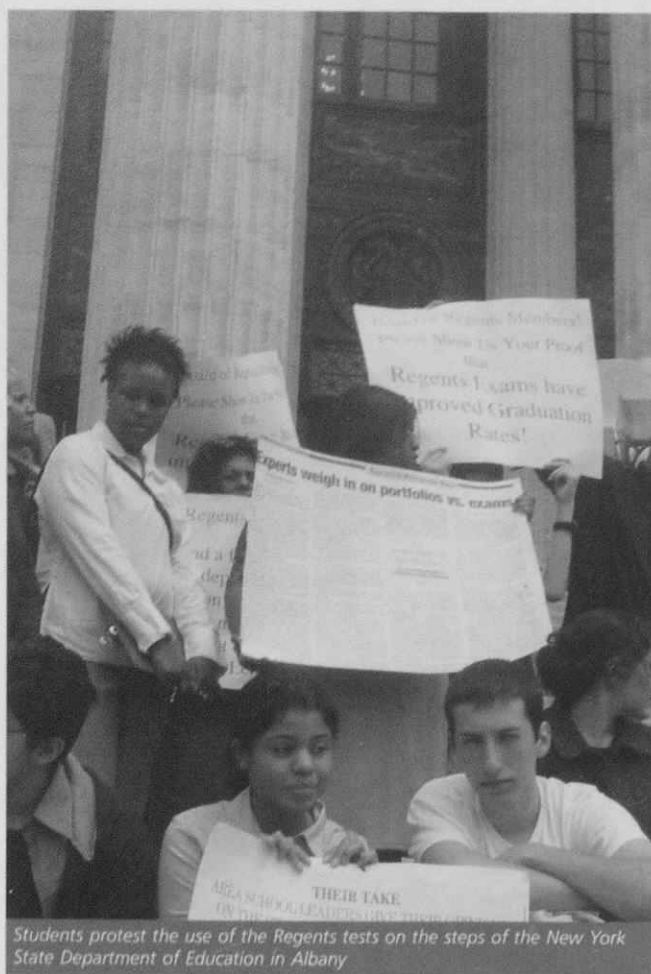
The Consortium had no quarrel with the State learning standards. Who wouldn't want kids to write well, read analytically, punctuate correctly, and solve geometry problems? Who wouldn't expect kids to know the scientific method and that the Seneca Falls convention was a turning point in the women's rights movement? To support our contention that the Consortium's curriculum not only met but exceeded State standards, we scrupulously reviewed the courses offered at each school. Readings, assignments, discussions, debates, activities, and performance tasks required in academic courses, inter-disciplinary courses, and project-based work were scrutinized to determine alignment with the State's learning standards.

To support our efforts, we set about disseminating information about our system. The Consortium's performance assessment system was explained, diagrammed, written about in articles in major and minor publications, and explicated again and again in emails and faxes that were sent repeatedly to public officials, journalists, educators, and parents. It was clear we were building something; we were not unmoored naysayers who would just disappear.

Roadblocks

In 1999, when the Commissioner determined that all "alternative methods" of assessment required approval from a State-appointed panel, the Consortium convened a group of nationally known education experts in assessment to review our system and formally present it to the panel. The result was devastating. The panel determined that since the performance assessment system was not a test, it was not possible to grant approval.

In similar fashion, the State Education Department (SED) blatantly violated the terms of the waiver itself. The SED never conducted a five-year study to assess the effectiveness of the performance assessment system. And although the language of the waiver was explicit that if no study was done, the



Students protest the use of the Regents tests on the steps of the New York State Department of Education in Albany

waiver was to continue indefinitely, Commissioner Mills ignored this directive.

Weil, Gotshal and Manges, a prestigious New York City law firm whose partners had given support to schools in the Consortium, agreed to provide legal counsel on a pro bono basis. The ensuing law suit (*New York State Performance Assessment Consortium v. New York State Education Department*) sued the Commissioner and the State Education Department, arguing that in refusing to conduct the mandated study, they had acted in an "arbitrary and capricious" manner.

The legal battle went on for almost a full year and, although the State Court of Appeals in 2002 ruled in the State's favor (as is customary, we were told, when the State is the object of a suit), the case yielded volumes of critical documents: depositions from experts, memos and reports obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, and data gleaned by researchers, who, with the introduction of high stakes testing in several states, had begun to investigate their impact on dropout rates.

From official minutes of the State's own Technical Advisory Group, we learned that the State's tests lacked the pro forma technical manual and that some of the official studies intended to demonstrate the reliability and validity of the statewide tests were, upon close examination, sparse and inconclusive. As the struggle to protect the waiver continued, such information proved quite useful.



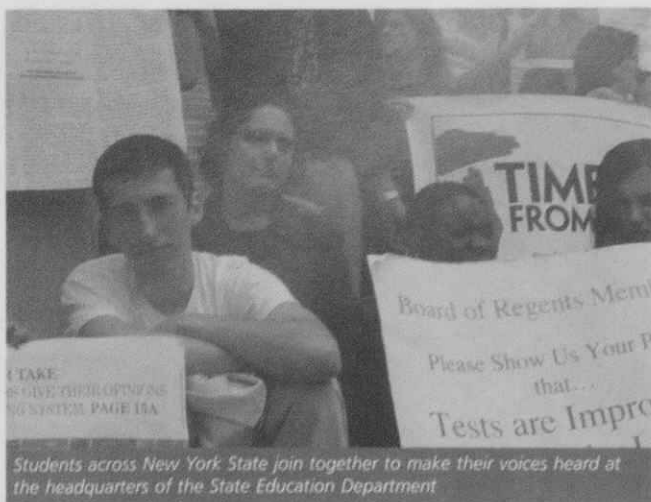
"Students burn at high stakes" in a public protest against high stakes tests

Activism and Parents: Time Out From Testing

As events unfolded, parents of Consortium students organized a state-wide coalition of grassroots organizations. Time Out From Testing joined with the Consortium in a number of initiatives: rallies, petition drives, letter-writing campaigns, press conferences, and background briefings with legislators, policy-makers, and members of editorial boards. Teachers, parents, students and members of the business community testified at numerous legislative hearings as did members of the academic community who presented research on the consequences of high stakes testing.

At one point in 2001, parents, teachers and students held a rally in Albany that drew more than 1,500 people, focusing the public's attention on the Consortium and assessment as a critical issue. In Rochester, Consortium schools helped organize the Coalition for Common Sense in Education, a group that linked members of the academic community with concerned parents and teachers. Although teachers and parents often found themselves pressed for time, they also understood the urgency of the situation and were ready to do what was necessary to support their convictions. Parents were angry: they had chosen to send their children to the Consortium schools precisely because of their assessment system. Similarly, teachers had chosen to work in these schools and were unwilling to see their efforts and ideas destroyed.

As we created a broader awareness of the issues, the Consortium and Time Out From Testing became recognized voices on performance-based assessment for national and local journalists. We took advantage of every opportunity. Fortunately, the SED often became an unwitting accomplice. One of our parents caused a major embarrassment for the SED when her research that exposed bowdlerized literature passages in several English Regents exams was featured on the front page of *The New York Times* and in *The New Yorker* magazine. The National Coalition Against Censorship, PEN, the New York Civil Liberties Union, and the National Library Association, to mention only a few organizations, voiced strong opposition to the SED's blatant manipulation of literary texts. Responding to public criticism, the SED claimed in 2002 that it would withdraw offending guidelines that sanctioned censorship. The episode contributed to the growing unease about the overall competence of the SED.



Diminished Curriculum

While Consortium schools were involved in the fight to maintain performance assessment and substantive curriculums, other New York state high schools were succumbing. Not only were they administering the onerous tests, they were overhauling curriculum, particularly in their history, social studies, and science courses. To alert the public to the erosion of real learning standards, the Consortium instituted a series of panels of academicians to review the Regents exams. Panelists included historians, writers, scientists, literature professors, and mathematicians.

Panelists were asked to consider overall test quality, alignment of test content with state standards, accuracy of the test as an indicator of readiness for college level work, skill level demonstrated by anchor papers provided by the SED, and comparative quality when considered alongside Consortium students' work samples. Part of each session involved panel members actually taking a portion of the exam. In every session, this reality check resulted in strong condemnation about the wisdom of using such instruments to determine either subject competence or high school graduation. The panels' five highly critical Regents exam critiques were broadly distributed and posted on the Consortium's website.

In the report on the Living Environment exam, scientists concurred that, "The exam does not reflect how scientists think or how scientists use their curiosity to investigate natural phenomena. The exam conveys the idea that science is about answers, not questions." They also agreed that "nothing in the test gave students insights into 'basic underlying scientific habits of mind'" such as "developing deductive reasoning; stating and testing hypotheses; . . . understanding estimation and the difference between correlation and causation; and recognizing and understanding patterns."

Similarly, panelists who participated in the review of the American History exam concurred that some of the essay questions were "truly ludicrous" and required no "sense of historical change at all." Further, that "the skill that's missing in the entire exam is critical interpretive thinking." As one panelist concluded: "...what was most disturbing about those tests was the effect they must have on what goes on in the classroom. It's bad enough that valuable time is spent teaching for the test...but worse is the very real possibility that

College Enrollment and Success

Of paramount importance in this debate was the recently completed College Performance Study (M. Foote, 2005, currently under consideration by journals) that documented the college performance record of Consortium graduates. Tracking students into their third semester of college, the three-year study drew on official college transcripts for over 750 graduates. The results were impressive: not only were students graduating from Consortium schools attending competitive colleges, they also showed higher than average persistence rates and earned above average GPAs: all this despite the fact that Consortium students represent a more disadvantaged population than students throughout other New York City high schools.

The full text of the New York Performance Standards Consortium College Performance Study by Martha Foote, Director of Research, is available at:

<http://www.performanceassessment.org/consequences/collegeperformancestudy.pdf>

what will be taught in those sessions is a very simple-minded notion of what history is."

It was this realization that led Eric Foner, former head of the American Historical Association and DeWitt Clinton professor of American History at Columbia, to address a letter signed by more than 25 leading historians to the Board of Regents. The February 2005 letter emphasized the negative impact of the tests on the teaching of American history.

Public Accountability

As is often the case, once a bad idea becomes policy, it eventually starts unraveling of its own accord. This was certainly true for the tests and the procedures used to score them. A major disaster occurred in 2003 when some 70 percent of the students taking the math exam failed to pass. Unable to renorm the test quickly enough, the test was withdrawn entirely and school officials replaced test scores with students' coursework grade. In physics, too, there had been norming problems in 2002 and 2003 and errors on chemistry, biology and American History exams. These errors helped the Consortium educate the public on the arbitrary method of scoring used by the SED. On the 2005 Regents math test, in a particularly ironic example, students had to score 26 points out of a possible 84 to earn a passing score of 55.

Each time a fiasco occurred, Consortium members and its parent leadership were there to publicly speak out and write about the superiority of the performance assessment system. Once glitches in the State's system became more public, demands for accountability escalated. In September and October 2003, the New York State legislature held hearings to examine the impact of the SED's Regents exam policy. More

than 90 percent of the 2,000 parents, teachers, testing experts, union officials, students, and members of the business community who testified were highly critical of State policy. Evidence presented by researchers documented the collateral damage linked to the SED's high stakes policies: New York State now ranked 45th in the nation with respect to graduation rates; New York state's Black and Hispanic youngsters had the lowest graduation rate of any state in the nation.

As criticism gathered strength, the community of advocates grew to include organizations like FairTest, the Coalition of Essential Schools, and the United Federation of Teachers. They played critical roles, providing data and the latest research findings, organizing email campaigns across the country, and speaking with key policymakers at critical moments.

The climate for change had been created. In 2004, in the Republican-led State Senate, a bill extending the Consortium's waiver passed unanimously. Responding to pressure from parents and educators (and aided by the uncompromising attitude of state education officials), the Chair of the Assembly Education committee secured a one-year extension of the waiver pending what he hoped would be a thorough investigation of SED policy by the Board of Regents.

The Public/Private Factor

The one year extension, while less than ideal, kept the waiver alive. All during the summer and fall of 2004, members of the Consortium and its extended community of supporters met with individual members of the Board of Regents. Those meetings were symptomatic of an ongoing dilemma commonly faced by advocacy groups when dealing with policymakers and public officials: the private/public factor.

Early in the battle to protect the waiver, Consortium members had been assured in a private meeting by the Chancellor and

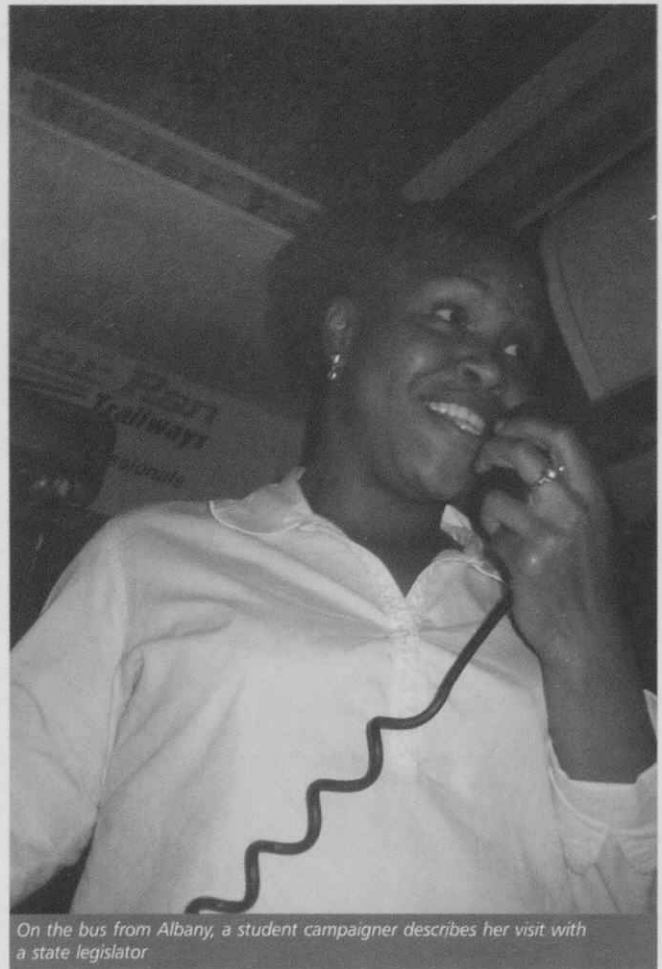
Chair of the Board of Regents that the waiver was alive and well. One week later, his public posture was the opposite. Later, Consortium representatives were assured, privately, that an appeals process could be activated, but when attempts were made, the Regents' public response was to deny it. A similar pattern emerged in meetings with individual Regents. Privately, while members were sympathetic, even supportive; their public posture was the reverse. Nevertheless, Consortium supporters persisted in pursuing their contacts and searching for support even when they faced resistance

RELATED RESOURCE

"Personalization, High Standards and the Assessment Debates," by Jill Davidson, *Horace* Volume 18, Number 2 (Winter, 2002)

This article looks at efforts to create and sustain performance-based assessment systems in Maine, New York, California, and Massachusetts, with a focus on the work of the New York Performance Standards Consortium.

www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/219



On the bus from Albany, a student campaigner describes her visit with a state legislator

The Deal

The year 2005 began with the realization that no significant change would be possible without legislative intervention. Once again, a Republican-controlled State Senate sponsored legislation. After a heated one and a half hour debate, it passed the Consortium bill 51 to 9 despite intense lobbying efforts against the bill by the Commissioner, New York City Mayor Bloomberg, and even the White House.

As the Consortium bill gained strength in the Assembly, its leadership moved into action. The Speaker, an opponent of legislative intervention in education policy, yielded to the pressure and brokered a deal. The waiver would continue for five years. A comparative research study was proposed and at least some of the members of the Board of Regents seemed prepared to consider the implications for system-wide changes based on resulting research findings. The agreement represented the first public recognition of the legitimacy of performance assessment.

Refocusing Policy

The Consortium's performance assessment system offers a powerful alternative to New York's failed policy of high-stakes and excessive testing – a policy that has eroded the quality of public education; contributed to higher drop-out rates, particularly for minority students; and demeaned teaching as a