ESReview

Fall 2006

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We launched Education Sector in early 2006 as an independent education think tank devoted to developing innovative solutions to the nation's most pressing educational problems. We are a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization.

We publish research, analysis, and commentary on a wide range of issues and we sponsor frequent policy events, seeking to be a dependable source of sound thinking on education policy and an honest broker of evidence in key education debates throughout the United States.

ES Review brings together in one publication recent Education Sector work that reflects both the reach of our policy projects and our commitment to translating the complexities of education policymaking for a wide range of audiences.

We have abridged some of the longer reports to conserve space, but we encourage you to visit our Web site at **www.educationsector.org** to read the complete reports and all of the work that we have published to date.

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We think of *ES Review* as a convenient way of staying abreast of Education Sector's work and as an invitation to become more closely connected to our organization.

We hope you agree.

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ESReview

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Community College Confidential

By Robert Margolis

The 20-year-old student sat quietly as an impassioned debate on the use of torture in war unfolded in my American Government and Politics class at Ulster County Community College, a former IBM corporate conference center 90 minutes north of New York City. The Abu Ghraib scandal in Iraq was fresh in the news and many of my students were outraged at the treatment of Iraqi prisoners.

Then the student squirmed a bit and took a deep breath. Up went her hand. "With all due respect, I just returned from there. I am in the Army and worked… well… at the jail. Sure we were told of the Geneva Accords and so on, but we were also told of the rules with a wink and a nod."

"Until you have seen a person who you depended on for your life blown to bits ten feet in front of you, don't tell me what you would or wouldn't do in combat situation," she responded when a classmate charged that the military lacked moral fiber.

I have a master's degree in political science from a big-name college. I was a researcher at a prestigious Washington think tank. I taught history at a fancy New York private high school. I know Benjamin Bloom's six levels of cognition and Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences.

But the give and take in my windowless UCCC classroom, where I taught three sections of government and politics for a year, had an edge, a range and richness of perspectives, that you often don't find very much of in the nation's expensive colleges and universities.

Sure, there were kids in my classes who thought the Electoral College was a Division I program in the ACC and that the Whiskey Rebellion had something to do with early bar closings. Yes, a lot of community college kids drop out, never going on to earn the four-year degrees that students increasingly need to get decent-paying jobs.

But I have to wonder how many $40,000-a-year schools would provide as wide an array of viewpoints as my Tuesday/Thursday class did. If diversity in higher education is really a compelling state interest, as Justice Lewis Powell argued in the 1978 Bakke decision upholding affirmative action, then community colleges, which educate 40 percent of the nation's college students, are perhaps more valuable enterprises than their lowly status in higher education suggests.

"Until you have seen a person who you depended on for your life blown to bits ten feet in front of you, don't tell me what you would or wouldn't do in combat situation,"

Remember after 9/11 when the chorus of talking heads shouted that despite what your daughter's political science professor claims, the attacks weren't the fault of the US? That sort of defensive rhetoric may have played well among the disproportionately homogenous—rich, white—student bodies of the nation's big-name colleges and universities. But not at places like UCCC—kalidescopes of races, religions, ethnicities, languages, family incomes—and perspectives.

In addition to my Iraq War veteran, I had a student whose day job was to man the sniper tower at a nearby prison, a brilliant daughter of the leading Buddhist monk in the area, and an Alvin Ailey dancer. There are kids at Ulster doing their 12th-grade years though a program with local high schools. Some are working towards admission to the Kingston police academy. Some haven't been in a classroom for 40 years. And some are avoiding $40,000 tuitions at four-year schools. All this diversity adds up to statistics like this one: There are six times as many Hispanic students in Miami Dade (Community) College in Florida than in the entire Ivy League.

A lot of community college students face a psychological barrier I confronted often at UCCC. Because four-year colleges and universities, including many top public schools, are so much more expensive than community colleges, many of my students don't think they are worthy of attending quality four-year institutions. They seem to equate UCCC's worth with its cost. I found myself frequently explaining to students that such self-defeating assumptions were false.

That task was made tougher, and more important, by the fact that Kingston, New York, where UCCC is located, is a shell of what it once was. The local economy has collapsed, the area public schools are a disgrace, and a general sense of despair has laid anchor. On my first day at UCCC, an anxious student let me know that she wouldn't able to buy the books or subscribe to the newspaper I required for her course. I gave her my books.

Most community college students don't transfer to four-year schools. But those who do, the research shows, do well. The challenge is to find ways to help more students move up. The conversation in the classrooms of four-year schools would no doubt be richer for it.

Robert Margolis is a New York-based writer and served as an adjunct member of the Social and Behavioral Sciences faculty at SUNY Ulster County Community College.

Staying Power

Teach for America Alumni in Public Education

By Bridget Kelly

It would be reasonable to expect recent college graduates entering Teach for America (TFA) to complete their two-year TFA teaching requirements in public schools and then move on. But that isn't happening. TFA alumni are increasingly working throughout the public education system.

Introduction

Teach for America, the Peace Corps-style organization that recruits graduates of top colleges to spend two years teaching in urban and rural public schools without first earning education degrees, is becoming a big enterprise. It is drawing a growing number of the nation's best and brightest into some of public education's most troubled schools. And they are staying. Rather than completing their two-year tours and moving on to law, banking, and other more lucrative fields, increasing numbers of TFA alumni are continuing to work in education in many different roles, many of them serving the nation's neediest students.

"Why doesn't the country have a national teacher corps to recruit as aggressively as we are being recruited to work on Wall Street?" Teach for America founder Wendy Kopp wondered back in the late 1980s as a student at Princeton. The question led to a senior thesis outlining such an organization, and then, in 1990, to TFA's first cadre of 500 teachers. Today, it has a staff of 350, a $39 million budget, and 3,600 "corps members" in nearly two dozen locations from New York City to the Mississippi Delta.

Nearly 17,300 students applied to TFA in 2005, including 12 percent of the senior classes of Yale and Spelman, 11 percent of Dartmouth's seniors, and 8 percent of Harvard's. On many campuses, Kopp has vanquished Wall Street: TFA was the top employer of graduates from Duke, Georgetown, Scripps College, Washington University in St. Louis, and the University of North Carolina in 2005. TFA has become more selective than most of the nation's law and business schools, accepting only 17 percent of its applicants in 2005. What's more, nearly one in five TFA recruits is a math, science, or engineering major—the student who traditionally shuns public school teaching.

TFA spends about $10,000 to recruit, select, train, and support each corps member and gets about $1,500 a year per corps member from the school systems where it places teachers.

In fall 2005, the organization announced plans to more than double its size to 8,000 corps members by 2010 with the help of a $60-million capital campaign, a move that would also more than double the number of TFA alumni to over 20,000.

Critics charge that Teach for America is a revolving door and that corps members' interest in education is ephemeral. In fact, while many alumni speak of "surviving" their time in TFA under very difficult teaching conditions, TFA reports that 85 percent of its recruits finish their two-year commitments. A 2004 study by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., an independent organization, found that their students learn just as much reading as—and more math than—do the students of the other teachers in their schools. And over 60 percent remain in education longer than two years.

The alumni have taken on many roles, working on school boards, in state departments of education and governor's offices, as central office administrators, and as education entrepreneurs. Over 50 principals of traditional public schools and more than 80 principals of charter schools are TFA alumni, including two-thirds of the highly regarded KIPP charter schools. And 36 percent of TFA alumni have continued as classroom teachers, including Jason Kamras, the 2005 National Teacher of the Year.

TFA has also cultivated a commitment to education in a generation of leaders in a variety of other fields, as Kopp had hoped. Nearly half of the alumni who have left the education sector do work that helps low-income communities, according to a 2004 TFA alumni survey, and an additional 20 percent do volunteer work in such communities.

ON THE WEB Read the TFA Alumni profiles from this article, along with other Connecting the Dots reports.

Additional Teach for America Alumni

Teachers

Jonathan Harris (Houston, 1992), national board certified teacher at Anderson High School, Austin, Texas. Several dozen TFA alumni are board-certified teachers

Hailly Korman (Los Angeles, 2002), kindergarten and first-grade teacher, 122nd Street Elementary School, Los Angeles; member, advisory board, National Council on Teacher Quality; writer; presenter at national education conferences

Steve Zimmer (Los Angeles, 1992), social studies teacher, John Marshall High School, Los Angeles; director, Marshall High School Multilingual Teacher Career Academy; family services director, Elysian Valley United, a community-based social-services agency in northeast Los Angeles

Principals

Tony Byrd (Los Angeles, 1993), principal, Cedar Valley Community School, Lynnwood, Wash.; former principal, Farnham Elementary School, San Jose, Calif.; California Teacher of the Year, 1995

Julie Jackson (Newark, 1994), principal, Northstar Academy, Newark, N.J., a charter school

Tracy Wright (District of Columbia, 1996), principal, Nalle Elementary School, Washington, D.C.

School Board Members

Natasha Barbic (Houston, 1991), school board member, Houston Independent School District

Adam Mitchell (San Francisco Bay Area, 1999), vice president, Ravenswood City School District, Ravenswood, Calif.

Layla Avila (Los Angeles, 1997), school board member, Whittier, Calif.

Public School Administrators

Michael Lach, director of science, Chicago Public Schools

Hae-Sin Kim (Bay Area, 1993), director of New School Development Group, Oakland (Calif.) Unified School District

Elizabeth Pauley (District of Columbia, 1993), director of leadership initiatives, Massachusetts Department of Education

Emily Qazilbash (Baltimore, 1993), received Harvard University's Conant Fellowship; assistant director for Boston Public Schools' Center for Leadership Development

Education Entrepreneurs

Chris Barbic (Houston, 1992), founder and executive director, YES College Prep School, Houston

Julia Grace (New York City, 1996), executive director, Reach for Excellence, Atlanta. Participants in the tuition-free program for middle-schoolers attend classes on Saturdays and during summers to get them ready for college-preparatory programs

Kim Smith (Baltimore, 1998), co-founder and chairman, New Schools Venture Fund

Education Policy Experts

Kristin Bannerman (Houston, 1996), education policy adviser, Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee

Scott Joftus (Los Angeles, 1991), co-founder and president of Cross & Joftus, an education policy consulting firm

Heather Urban (South Louisiana, 1996), policy director, Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada

Teachers Unions as Agents of Reform

An Interview with Brad Jupp

Education Sector Senior Policy Analyst Sara Mead interviewed Jupp in December, 2005.

Voters in Denver, Colo., in 2005 overwhelmingly approved a $25-million tax increase to fund a new, nine-year performance-based pay system for the city's teachers. ProComp, the new teacher pay system funded by the tax initiative, reflects a landmark agreement between the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) and the Denver Board of Education to link teacher pay more closely to performance and market conditions—something that rarely happens in public education.

Unlike traditional teacher pay schemes, in which salary is determined by experience and higher education coursework, ProComp will tie raises or bonuses for teachers to positive professional evaluations, meeting objectives for improving student learning, working in hard-to-staff schools or positions, and building professionally-relevant knowledge and skills. Teachers who perform well on these measures will be able to earn much more money over the course of their careers than under traditional pay plans based on experience and education.

ProComp is the result of an initiative begun in 1999, when the Denver Board of Education proposed a pay-for-performance experiment in collective bargaining negotiations with DCTA. DCTA agreed, and 16 Denver schools became part of a four-year experiment to see how performance-based pay would work and determine what a performance-based pay plan for Denver teachers should look like. In 2004, both the Denver Board of Education and the DCTA voted to create a districtwide ProComp plan as part of the Denver teachers' contract, and the November 2005 levy provided the funding necessary to implement the plan.

Brad Jupp, who taught in Denver's public schools for 20 years, was the lead DCTA negotiator on the team that negotiated the pilot project in 1999, and for the next 5 years he worked on the team that implemented the ProComp pilot. He also assisted the Joint Task Force on Teacher Compensation, the body that crafted the longer-term ProComp Agreement. Jupp is an outspoken advocate of both labor organizing and quality education for disadvantaged kids. Education Sector Senior Policy Analyst Sara Mead spoke with Jupp about ProComp, teacher unionism, and the future of the teaching profession.

Education Sector: How did you end up working on ProComp?

Brad Jupp: I started out teaching in Denver in an urban middle school in fall 1986. I brought two basic traits into the teaching profession: a very strong commitment to teaching kids to read, and an almost far-left commitment to labor and workers' rights. Teaching is one of the few places where you can indulge yourself in both of those things at once. From the very earliest period of my teaching career, I believed that collective bargaining should serve as a vehicle to meet the needs of children. It wasn't just about work hours and working conditions and wages; it was about creating conditions for workers that allowed teachers to save kids' lives.

By my second year teaching, I was a member of my union's negotiating team, and by the third year I was the chief negotiator. From about 1990 to 1999 my career as a labor leader was pretty conventional. During that same period, my career as a teacher shifted towards alternative education. By 1995 I was teaching in a very small alternative middle school that served kids who were one due process step from the street. I taught all different subjects. It was a dream job, really rewarding and interesting work.

In the spring of 1999 the Denver board of education brought to DCTA a very interesting proposal on teacher pay: They would pay senior teachers substantially more—five to seven thousand dollars a year at the end of their careers—if we made their compensation increases contingent on student learning. That was a trade-off that our members couldn't ignore: We couldn't jump to an immediate no. It was a unique situation, one where we saw a chance to mix some of the interests that drive so much in public education, interests focused on student learning on the one hand, and interests focused on teacher pay and working conditions on the other.

The two negotiating teams worked together in traditional, adversarial collective bargaining and crafted a compromise: the Pay-for-Performance Pilot. When we reached that compromise, my old friend Bruce Dickinson, the Executive Director of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA), said, in effect, "You've bargained for this, so now you actually have to sit on this Design Team to carry this out."

The Denver Pay-for-Performance Model

ES: Why were you able to develop a pay-for-performance model in Denver when other places haven't been?

BJ: Denver had a combination of the right opportunities and people who

were willing, once they saw the opportunities, to put aside their fears of losing and work with other people to try to take advantage of those opportunities. The people included a school board president willing to say, "If the teachers accept this, we'll figure out how to pay for it. They included the teacher building reps who said, "This is too good to refuse outright; let's study it." They included a local foundation that, once we negotiated the pay for performance pilot, realized we might actually be serious and offered us a million dollars to help put it in place. They included the Community Training and Assistance Center, the group that provided us with technical support and a research study of our work. They were willing to take on the enormous and risky task of measuring the impact of the pilot. And they included 16 principals in Denver who were able to see that this was going to be an opportunity for their faculties to build esprit de corps, to make a little extra money, to do some professional development around measuring results. I don't really think there was a secret ingredient other than people being able to move past their doubts and seize an opportunity. It was a chance to create opportunities where the rewards outweighed the risks. I don't think we do that much in public education.

ES: So why doesn't it happen in other places?

BJ: I think that we have to remember that it is happening in more places, certainly more places than it was 25 years ago: Columbus, Ohio; Minneapolis, Rochester, N.Y.; Douglas County, Colo., Denver—more and more places are doing things like this. We are at a moment in time, I think, when the wave is breaking, and we will see more and more efforts like the ones we now see in beacon districts like the ones I listed.

But public schools have a harder time making changes, especially in the way people are paid, for a number of reasons. First, we don't have a history of measuring results, and we don't have a results-oriented attitude in our industry. Furthermore, we have configured the debate about teacher pay so that it's a conflict between heavyweight policy contenders like unions and school boards. Finally, we do not have direct control over our revenue. It is easier to change a pay system when there is a rapid change in revenue that can be oriented to new outcomes. Most school finance systems provide nothing but routine cost of living adjustments. If that is all a district and union have to work with, they're not going to have money to redistribute and make a new pay system.

ES: What were some of the specific lessons you learned in the pay-for-performance pilot?

BJ: The most important lesson was that you can build pay systems around pragmatic judgments. By pragmatic judgments, I mean decisions that are not necessarily based on researched psychometric standards but reflect common sense and professional judgment to make effective decisions. In fact, almost all pay systems—including the single salary schedule in place in most schools today—are built around pragmatic judgments. We will never create a perfectly objective basis for compensation decisions, but if we rely on the common sense of professionals we can go a long way.

The second thing we learned, which is very important, was that differentiated pay did not destroy workplace morale; it created new challenges, but in our pilot schools, we never saw the plummet in morale predicted by opponents of alternative compensation schemes.

The third thing we learned was that, when teachers set goals and plan to meet them, students perform well whether teachers meet those goals or not. When teachers set high-quality objectives—objectives that have clear, measurable outcomes and well-articulated strategies to meet them, and those objectives are assessed routinely throughout the year—kids learn more. Learning became the cornerstone of the way we built the pay system.

A fourth thing that we learned was that we need to think hard about how to connect the stakes in a pay system to the behavior that we're trying to change. Policymakers often think of pay systems in very simple ways: "If I put a lot of money on the table, it's going to change people's behavior dramatically, so I'll put a lot of money on the table for the behavior I want." But you often don't need to do that, and you may, in fact, be making a big mistake.

We've found, for instance, that a $1,000 incentive to work in a high-poverty school with low-performing kids doesn't motivate teachers in schools with wealthier kids that perform well to move to that low-performing school. On the other hand, it does motivate teachers to stay at that high-poverty school after they've been hired there. Maybe what you need to do is to put a small amount of money on the table, stabilize the workforce, and then build the workforce in these schools over time, rather then to assume that what you want the incentive to do is to steal teachers from the suburbs. Another example is that it doesn't take a whole lot of money—only about $330 in the compensation model that we have—to get people to commit to look at their objectives twice a year. But if there's no money, they don't do it. Sometimes smaller stakes make a big difference.

ES: Why was ProComp important to you?

BJ: What was compelling for me about ProComp was that it gave teachers as workers an opportunity to stand up and say, "We succeed at what you ask us to do and therefore we're willing to stake our pay on it."

It also offered a constructive alternative to the stale debates about whether test results should be used to make any decisions in education and, in particular, to affect teacher pay. I think it's incredibly stupid for members of the education profession, especially

teacher union leaders to take the con side in that debate. The smart thing is for educators and labor leaders, to act as experts and help resolve the issue so the profession can move beyond the simplistic arguments that form the present state of the debate.

We can make agreements that change the way teachers are paid only if we are willing to experiment with methods of measuring student achievement that are directly tied to individual teachers. I use the word experiment, because there are no psychometrically proven ways to tie student data to teacher behavior, let alone teacher pay. But it begs common sense to say that teacher behavior doesn't have an impact on student learning, and it begs common sense that we should pay the same for effective teaching and ineffective teaching just because we are waiting on psychometricians to get around to finishing their research projects. Therefore, we will have to depend on a pragmatic system. Professionalism, though, is ultimately always geared around pragmatics, not psychometrics. What makes a good doctor a good doctor is the ability to use professional judgment and work with other medical professionals, not crippling reliance on outside expertise. We can do that as teachers, too, but we have to change the way we think of ourselves as workers.

Changing How We Think About Teachers as Workers

ES: What does it mean to change how teachers think of themselves as workers?

BJ: Teachers will have to acknowledge that we make a difference in the learning lives of the children we teach. If I'm a 5th grade teacher, I should be able to say I have made a measurable impact on the students who have spent the year with me. Furthermore, I should be able to diagnose and support cases where an individual child doesn't make as much progress or reach the target level of achievement. I should not say, "You know, these kids come from tough homes. Some of them don't speak English very well. I'm not going to be able to teach them." I think the willingness to accept that kind of accountability will get teachers a much higher status in the world.

It is an interesting paradox among teachers who resist the current wave of accountability measures that they are willing to embrace similar older models like the Advanced Placement system. The best high school AP teachers will stand up and say, "Yup, the kids I teach are going to pass the AP test because I teach them, and if they get a teacher who's not as good as I am, they're not going to pass that AP test." I'd like to see that kind of professional chutzpah across the entire teaching profession.

ES: So why doesn't that openness to accountability come across in public debates?

BJ: I think that too often we're debating the wrong thing. We've gotten so caught up debating the psychometric validity of states' standardized tests, and whether or not we're going to trust the results from these large scale tests, that we've forgotten that there are far more pragmatic measures of student learning that we can use every day to make decisions of consequence.

There are other things to inhibit us. The job of teaching has been one where there's too much individual autonomy and not enough collective commitment to getting results. And so we are unpracticed as a profession in talking about results. We organize our workplace in isolated cells that we call classrooms that rarely get together and talk about results. Some elementary school teachers, mainly in Title I jobs, have been battling this, though, for decades. These are the people who pioneered diagnostic testing in the 1970's. And when I get around a group of well-trained diagnostic elementary school teachers, they can sit down, talk about results, not be shy about the fact that one of them outperformed another, not be shy about the fact that some groups of kids are tougher to teach than others, and not be shy that when you are getting tougher kids you've got to teach in different methods. The isolation in which secondary teachers work has really inhibited that aspect of the profession.

In general, the debate about how we measure performance in education is incredibly crude. We tend to focus narrowly on large-scale math and reading assessments. But what schools and teachers do is much more diverse than can be captured by those assessments. In our work during the DPS/DCTA Pay for Performance Pilot, we conducted an inventory of job types in Denver public schools in 2001. We found that there were more than 450 job assignments among the teaching workforce, and fewer than 40 percent of the teachers in the entire school system could be held individually accountable using the state standards tests administered every year in math and reading in grades three through ten. So when we focus only on the results of large-scale math and reading assessments, the debate becomes limiting and tends to neglect a majority of the workers in schools who are making a difference but who don't have the tools to show it. We need much more agile tests, so that teachers can look at the assessments and say, "These kids really learned what I taught them last year." We don't use tools like that so we end up unable to stand up for the high quality work that we do.

ES: Who needs to take the lead in fixing these structural and organizational problems?

BJ: Right now all of us—teachers unions, school boards and administrators, higher education—are locked in a game of chicken where both sides say, "I'll go forward when you've gotten the conditions I demand right." We've got to stop waiting for conditions to be perfect to engage in reform, and we've got to stop waiting for others to get their work right before we begin doing our part. Part of the story in Denver is that we decided that in the choice between fishing and cut-

ting bait, it was time for all of us—the school district, central office, principals in the pilot schools, the teachers union, the philanthropic community, higher education and technical groups that supported us—to all fish at the same time.

Unions and Reform

ES: What role do you think unions should play in school reform generally?

BJ: Unions should make it part of their professional and organizational goals to lead school reform. To do so they have to accept that the paradigm around accountability and quality has shifted and cannot be rolled back. They need to stop trying to go back to a pre-NCLB, or pre-Goals 2000, or pre–Nation at Risk era and recognize that, even though some of the push for accountability comes from people who are their political enemies, there are also some good ideas there. Teachers unions need to make those good ideas their own and become champions of schools and a profession that thrives only when it serves its community's simple hopes that students will learn. They need to lead the debate on what makes a sound, useful accountability system. To do that, teacher's unions will have to let go of their fear of standardized tests, accountability, rewards and consequences. And when they let go of that fear, they'll have to go farther and recognize that, in fact, since teachers already live in a world of rewards and consequences, it's our job to make rewards and consequences that help our profession thrive rather than to resist them and demand they go away.

ES: Many on the right argue that unions are the major barrier to reform. As someone with a strong commitment to and history in unionism, how do you respond to that characterization?

BJ: There are multiple sides to that argument. Teacher's unions are not necessarily resistant. Many of the reform proposals that are put before us are silly and should be rejected. Proposals to redistribute the existing salary among workers, so that some get a lot more while others get a lot less, will never work whether in a unionized workforce or not. Likewise, old-fashioned merit pay proposals, where salary increases are dependent entirely on a principal evaluation are silly, too. Research on private and public sector merit pay systems shows that when you ask the supervisor to identify outstanding performers they over-identify, so within a short period of time this becomes very expensive. Unions should be recognized as right when they resist proposals like that.

Unions are very conservative organizations, although they don't like to admit it. After they go through the radical surge of getting a collective bargaining agreement, they begin to demand that things stay the same. This is, I think, the real challenge in getting alternative compensation systems into urban schools. You have to look at the inherently conservative nature of collective bargaining as a tool to create enduring policy and then say to the workforce, "We're not going to create enduring policy until we know it works. Therefore we're going to experiment and figure out what works before we develop the policy." That's what we did in Denver. We took advantage of the conservative nature of collective bargaining. We entered into an experiment prior to locking everything down in policy. As we experimented we changed what we thought we would do based on what we learned in the experiment. Only when we were satisfied that we had gotten things largely right did we put the system into broader and more durable policy.

Union leaders, and leaders in school districts in general, are often isolated from a wider view of the changing world of policy and practice. Therefore we can accept without proof the totally false assertion that there are no successful examples of alternative teacher compensation systems around the country and that all earlier experiments are proven failures. There are, in fact, hundreds of examples. People in think tanks, people who go to conferences, people who get the kind of professional development you and I get—know that. But folks who work in schools, in district offices and in union halls don't get those kinds of development opportunities, so they don't know.

I think the last reason that we fail as unions to embrace alternative compensation is the most tragic. In the last 25 years, our failure to embrace accountability initiatives has made us fear that we cannot be held accountable for results with students. I can't understand that kind of commitment to failure before the fact. I think that we, as unions and teachers, have felt so victimized by accountability that we have almost betrayed our own mission as a profession. We're the ones that are supposed to make a difference in the learning lives of kids, but we make the facile argument that you can't measure the results of our work in any publicly-reportable way. To that I say, "If I can't measure the results of learning in my classroom, why do I go to work and teach kids every day?"

The people who really confuse me in this debate are people, like Jonathan Kozol and Alfie Kohn, who say they are committed to student learning at all costs but reject the use of any kind of assessment to measure student learning. They treat learning as sacred but magically immeasurable—invisible, almost. As long as opinion leaders like the two of them make the case for the importance of education but argue that its results cannot be measured in a publicly reportable way, they are the worst allies of credible public school systems. They unwittingly give aid to the enemies of public education who view us as an unaccountable monopoly.

ES: Why do teachers feel so victimized by accountability?

BJ: I think that the accountability debate, as it's presented by politicians and policymakers, often does make teachers feel like victims. Legislators and policymakers create irrational

consequences and rewards in those systems, consequences and rewards that are out of the individual's control. Nothing makes a person feel more like a victim than being unable to control work- or life-altering consequences. In Colorado, for instance, we have a law requiring a state takeover of schools after 3 years of unsatisfactory performance. Colorado educators feel very victimized by this consequence. In California, they tried giving enormous rewards to everybody in schools that performed really well. But what they created didn't motivate teachers to teach differently; when implemented, these bonuses appeared like a lottery for people who served high-performing, mostly wealthier students. Systems like these make educators feel like victims because, as individuals, the decisions they make, the actions they take, have little meaningful effect on the consequences.

You also can't get around the fact that some of the people advocating accountability—not all of them, but some—really want to dismantle public education. For them, accountability isn't a mechanism for getting students to learn more; it's a mechanism to steal power from the public sector and move it to the private sector. And the result is that people start to see a conspiracy—often a falsely constructed conspiracy—to privatize public education. A stronger profession, though, would break down this tendency through good politics, rather than claim to be victimized by the accountability movement in general. There are plenty of people in the accountability movement—people in the civil rights movements, Republican moderates who believe that good government would provide strong schools to all—who believe that the mission of schools is to educate children and that schools need to live up to that mission. These people should be the natural allies of the teaching profession. When you have people from the civil rights community standing shoulder by shoulder with business leaders who are longtime Republican Party donors you've created a very different [type of] politics, and we in public education should be prepared to engage with them.

Finally, I think that a lot of teachers were taught, in our liberal arts and education training, that poor children were victims of the environments in which they lived and therefore deserved different considerations. That way of thinking about students doesn't work for me. It was my job to get kids to read, no matter what situation they came from. The belief that because the kids have troubled background they're never going to learn is deeply embedded into the culture of public school teaching and needs to get shaken out.

Looking Ahead

ES: How can you change this way of thinking?

BJ: You need to build systems like ProComp to demonstrate that teachers, by and large, succeed in their work. To do that you have to measure student learning using methods that take into account how much kids know when they enter a course of instruction and how much they know when they complete it. Over time teachers will realize that the consequences generated from that kind of data can be fair and that success is in their grasp as individuals. Over time, the profession will take more responsibility for its collective results. Conversely, you're not going to change this way of thinking by imagining a magic system of consequences and rewards in which everyone, in the blink of an eye, works harder and performs above average. As policy leaders we have to resist the temptation to transform public education in an instant. Instead we must forge durable and pragmatic reforms that change results over time.

ES: How would you like to see the teaching profession change for the next generation of teachers?

BJ: I think the most important thing we have to do is to build measurements of student learning that teachers have confidence in—not womb-to-tomb standardized-assessment systems, but measures that give the teachers the ability to show how they make a difference with kids.

The second step is to give people the kind of professional opportunities that encourage teachers to stay in the profession and make a lifelong career out of it. We need to differentiate the workload of teachers so that in your first two or three years you spend more time with groups of adults and less time in the classroom. Similarly, we have to start creating career opportunities for people to advance while remaining in the profession. The teaching profession is based on a simple career model: You can start at age 22 teaching third graders in room 107 and retire 35 years later from the exact same room teaching the next generation of third graders. I do not know many people who think of this career model as a meaningful opportunity. So we need to create more career options for people to maybe teach a portion of the day and work as staff developers, or consultants, or curriculum writers, or intervention specialists, or even on university faculties. In this day and age, well-educated and ambitious people—the kind of people we want in the teaching profession—want a more versatile and dynamic career model. Policymakers should strive to create it.

To me, those two things are more important by a long shot than changing the way teachers are paid. But I also think that, if you really do those two things well, teachers would be paid differently in the end anyway.

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- Ted Sizer

The Black-White College Literacy Gap

By Kevin Carey

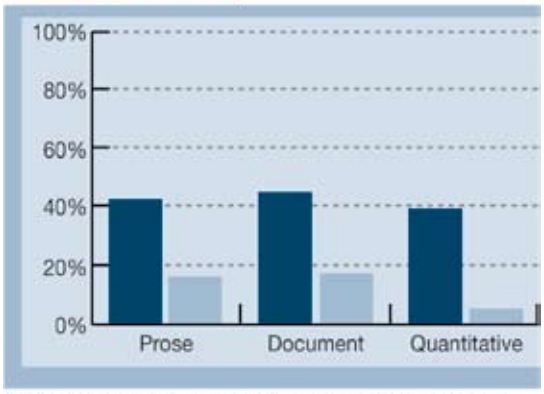
Achievement gaps between black and white high school students are discouraging but all-too-common facts of education life. It's well known that black students are less likely than their white peers to graduate from high school, and score lower on tests like the SAT and the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). Far less attention has been paid to gaps in higher education. A new study of college student literacy suggests that black-white gaps not only persist into college, but may become even larger by the time students finish their degree.

Released in January 2006 by the American Institutes for Research, the study assessed the literacy of 1,827 graduating seniors from 80 randomly-selected two- and four-year colleges and universities. Students were tested for three types of literacy:

- "Prose" (comprehending and using information from texts such as news stories and editorials)
- "Document" (comprehending and using information from documents such as job applications, maps, and food labels)
- "Quantitative" (identifying and performing computations with data from printed materials such as order forms and interest rate schedules)

Scores were translated into four levels: "Below Basic," "Basic," "Intermediate," and "Proficient." To be proficient in prose literacy, for example, a student would have to successfully compare the viewpoints of two newspaper editorials. Proficient document literacy might mean interpreting a table about blood pressure and physical activity, while proficient quantitative literacy could include computing and comparing the cost per ounce of food items.

Percentage of Graduating Students at Four-Year Colleges and Universities With "Proficient" Literacy



Prose: Comprehending and using information from texts such as news stories and editorials.

Document: Comprehending and using information from documents such as job applications and maps.

Quantitative: Identifying and performing computations using numbers embedded in printed materials such as an interest rate schedule.

White Black

Source: J.D. Baer, A.L. Cook, S. Baldi, The Literacy of America's College Students, American Institutes for Research, 2006.

As the chart shows, there were dramatic differences in proficiency between black and white students. White proficiency rates in prose and document literacy were more than double that of black students, and eight times higher for quantitative literacy (all differences were statistically significant).

Similarly, there were large differences in the percent of college seniors with no more than "Basic" levels of literacy, with far more black students scoring at low levels than white. A student with only basic document literacy, for example, would be unable to identify a specific location on a map.

By some comparisons, these gaps for college seniors are larger than black-white gaps for high school seniors. For example, 69 percent of white 17-year-olds scored 300 or above (mastery of "moderately complex procedures and reasoning") on the most recent NAEP mathematics test, compared to 26 percent of black 17-year-olds. That means that white students are 2.7 times more likely than black students to hit the mark in high school math, but 8.0 times more likely to be proficient in quantitative literacy at the end of college.

Gaps in NAEP reading scores, by contrast, were very similar to the college literacy gaps, with 45 percent of white high school seniors scoring at 300 or above, compared to 17 percent of black students—exactly the same percentages as document literacy in college.

These results should be interpreted with caution. The high school NAEP and college literacy assessments are different tests that measure different things. Colleges and universities are supposed to give their students a broad range of knowledge, perspectives and skills, only a fraction of which are represented in a test of practical literacy. Readers should also be cautious in associating black literacy with the nation's Historical Black Colleges and Universities, since most black collegians don't attend HBCUs.

But these results are undeniably disturbing. In working to improve college opportunities for black students, policymakers have historically focused on issues like access, affordability, and affirmative action. People worked to give minority students the chance to attend college, on the assumption that once they got there they would be okay. The new literacy data—along with reports that fewer than 4 in 10

black students graduate from college on time—suggest otherwise. When nearly half of all black college seniors at four-year institutions demonstrate no more than basic levels of quantitative literacy—skills commonly associated with high school graduates, at best—hard questions must asked about how well our colleges and universities are serving students of color, and what they will do to improve.

Colleges Giving More Financial Aid to Wealthy Students

By Kevin Carey

Every year, college gets more expensive. But while policymakers often focus on Pell grants and student loans, another important form of student financial assistance has received less scrutiny—aid provided directly by individual colleges and universities. Traditionally, these grants were based primarily on students' financial need. But in recent years, many colleges and universities—particularly private institutions—have been giving more and more aid to their wealthiest undergraduates, students who wouldn't qualify for aid under most need-based formulas. Why? Because even after taking into account the cost of the aid, these students still provide institutions with far more net revenue than their low-income peers.

According to the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey, private institutions gave financial aid to about half—53 percent—of students in the lowest income quartile in 1993. That number has held steady, rising only 3 percentage points to 56 percent in 2000. But for students in the highest quartile, the percent receiving aid jumped by 16 percentage points, from 35 percent to 51 percent.

Moreover, the amount of money received by high-income students rose faster as well. In 1992, low- and high-income students received the same average award, roughly $5,500. But by 2000, awards jumped by $1,300 for students in the highest income quartile, compared to only $700 for students in the lowest. Public institutions are going the same way, with the biggest increases awarded to the wealthiest students, although the trend is less pronounced than in the private sector.

There's a ruthless bottom-line logic driving this trend: poor students bring in far less net revenue than rich ones, and do nothing to burnish an institution's status in the higher education marketplace. Using sophisticated pricing models originally developed by the airline industry and sold by for-profit "enrollment management" consultants, a growing number of institutions have figured out how to shore up their balance sheet and raise their status in the influential U.S. News rankings by using aid dollars to entice wealthy students who ultimately pay more to attend. More recent data suggest that the trend isn't letting up—the amount of so-called "merit" aid awarded to students increased five-fold from 1994 to 2004, more than four times the rate of increase for need-based aid.

Shifting the student aid focus away from low-income students puts them at risk of being pushed out of elite institutions and out of the four-year higher education sector as a whole. Higher education, long an engine of social mobility, runs the danger of widening our already-growing class divisions instead of narrowing them.

Average Institutional Financial Aid Awarded per student at Private Colleges and Universities, by Family Income, 1993–2000

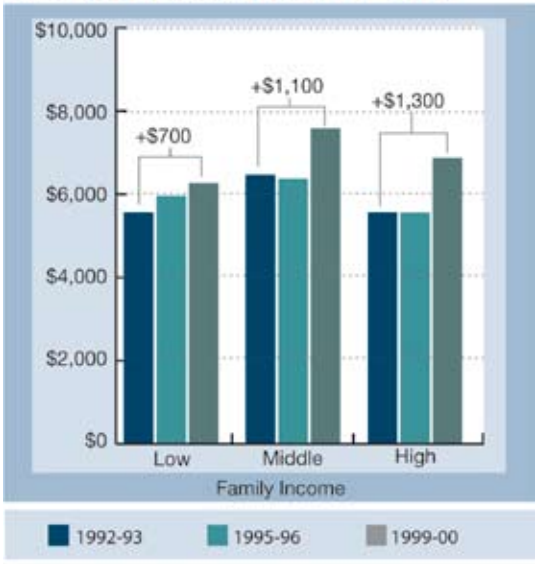


Chart source: The Condition of Education 2004, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Original data source: National Post-Secondary Student Aid Survey, 1992-93, 1995-96, and 1999-2000.

Percent of Students Receiving Institutional Financial Aid at Private Colleges and Universities, by Family Income, 1993–2000

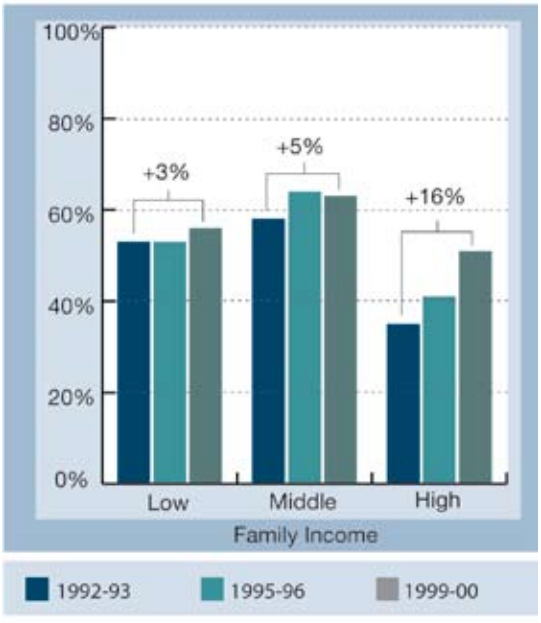


Chart source: The Condition of Education 2004, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Original data source: National Post-Secondary Student Aid Survey, 1992-93, 1995-96, and 1999-2000.

ON THE WEB Read additional Charts You Can Trust, including citations.

Challenged Index

Why Newsweek's List of America's 100 Best High Schools Doesn't Make the Grade

By Andrew J. Rotherham and Sara Mead

Americans love rankings, and one has to look no further than the local newsstand for evidence. Every week, it seems, a magazine or newspaper runs a headline about the number one way to lose weight, the five hottest new soul singers or the top ten most powerful dishwashers. Education has not been spared from this national obsession, and *U.S. News and World Report's* annual ranking of colleges and universities shows just how influential such ratings can be: Some colleges have altered their admissions practices in order to boost their score in the newsmagazine's ranking.

While there is no national ranking of the country's elementary and secondary schools, *Newsweek* publishes a list of the top 100 American high schools. The annual list has become increasingly influential since its inception in 1998….

The highly regarded Washington Post education writer Jay Mathews developed the *Newsweek* formula. He calls it the Challenge Index, and it is a simple measure: Divide the number of Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) tests taken by students at a high school by the number of graduating seniors.

The Challenge Index =

$$\frac{\text{AP and IB Tests Taken}}{\text{Number of Graduating Seniors}}$$

Mathews focuses on AP and IB because the courses are supposed to give students an opportunity to experience challenging, college-level work while still in high school. And, according to Mathews, the percentage of students taking the exams is better than other measures at gauging how effectively a high school prepares its students for post-secondary success. Further, because the same AP and IB tests are given to students nationally, the Challenge Index allows Mathews to compare schools from different states.

While the number of students taking AP and IB tests is one key indicator of a good high school, we believe that the Challenge Index is a seriously flawed measure of overall quality. A successful high school should show high levels of student achievement, graduate almost all of its students and not let any demographic subgroup suffer at the expense of others. Most national and local experts and policymakers share these values. To be sure, graduation rates and student achievement are hardly the only indicators of a school's quality. At a minimum, however, America's best high schools should be expected to meet these basic criteria.

Yet our analysis shows that many schools on *Newsweek's* list do not meet these minimum standards. Using publicly available student performance data, we found that many schools on *Newsweek's* 2005 ranking have glaring achievement gaps and high dropout rates. By presenting them as America's best, *Newsweek* is misleading readers and slighting other schools that may in fact be better than those on Mathews' list. For example, the magazine ranks Eastside High School in Gainesville, Fla., as the third best high school in the nation, but only 12 percent of Eastside's black students were reading at grade-level in 2004. And *Newsweek* ranks Hillsborough High School in Tampa, Fla., as America's 10th best high school, but only 17 percent of black students and 26 percent of Hispanic students met the state's modest grade-level standards in 2004. While some students at Eastside or Hillsborough may be receiving a challenging education, it's clear that many are not. And Eastside and Hillsborough are not outliers. In fact, schools with substantial inequities in student achievement make up a significant proportion of *Newsweek's* list of best high schools.

Certainly, ensuring that more students take rigorous courses is important…. However, the inclusion of schools with significant achievements gaps and very low performance for some student groups raises two important questions:

- Is Mathews' methodology the best way to find out which high schools are America's best, in light of the increasing public availability of school data?
- Is this list fair to other non-selective public high schools?

We think the answer to both questions is no.

Method

Our analysis is straightforward. We collected student performance data for the 100 schools in *Newsweek's* 2005 "America's 100 Best High Schools" issue…. We calculated the proficiency gaps based on state assessments for three student populations that are often underserved: black students, Hispanic students and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. We also examined the graduation rates of schools disaggregated by race, ethnicity and family income….

Findings

Black-White Test Score Gaps

Of the sixty-one schools on *Newsweek's* list that reported data for both black and white students in reading, the average difference between the percentages of white and black students who were proficient was 26 points…. In math, 56 schools reported data for both black and white student subgroups, and the average gap between the percentages of white and black students who scored proficient was 31 points.

Hispanic-White Test Score Gaps

In the 58 schools with disaggregated data for white and Hispanic students in reading, the average gap between the percentages of white and Hispanic students who scored proficient was 19 points…. In math, 54 schools reported data for both white and Hispanic students, and the average difference between the percentages of white and Hispanic students proficient in math was 18 points.

Test Score Gaps By Income

In the 60 schools with disaggregated data for economically disadvantaged students in reading, the average difference between the percentages of economically disadvantaged students who were proficient and the school-wide average was 19 points…. In math, 55 schools reported data for economically disadvantaged students, and the average difference between the percentages of economically disadvantaged students who were proficient and school-wide averages was 20 points.

Graduation Rate Gaps

[G]raduation rates are an important indicator of school performance, and they are particularly important when considering the accuracy of the Challenge Index, because the denominator in the Challenge Index is the number of graduates, rather than the number of students who should have graduated in a given year.

We found graduation rates for 84 schools, and the average graduation rate for these schools was 91 percent. Although this average seems quite high, these graduation rates should be approached cautiously since researchers have extensively documented the tendency for schools to underreport dropouts. Some schools on *Newsweek's* list still reported graduation rates that are disturbingly low. While 77 schools report graduation rates of 90 percent or higher, nine schools on *Newsweek's* list had graduation rates of less than 75 percent.

We find disappointing results when we disaggregate graduation rates by race, ethnicity and family income. Of the 26 schools that reported graduation rates for black students as a separate subgroup, the average rate was only 71 percent…. The average gap between the graduation rates of black and white students was 15 percentage points, with a median gap of 18 points.

Nineteen schools reported graduation rates for Hispanic students, and the average rate was 81 percent…. The average graduation gap between Hispanic and white students was 10 percentage points, with a median gap of nine points.

Twenty-one schools reported data for economically disadvantaged students, and the average graduation rate was 63 percent…. The average gap in graduation rates between economically disadvantaged students and school-wide averages was 17 percentage points, with a median gap of 19 points.

Implications

While some schools on *Newsweek's* list may be among the best in the nation, a closer look at the data reveals that many do not meet a reasonable definition of a good high school….

Why is it possible that so many schools that score well on the Challenge Index could still have substantial achievement gaps?

- The Challenge Index does not reflect how AP and IB tests are distributed…so a school with a small number of students taking many tests will receive a high Challenge Index score even if it is providing a lousy education to the rest of its students…. And some of the schools on the *Newsweek* list may have selective school-within-a-school-type programs in which a few students, who take a lot of tests, make the whole school look good. While the *Newsweek* index only lists schools where at least half the students are admitted on an open-enrollment basis, this filter is not sufficient.
- Because the Challenge Index uses the number of students who graduated in a given year as the denominator, rather than the number of those who should have done so, it fails to account for the large number of students who drop out…. This is a serious design flaw considering that the most commonly accepted methodology for calculating completion rates indicates that only 56 percent of black students and 52 percent of Hispanic students finish high school with a degree.
- Though the achievement gaps detailed in these schools are not that different from those in other schools…if these schools are going to be held up as the gold standard, they should not have such large achievement gaps.

In *Newsweek's* defense, it is very difficult to measure the quality of a high school. For one, state assessment practices and procedures are far from uniform. Some states test students at the end of courses, while others use graduation exams. State accountability systems are also often not sophisticated enough to rank schools. Moreover, by the time students reach high school they have often suffered from years of educational neglect, and it's extremely difficult to measure how much a high school has helped each student improve.

We hope our research produces two results:

First, *Newsweek* should characterize its rankings more precisely, and thus more accurately…the current *Newsweek* approach gives readers the wrong impression about the

overall achievement of these schools. These schools score highly on one very narrow measure that ignores many other important aspects of school quality….

Second, *Newsweek* should use more sophisticated measures…that include comprehensive data on performance from measures like adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements in No Child Left Behind…. They could tighten the definition of an open-enrollment school...and include disaggregated data as well as graduation rates in their rankings and reward schools that do well with students from diverse backgrounds….

They could also develop a more elaborate metric for determining school quality and couple it with professional judgment…. Though more laborious, adding indicators to the Challenge Index would increase the accuracy of its ranking.

Conclusion

A rating of America's high schools that examines how schools prepare students for a broad range of post-secondary opportunities has tremendous value, especially as educators and policymakers seek to improve high school curricula. For a national magazine with the reputation and stature of *Newsweek* to engage in such an effort is something that the education community should welcome, not shun. But *Newsweek* must take steps to improve their approach. Because, as the magazine knows as well as anyone, everyone wants a top-rated ranking.

ON THE WEB Read the full report, along with citations, charts, and a response from Jay Mathews.

Measured Progress: A Report on the High School Reform Movement

For more on high schools, read Education Sector's report "Measured Progress: A Report on the High School Reform Movement." This report reviews new evidence on high school reform and reaches two important conclusions:

First, the American high school is not as impervious to change as many believe it to be. Both real change and real progress are possible, slow and difficult though they may be.

Second, the most significant improvements in high schools come from combining strategies and solutions long thought to be ideologically disparate or even mutually exclusive: creating more supportive educational environments for students with high expectations and rigorous instruction. More rigorous curricula and tougher graduation standards might not hurt graduation rates, and might even help improve them. Structural reforms and curriculum reforms are mutually reinforcing and produce larger gains in student performance when implemented together. Helping educators become more supportive of students, rather than merely indifferent to their success or failure, is critical. But improving school climates alone is not the answer. For example, many students learn demanding academic content better when it is infused with workplace applications and problems. But teachers need help in creating such courses, researchers say. And there's a growing consensus that struggling high schools require directive support from outside organizations – especially the 15 percent of the nation's high schools that produce 50 percent of its dropouts.

The challenge now becomes how to create the conditions that allow such solutions to flourish together and how to get them into the communities and high schools that need them the most. High school reform is achievable, but reformers must leave very little to chance to be successful.

Hot Air

How States Inflate Their Educational Progress Under NCLB

By Kevin Carey

Critics on both the Left and the Right have charged that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) tramples states' rights by imposing a federally mandated, one-size-fits-all accountability system on the nation's diverse states and schools.

In truth, NCLB gives states wide discretion to define what students must learn, how that knowledge should be tested, and what test scores constitute "proficiency"—the key elements of any accountability system. States also set standards for high school graduation rates, teacher qualifications, school safety and many other aspects of school performance. As a result, states are largely free to define the terms of their own educational success.

Unfortunately, many states have taken advantage of this autonomy to make their educational performance look much better than it really is. In March 2006, they submitted the latest in a series of annual reports to the U.S. Department of Education detailing their progress under NCLB. The reports covered topics ranging from student proficiency and school violence to school district performance and teacher credentials. For every measure, the pattern was the same: a significant number of states used their standard-setting flexibility to inflate the progress that their schools are making and thus minimize the number of schools facing scrutiny under the law.

Some states claimed that 80 percent to 90 percent of their students were proficient in reading and math, even though external measures such as the federally funded National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) put the number at 30 percent or below. One state alleged that nearly 95 percent of their students graduated from high school even as independent studies put the figure closer to 65 percent. Another state determined that 99 percent of its school districts were making

adequate progress, while others found that 99 percent of their teachers were highly qualified. Forty-four states reported that zero percent of their schools were persistently dangerous.

With the approval of the U.S. Department of Education, many states are reporting educational results under NCLB that defy reality and common sense. In so doing, they are undermining the effectiveness of the law. Principals and teachers in states that establish high standards under NCLB are under intense pressure to improve, while similar educators in states with low standards are told that everything is fine and they're doing a great job. Students in states that set the bar high for school performance have access to free tutoring and public school choice when their schools fall short; students in identical circumstances in other states must do without.

The result is a system of perverse incentives that rewards state education officials who misrepresent reality. Their performance looks better in the eyes of the public and they're able to avoid conflict with organized political interests. By contrast, officials who keep expectations high and report honest data have more hard choices to make and are penalized because their states look worse than others by comparison.

It is understandable, even predictable, that some state education officials would make these choices. But their actions threaten NCLB. While the most high-profile opposition to the law has come in the form of lawsuits filed and public relations campaigns waged by national teachers unions, lax state standard-setting may actually be far more harmful to the law in the long run—not by attacking it directly, but by falsely asserting that most of its goals have already been met.

Policymakers and the public won't stand behind an education system that isn't truthful. Thus, federal lawmakers have no choice but to confront the historically contentious issue of how to balance federal and state responsibility for setting education standards. Unless steps are taken to bring state standards in line with reality, NCLB's credibility—and viability—are at serious risk.

The Pangloss Index

Some states have inflated their performance under NCLB dramatically. To identify the states that report the most optimistic education results, this paper aggregates state rankings on 11 measures contained in the March 2006 state reports into a single ranking, shown on Table 1. Those measures include student proficiency rates in elementary, middle, and high schools, the percent of schools and districts making "adequate yearly progress," high school graduation and dropout rates, school violence ratings, teacher and paraprofessional qualifications and teacher access to high-quality professional development. The highest ranked states reported the best combined results. (For a complete list of data and an explanation of the rankings methodology, see Appendix 1 in the PDF version of the report, which is available online).

In a perfect world, this index would provide an accurate snapshot of education progress, showing parents and policymakers which states are providing the best education

to their children and which have the most room to improve. But as this report's analysis of the state-reported data shows, state rankings on Table 1 are driven less by real-world education success than by the penchant of some states to misuse their standard-setting flexibility under NCLB to define and report performance data that are contradicted by objective measures. That's why these rankings are called the "Pangloss Index," after the character in Voltaire's Candide. Dr. Pangloss was an inveterate optimist, a man who insisted, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, that we live in the best of all possible worlds. Far too many states are using their discretion under NCLB to follow Pangloss' lead.

Cream of the Crop?

The Pangloss Index ranks Wisconsin as the most optimistic state in the nation. Wisconsin scores well on some educational measures, like the SAT, but lags behind in others, such as achievement gaps for minority students. But according to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the state is a modern-day educational utopia where a large majority of students meet academic standards, high school graduation rates are high, every school is safe and nearly all teachers are highly-qualified. School districts around the nation are struggling to make adequate yearly progress (AYP), the primary standard of school and district success under NCLB. Yet 99.8 percent of Wisconsin districts—425 out of 426—made AYP in 2004–05.

How is that possible? The answer lies with the way Wisconsin has chosen to define the AYP standard. NCLB requires states to base AYP designations on the percentage of students who score at the "proficient" level on state tests in reading and math. That percentage is compared to a target percentage, which must be met by both the student body as a whole and by "subgroups" of students, such as students from specific racial and ethnic populations. Districts that fail to make AYP for multiple consecutive years become subject to increasingly serious consequences and interventions.

Wisconsin has a relatively homogenous racial makeup and many small school districts, resulting in fewer subgroups in each district that could potentially miss the proficiency targets. But Wisconsin's remarkable district success rate is mostly a function of the way it has used its flexibility under NCLB to manipulate the statistical underpinnings of the AYP formula.

AYP results are based on standardized tests, and all tests have a built-in margin of error. Students might do better or worse on a given test depending on the test-maker's choice of questions. Test results can also vary due to other factors unrelated to student learning, particularly if the group of students tested is relatively small. For these reasons, the U.S. Department of Education allows states to adjust the AYP formula to give districts that miss proficiency targets by a relatively small amount the benefit of the doubt. This makes sense in theory—districts should only be labeled as inadequate if their students are truly not learning enough. But states like Wisconsin have exploited this flexibility to implement a whole series of adjustments, to the point where their AYP systems have essentially ceased to function.

Table 1. The Pangloss Index

State	Rank	State	Rank
Wisconsin	1	Rhode Island	27
Iowa	2	Pennsylvania	28
Connecticut	3	Georgia	29
Nebraska	4	Michigan	29
South Dakota	5	North Carolina	31
Kansas	6	Arkansas	32
West Virginia	7	Utah	33
Indiana	8	Washington	33
Idaho	9	Arizona	35
North Dakota	10	Kentucky	36
Tennessee	11	New York	37
Virginia	12	Louisiana	38
Mississippi	13	Massachusetts	39
Oklahoma	13	Missouri	40
Vermont	13	Oregon	41
Montana	16	Wyoming	42
New Jersey	17	Alaska	43
Minnesota	18	California	44
Colorado	19	Florida	45
Texas	19	South Carolina	46
Maine	21	Nevada	47
Alabama	22	New Mexico	48
New Hampshire	23	Maryland	49
Delaware	24	District of Columbia	50
Ohio	24	Hawaii	51
Illinois	26		

Statistical Games

Wisconsin starts by instituting a "minimum group size," only measuring subgroups that contain 40 or more students. If a Wisconsin district has, for example, 38 Hispanic students, those scores are not counted, even if few or none of them pass the test. Nearly all states use minimum group sizes, but many have chosen to measure groups smaller than 40.

This is only the beginning. Even when subgroups are large enough, individual student test scores in Wisconsin are still given the statistical benefit of the doubt. If a student's score falls below the proficiency level, but falls within a range of scores called a "standard error," their score is considered to be proficient.

After that adjustment, the percentage of students who are proficient is calculated and then compared to the target percentage. In this comparison, the district is given the statistical benefit of the doubt again. If the percent proficient is below the target, but falls within a "99 percent confidence interval," the target is considered to have been met. A confidence interval is essentially a "plus or minus" band around the proficiency target, similar to when a poll of likely voters is said to be accurate to within plus or minus a few percentage points.

Ninety-nine percent is a very stringent standard for confidence intervals—voter polls, by contrast, generally use a 95 percent confidence interval. That means that the voting preferences of all voters will be within the plus-or-minus range of the preferences of the polled voters 95 percent of the time. To achieve 99 percent confidence, the plus-or-minus band must be significantly larger, which means that a Wisconsin district's proficiency rate can fall well below the target and still be considered good enough.

Wisconsin also uses a 75 percent confidence interval for its "safe harbor" calculations, which allow under-performing districts to make AYP if they make enough improvement from the previous year. Districts make safe harbor if the percentage of students not proficient drops by at least 10 percent from the year before. Applying a confidence interval means that a district could make safe harbor even if the percentage not proficient drops by significantly less than 10 percent. In fact, if the subgroup size is small enough, it could make safe harbor even if test scores don't improve at all.

Wisconsin then breaks district scores into three levels: elementary, middle, and high school. For a district to miss AYP, it must fall short (after all of the statistical allowances above) at all three levels. If student performance is good in the elementary grades but drops off sharply in middle and high school, the district still makes AYP. This provision also has the effect of splitting student subgroups into smaller sizes and thus reducing the number that meet the minimum size of 40.

Moreover, the district must miss the mark at all three levels in the same subject. If elementary and middle school performance is inadequate in reading, while high school performance is too low in math, the district still makes AYP.

Individually, some of these adjustments have merit. For instance, minimum group sizes and confidence intervals, for example, reduce the odds of a district missing AYP due to mere statistical variance. But when such allowances and adjustments are combined, multiplied, and layered on top of one another to the degree found in Wisconsin, they have the effect of opening every safety valve in the AYP system until pressure on schools and school systems to improve is exhausted.

All of these adjustments and statistical trap doors have been approved by the U.S. Department of Education, encouraging a statistical "race to the bottom" between states. Few states used the ultra-permissive 99 percent confidence interval in NCLB's first years. But a growing number of states have adopted it after seeing its effectiveness in artificially boosting AYP results. The same is true for other adjustments—as one state department of education employee said of the provision whereby school districts only miss AYP if elementary, middle, and high school students all fall short of standards: "It's a new wrinkle this year. Lots of states are doing it."

Different Measures, Same Result

For every measure states are required to report under NCLB, the pattern is the same: some states adopt standards of success so lax as to undermine the intent of the law. Mississippi reported the highest percent of 4th graders proficient in the nation, even though the federal National Assessment of Education Progress puts the state next to last in fourth grade reading. Forty-four states, including large states like California, Illinois, and Florida, have never identified a single school as being "persistently dangerous." North Carolina defined "four-year high school graduation rate" as the number of graduates who finished in four years divided by the number who graduated in four years or more—in other words, a high school graduation rate definition that doesn't count high school dropouts in the equation.

Some of these problems can be solved with voluntary inter-state agreements to adopt common, rigorous standards, such as the "Compact on State High School Graduation Data" recently brokered by the National Governor's Association. That agreement should ensure that graduation rate definitions like North Carolina's are a thing of the past. The U.S. Department of Education also needs to do a better job of enforce existing federal guidelines. And in some cases, Congress will need to consider tightening current guidelines or explicitly setting new, uniform standards in federal law. This will be politically difficult. The Bush administration and the Republican leadership in Congress must walk a tight political line between enforcing the spirit of NCLB and traditional Republican support of "states rights" while many Democrats are reluctant to support accountability provisions with real teeth for teachers and schools. But unless Congress and the administration strike a better balance between federal enforcement and state autonomy, unless they require the U.S. Department of Education to make states take NCLB requirements seriously, NCLB could ultimately cease to be a credible vehicle of school reform.

ON THE WEB Read the full report, along with citations, charts, and additional data, including the Appendix.

The Truth About Boys and Girls

By Sara Mead

If you've been paying attention to the education news lately, you know that American boys are in crisis. After decades spent worrying about how schools "shortchange girls," the eyes of the nation's education commentariat are now fixed on how they shortchange boys. In 2006 alone, a *Newsweek* cover story, a major *New Republic* article, a long article in *Esquire*, a "Today" show segment, and numerous op-eds have informed the public that boys are falling behind girls in elementary and secondary school and are increasingly outnumbered on college campuses. A young man in Massachusetts filed a civil rights complaint with the U.S. Department of Education, arguing that his high school's homework and community service requirements discriminate against boys. A growth industry of experts is advising educators and policymakers how to make schools more "boy friendly" in an effort to reverse this slide.

It's a compelling story that seizes public attention with its "man bites dog" characteristics. It touches on Americans' deepest insecurities, ambivalences, and fears about changing gender roles and the "battle of the sexes." It troubles not only parents of boys, who fear their sons are falling behind, but also parents of girls, who fear boys' academic deficits will undermine their daughters' chances of finding suitable mates.

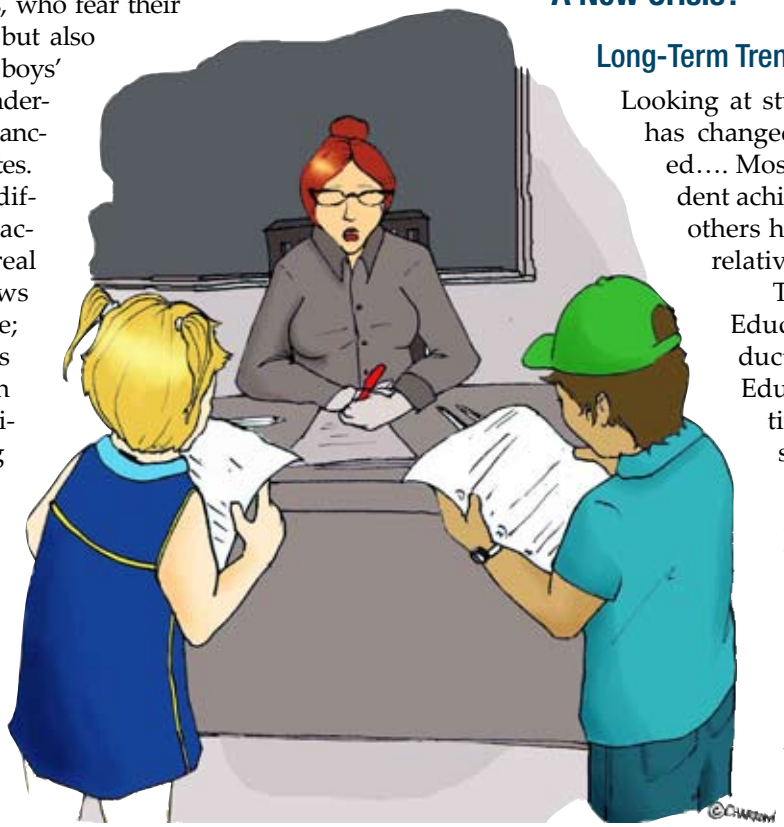
But the truth is far different from what these accounts suggest. The real story is not bad news about boys doing worse; it's good news about girls doing better. In fact, with a few exceptions, American boys are scoring higher and achieving more than they ever have before. But girls have just improved their performance on some measures even faster. As a result, girls have narrowed or even closed some academic gaps that previously favored boys, while other long-standing gaps that favored girls have widened, leading to the belief that boys are falling behind.

There's no doubt that some groups of boys—particularly Hispanic and black boys and boys from low-income homes—are in real trouble. But the predominant issues for them are race and class, not gender. Closing racial and economic gaps would help poor and minority boys more than closing gender gaps, and focusing on gender gaps may distract attention from the bigger problems facing these youngsters.

The hysteria about boys is partly a matter of perspective. While most of society has finally embraced the idea of equality for women, the idea that women might actually surpass men in some areas (even as they remain behind in others) seems hard for many people to swallow. Thus, boys are routinely characterized as "falling behind" even as they improve in absolute terms.

In addition, a dizzying array of so-called experts have seized on the boy crisis as a way to draw attention to their pet educational, cultural, or ideological issues….

Unfortunately, the current boy crisis hype and the debate around it are based more on hopes and fears than on evidence. This debate benefits neither boys nor girls, while distracting attention from more serious educational problems—such as large racial and economic achievement gaps—and practical ways to help both boys and girls succeed in school.



A New Crisis?

Long-Term Trends

Looking at student achievement and how it has changed over time can be complicated…. Most of the tests used to assess student achievement are relatively new, and others have changed over time, leaving relatively few constant measures.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), conducted by the U.S. Department of Education using a large, representative national sample of American students, is the only way to measure national trends in boys' and girls' academic achievements over long periods of time….

But NAEP data simply does not support these [boy crisis] claims. In fact, 9-year-old boys did better on the most recent long-term reading NAEP, in 2004, than they have at any time since the test was first administered in 1971…. Boys

of all ages and races are scoring as high—or higher—in math than ever before….

Even relative to girls, the NAEP data for boys paints a complex picture…. Overall, there has been no radical or recent decline in boys' performance relative to girls. Nor is there a clear overall trend—boys score higher in some areas, girls in others.

We Should Be Worried About Some Subgroups of Boys

There are groups of boys for whom "crisis" is not too strong a term. When racial and economic gaps combine with gender achievement gaps in reading, the result is disturbingly low achievement for poor, black, and Hispanic boys.

But the gaps between students of different races and classes are much larger than those for students of different genders—anywhere from two to five times as big, depending on the grade….

There are also reasons to be concerned about the substantial percentage of boys who have been diagnosed with disabilities…. The number of boys diagnosed with disabilities or ADHD has exploded in the past 30 years…. But the reasons for this growth are complicated….

While girls are less likely than boys to be diagnosed with most disabilities, the number of girls with disabilities has also grown rapidly in recent decades, meaning that this is not just a boy issue.

Moving Up and Moving On

Beyond achievement, there's the issue of attainment—student success in moving forward along the education pathway and ultimately earning credentials and degrees. There are undeniably some troubling numbers for boys in this area. But as with achievement, the attainment data does not show that boys are doing worse.

Elementary-school-age boys are more likely than girls to be held back a grade. Boys are also more likely than girls to drop out of high school.

Aspirations and Preparation

There is also some evidence that girls who graduate from high school have higher aspirations and better preparation for postsecondary education than boys do…. Girls are also more likely than boys to have taken a variety of college-preparatory classes.

But this is another case where boys are actually improving, just not as fast as girls. The percentages of both boys and girls taking higher-level math and science courses in high school and the percentages of boys and girls taking AP exams, which measure whether students have mastered rigorous, college-level curricula in various subjects, have increased dramatically in the past 20 years….

The Allegedly Disappearing Big Man on Campus

To hear commentators tell it, college campuses are becoming all-female enclaves, suffering from a kind of creeping Wellesleyfication…. In fact, men are enrolling in college in greater numbers than ever before and at historically high rates…. Why, then, all the anxiety? Because women are increasing college enrollment at an even faster rate…. But these numbers don't necessarily indicate an emerging crisis. Like many other trends in gender and education, they're nothing new. In fact, nearly two-thirds of the increase in women's share of college enrollment occurred more than two decades ago, between 1970 and 1980.

[I]t's simply inaccurate to imply that men are disappearing from college campuses or that they are doing worse than they were 10 or 20 years ago. Men's higher-education attainment is not declining; it's increasing, albeit at a slower rate than that of women.

In addition, while women have outstripped men in undergraduate enrollment, women still earn fewer than half of first professional degrees, such as law, medicine, and dentistry, and doctorates. Female college degrees are disproportionately in relatively low-paying occupations like teaching. Further, recent female college graduates earn less than their male counterparts, even after controlling for choice of field. In other words, the undeniable success of more women graduating from high school, going to college, and finishing college ultimately results in women remaining behind men economically—just by not as much as before. Far from surging ahead of men, women are still working to catch up.

The Source of the Boy Crisis: A Knowledge Deficit and a Surplus of Opportunism

Although there is a host of statistics about how boys and girls perform in school, we actually know very little about why these differences exist or how important they are. There are many things—including biological, developmental, cultural, and educational factors—that affect how boys and girls do in school. But untangling these different influences is incredibly difficult. Research on the causes of gender differences is hobbled by the twin demons of educational research: lack of data and the difficulty of drawing causal connections among multiple, complex influences…. The lack of solid research evidence confirming or debunking any particular hypothesis has created fertile ground for all sorts of people to seize on the boy crisis to draw attention to their pet educational, cultural or ideological issues.

How Should Parents, Educators, and Policymakers Respond?

To be sure, there are good reasons to be concerned about boys—particularly income, urban, rural, and minority

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Margins of Error

The Education Testing Industry in the No Child Left Behind Era

By Thomas Toch

State standards and standardized tests have become dominant forces in American public schooling. For most of its history, public education in the U.S. was a local matter, with local schools and school systems setting their own educational priorities. But in the wake of mounting evidence that the preparation most students received from public schools wouldn't suffice in a postindustrial economy, and with the conscience of the nation having been transformed by the civil rights movement, policymakers began to pursue a new paradigm, one that sought to establish statewide public school standards and hold local educators accountable if their students fell short of these standards. Standardized tests, used to measure student performance against the new state expectations, are the linchpin of this strategy of standards-based reform.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) solidified standards-based reform as a national priority, part of a bold attempt by federal policymakers to force state and local educators to improve the education of minorities and other students that public schools traditionally hadn't served very well. The legislation required that by the spring of 2006 states test nearly every public school student in grades three through eight and in one high school grade to gauge whether students have met standards in reading and math—a task requiring some 45 million standardized tests annually.

To comply with NCLB, 23 states that have not yet fully implemented the law's testing requirements will administer some 11.4 million new tests during the 2005–06 school year alone, half in reading, half in math. Within two years, states must begin testing students in a minimum of one elementary, middle, and high school grade in science under NCLB, requiring at least another 11 million tests.

Standardized test scores form the basis of NCLB's accountability mechanisms—school report cards, tutoring and school-choice options for students, and serious consequences for low-performing schools. Increasingly, as a result, the content of statewide tests has become the focus of teaching and learning in public school classrooms throughout the nation, to the point where many schools have begun to do much more testing than is required by NCLB, in an effort to prepare their students for the high-profile NCLB-mandated exams.

But this surge in testing has created immense challenges for both the industry that writes, scores, and reports the vast majority of the new statewide tests and the state agencies charged with carrying out NCLB's requirements. NCLB's test-based accountability system has given local educators powerful incentives to help students whom public education has long neglected. But the scale of the NCLB testing requirements, competitive pressures in the testing industry, a shortage of testing experts, insufficient state resources, tight regulatory deadlines, and a lack of meaningful oversight of the sprawling NCLB testing enterprise are undermining NCLB's pursuit of higher academic standards.

Symptoms of the turmoil in the testing industry aren't difficult to find: Newspapers carry accounts of testing companies giving students college scholarships to atone for the fact that scoring errors deprived them of their high school diplomas; of scoring errors sending thousands of students to summer school when they had in fact passed their tests; of months-long scoring delays; of administrators losing their jobs for low scores on tests that, had they been scored correctly, would have shown improvements in student achievement.

These problems have damaged the credibility of standards-based reform in the eyes of many educators and parents, and they have attracted the attention of the Office of Inspector General at the U.S. Department of Education, which has announced plans to examine the extent of test-scoring and reporting mistakes under NCLB.

But there are deeper, more structural problems stemming from the tremendous expansion of statewide standardized testing that haven't made headlines in the buildup to the full implementation of NCLB's testing requirements in spring 2006. Many states are constructing tests that don't fully measure student and school performance against state standards. And they are using tests that measure mostly low-level skills, a move that encourages teachers to make the same low-level

skills the priority in their classrooms at the expense of the higher standards that NCLB has sought to promote.

The testing infrastructure that undergirds NCLB's accountability system must be improved, as this report makes clear, and if steps aren't taken to do so, teachers and principals will lose valuable tools to improve instruction, and both NCLB's work on behalf of public education's neediest students and standards-based reform itself will be increasingly at risk. Statewide testing, envisioned under NCLB as a key part of the solution to what ails public schools, is fast becoming part of the problem in public education.

The Industry

The testing industry is surprisingly small, given its outsize role in public education today…. A handful of companies capture some 90 percent of the statewide testing revenue.

'Harder Than the Dickens'

Creating high-quality tests is difficult and labor intensive. The process involves determining the length and content of a test, hiring curriculum experts to write questions, and ensuring that the questions align with state standards so the questions test what students are supposed to know. Then questions are field-tested on thousands of students to ensure that they don't discriminate against groups of students but do discriminate between strong and weak students, a complex mathematical task that requires comparing how students do on other questions with how they perform on the questions being trial-tested. Test-makers also have to ensure that every multiple-choice question has one, and only one, correct (or clearly best) answer and that the questions on a test reflect an appropriate range of difficulty. Another complex statistical computation has to be performed to ensure that the same scores on different tests represent the same level of performance. Then tests have to be edited, printed, and distributed to every public school in the country….

This complex test-making infrastructure is buckling under the weight of NCLB's testing demands. "There's way too much demand and not enough supply," says H.D. Hoover, principal author of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills for nearly two decades….

The surge in state testing under NCLB has created a severe shortage of the specialists who do the analyses of how test items perform in field trials and the other heavy statistical lifting in test-making. Though the work of these experts, who are trained in measurement theory and statistics and are known as psychometricians, is crucial to creating high-quality tests, only a handful of them enter the workforce each year…

Market Pressures

The testing industry is facing these challenges in a time of tight budgets and thin margins. A study by Harvard economist Caroline Hoxby revealed that states typically spend less than one quarter of one percent of public school revenues on their statewide testing programs. States spend between $10 and $30 per student on their testing programs says Harcourt Assessment's CEO Jeff Galt and other testing experts. The result is immense pressure on test-makers to reduce costs….

Uneducated Consumers

State departments of education are ultimately responsible for carrying out NCLB's testing mandates, and they are, if anything, in a weaker position than the testing industry to respond to the surge in testing under NCLB….

According to Marion of the Center for Assessment, who was testing director in Wyoming, the result of the understaffing and lack of expertise in many state testing offices is that, "for the testing companies, it's like being auditors of their own work." Many state testing agencies simply don't have the capacity to scrutinize the work of their testing contractors closely….

Troubling Consequences

[T]he lack of state oversight of testing contractors, the industry-wide shortage of testing experts, and the many other problems that have plagued the spread of statewide testing under NCLB are also damaging the cause of standards-based reform in ways that don't make many headlines but are arguably more fundamental….

Simple Questions

Perhaps the most troubling classroom consequence of the tumult in the testing industry is the strong incentive the problems have created for states and their testing contractors to build tests that measure primarily low-level skills.

NCLB has sought to lift the level of teaching in the nation's classrooms by requiring states to set challenging standards for what students should know and be able to do. But testing experts say that many of the tests that states are introducing under NCLB contain many questions that require students to merely recall and restate facts rather than do more demanding tasks like applying or evaluating information, largely because it's easier and cheaper to test the simpler tasks….

Recommendations

State and federal policymakers can address the problems raised in this report by enhancing federal leadership on testing issues, creating an independent national oversight body to promote test quality, giving states incentives to collaborate on test development and, ultimately, developing voluntary national assessments.

Federal Leadership

The federal government should take several steps to improve the nation's education testing infrastructure. First, it should greatly increase the supply of well-trained psychometricians and other testing experts. The U.S. Department of Education should fund the training of 1,000 such specialists over the next five years, through grants to support students who commit to working in the field after they've completed their degrees….

Second, federal funding for testing under NCLB should be increased from its current level of $408 million to $860 million annually. This would help give all states the resources necessary to develop tests on par with those in states that currently have the strongest testing programs….

Third, the federal government should fund new research and development on testing…The federal government could make an important contribution by stepping in to support research and development on testing, catalyzing new ideas and technologies. It could fund research into ways to make the use of open-ended questions less expensive or ways to more accurately test students with disabilities who are able to participate in the general curriculum….

Effective Oversight

Improving the nation's fragmented testing system will require strong, effective federal leadership. President Bush should begin by inviting the leaders of both parties in both branches of Congress to work with him to name leading experts to a bipartisan presidential commission on standardized testing….

As part of its work, the commission should establish an independent national testing oversight agency…. Such a body would perhaps be called the National Testing Quality Commission and would operate in the spirit of the Consumer Product Safety Commission and other federal consumer-protection agencies….

Interstate Collaboration

The inefficiency of states and the District of Columbia administering 51 separate testing programs is obvious. States could create higher-quality tests at lower cost if they worked together to develop common tests….

[T]he federal government should encourage the creation of state testing consortia by offering states that elect to work together additional funding to support their assessment programs under NCLB.

In the long run, the logic of regional consortia leads to a solution that already exists in many of the industrialized nations of Europe and Asia: a single national testing system. By encouraging states to arrive at such a system through voluntary collaboration the federal government could support these efforts while sidestepping some of the thornier political questions about national testing….

ON THE WEB Read the full report, along with other Education Sector reports including:

- L.A. Story
- Florida Charter Schools
- A Report on the High School Reform Movement

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The Truth About Boys and Girls

boys as well as those with disabilities. Whether or not our schools are to blame for causing these boys' problems, they need to do a better job of working to address them….

[T]here are several things parents, educators, and policymakers could and should do. The first is to not panic. Boys' educational achievement is improving overall, some gender gaps are less significant than press reports make them out to be, and many boys are doing fine despite the averages.

Second, we need to realize that many areas in which we see boys struggling are connected to larger educational and social problems and are not just a function of gender….

Educators, parents, and policymakers should therefore be skeptical of simplistic proposals aimed at fixing the boy crisis, such as expanding single-sex schooling, implementing gender-based instructional techniques, or funding new federal programs aimed at improving boys' achievement. The close relation between the difficulties facing some boys and complex educational challenges such as racial and economic achievement gaps, high school reform, and special education suggests that silver-bullet approaches are unlikely to solve the problems facing many boys….

Finally, policymakers should support and fund more research about differences in boys' and girls' achievement, brain development, and the culture of schools…that include studies which use proper methodological and analytic tools…as well as experimental evaluations of different approaches that seek to close gender achievement gaps. To support research, policymakers should make sure that data systems are collecting quality information about boys' and girls' school experiences and academic achievement and men's and women's educational attainment and workforce outcomes. In addition, policymakers should fund research on some of the specific problems—learning disabilities, autism, and disciplinary or emotional problems—that disproportionately affect boys.

ON THE WEB View the entire report, charts, and citations.

Five Experts Square Off

A Debate on National Educational Standards

The Experts:

- **Lauren Resnick,** the Director of the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh and a former president of the American Education Research Association
- **Deborah Meier,** who has spent 40 years as a public school teacher and administrator in Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston
- **Michael Greve,** who serves as a John G. Searle Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute
- **Mike Petrilli,** a former associate assistant deputy secretary of education under President George W. Bush and vice president for national programs and policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation
- **Michael Dannenberg,** director of education policy at The New America Foundation and former aide to Sen. Edward Kennedy.

The Debate:

The U.S. constitution left education to the states, and for most of public education's history, the states left to local school systems questions of what to expect of students. This tradition of local control gave way in the early 1990s to a proposal by President George H.W. Bush to establish voluntary national standards, and a proposal later in the decade by President Bill Clinton to create voluntary national tests. These initiatives languished when met with strong opposition from the left and the right.

But the No Child Left Behind Act's requirement that every state introduce statewide standards and testing—and the states' often-problematic implementation of the law—has sparked new calls for national standards from liberals and conservatives alike—and has renewed opposition to the idea from both liberals and conservatives.

The following are highlights from the live Education Sector debate on March 10, 2006. Read the complete transcript on our Web site.

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Petrilli: We believe that the standards and accountability movement is in great peril and the only way to save it is through national standards and tests. Unfortunately, we're seeing all kinds of evidence that states are racing to the bottom and making their tests easier. And those of us who support No Child Left Behind have to admit that the law has played a role…. There have been a few states that have lowered their standards publicly—Missouri did so a few weeks ago—but we're most worried about what's happening behind the scenes. We can imagine a political appointee walking into a state testing director's office and saying, "make the test easier, and make sure no one will ever know…."

We asked about 15 different people who are involved in this debate to say "how can we get at this?" There are ways to get Washington to do it directly, and there are bottom-up ways, too. But if we want to have a race to the top, where states are setting high standards and we're pushing all kids to learn serious content and compete globally, then we have to do something different than we are doing today.

There are different models. For example, you have the American Diploma Project working in many states, trying to set a common exit standard for high schools that hopefully would be the same standard as an entrance standard for college. Governors are signing on to that standard and the federal government's had nothing to do with it. That's one way that you could develop a national standard from the ground up….

* * * * * *

Greve: [W]hat I think I would advocate—just my gut—is that you should have a national, very demanding test, one and the same test for any and every child in the country, and you should not connect any kind of consequences for schools, for school districts, for states with that test. The reason is that the national government is very good at providing information that can't or won't be provided at lower levels of government. And that's all it should do…. But for God's sake, don't connect consequences with it, because the minute you do it you politicize the program and the predictable effect is that what once was a demanding, uniform test will be dumbed down and variegated until you lose all the benefits you could gain.

Education Sector: So if we had a national test but without consequences, what would we do with the schools where the students fail the tests?

Greve: You could do a lot to pump the information out there. I believe in accountability, but it has to be accountability to parents, not to other bureaucrats up and down the educational chain. Then you have to say to yourself and the country, "We will do what we can to make the info available. If the schools are lousy, let's talk about what we can do to increase your options to attend better schools. If the schools are bad, sorry, but it's not a federal function to fix them."

Petrilli: So it sounds like you'd supported President Clinton's voluntary national test, then.

Greve: Yes, but I would have made it obligatory.

* * * * * *

Meier: [A]t a time when we are not very seriously interested in closing the gaps in any other area of American life, it's very hard for me to take very seriously that we want to

close the gaps in schooling. So I think, to a certain degree, these discussions are a distraction, and they annoy me because I think a different kind of social effort is needed in this country if we're serious about what happens to the poor and what happens to the disenfranchised and the oppressed and all the other things that we claim to be worried about through NCLB.

I see children left behind in so many areas that I sometimes imagine what it would be like if we said that we demand that we are going to close the gap in life expectancy. I think that's less utopian than what we are doing now, and it would have a greater effect on education gaps. I think it's only harder to talk about that because we have more respect for the medical field than we do for the educational field, so once they told us that it's a lot more complicated, not something you can simply do through the medical profession, we would take them seriously—but we think differently when we are talking about classrooms….

[I] don't think we have agreement on the purpose of a public education system…. I think there are fundamental differences in the larger purpose…. My definition is not that education is a race where the primary purpose is to avoid racing to the bottom and all the rest of that language. I think the exercise of good judgment is the central function of education in a democratic society because it's what democracy rests on—the belief that ordinary people can exercise judgment on complicated matters. Schools have to think about: what kind of complicated matters do we rely on ordinary citizens to exercise judgment about?...

[I] am for accountability, transparency. But I highly agree that, once you put high stakes to tests, not only will they be dumbed down, they'll be phony…. Kids don't come to us as standardized products, and a response to them as though they were misses the boat…. The kids who meet the one-size-fits-all criteria will do well in whatever they do, but precisely the kids we are most concerned with need the strongest school community, and as you know that's why I think schools ought to be smaller. It's why I think we should provide a lot more time for parents, teachers, and the community to talk about what they mean by education. And this hurried climate we have now in which the only time teachers get together is to talk about how to implement a curriculum and a pedagogy that they're not responsible for designing.

* * * * * *

Education Sector: [Y]ou have a lot of experience in actually creating standards, so I'm also curious as to your opinions if we were to go in this direction, practically speaking, how would that happen and how should that happen.

Resnick: Let me do the thing I'm sure you expected and turn that question around. If you look at what the standards effort or the standards movement or the standards initiative starting in the early 90s and late 80s, it had four main components. It said we should set standards and expectations in a consultative way very publicly…. Then there would be assessments systematically aligned to those standards…. The third component was that what you taught and how you taught—curriculum, teacher behavior, professional learning opportunities for teachers—would all be also geared to the standards, not to the test but to the standards. And the fourth was to try to give some push to this system using accountability….

I see children left behind in so many areas that I sometimes imagine what it would be like if we said that we demand that we are going to close the gap in life expectancy. I think that's less utopian than what we are doing now…

Now you could have several different ways of configuring these four elements. We could have something like…a national test and leave the accountability criteria totally up to states, local communities, maybe even individual schools that would then be in conversation with their parental communities. You could have had a national curriculum and left the tests up to the locals. There are countries that do that…. I'm talking about Sweden….

Here's what we did, though: We left everything up to more or less local agencies except the consequences. So we created national, federal requirements for what to do to bad schools…. The standards have been left to states and they vary dramatically. There can be differences of opinions about what good standards are, but no one will disagree that there's variability in quality. That means we have very, very different state standards with the same consequences attached to them.

The worst story is how bad the tests are. The tests are not aligned to their own state standards in all but a very few cases…. Most of the state tests do not test the high-level, intellectual demands that we were after when we set up the standards. What we really have to look at to see what kind of standards we have is what's being tested. And it's not what we want…we have to test every child every year and do it separately in 50 states. And there is no room for the kind of rich examination systems that some countries have and that we could have if we had—now I'm going to jump over—if we had some kind of a national assessment, perhaps not given every year, something that benchmarked where we were trying to go….

[T]he bright spot of NCLB and the run up to it is the utterly amazing transfer of attention and resources to our poor kids, to our kids of color, to their families, to people who were just

off-screen, not even really seriously recognized until these accountability systems came along. There has been more change in attention to actually teaching poor children and children of color in the 15 or so years of our accountability systems than all the years up to that of *Brown vs. Board of Education* produced. *Brown* was a great, wonderful opening for equity in the country…. But this standards and accountability effort has really produced attention to the children that we were not attending to…. And we may need accountability applied from outside the local school to get that, because I didn't see us having it before….

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Education Sector: Is there any point in having this discussion? Is this something that could happen on a congressional level?

Dannenberg: Yes, it's possible that something could happen on the national level. After eight years or so on Capitol Hill, I left about six months ago, frustrated like a lot of Americans that there is too much emphasis there on ideology and tactics. Ideology I think is the big impediment to national standards and national tests, but it's not something that can't be tackled, nor is partisanship, I suppose. Tactics means looking at politics from a snapshot perspective instead of the long view. Today, if there were a vote on national standards on Capitol Hill, yes, it would fail. But NCLB reauthorization, which will be the big vehicle for federal K-12 reform, I expect will be at least a four-year process: 2006, 2007, 2008, and it probably won't be signed into law until 2009, if not later. So there's a long window of opportunity to build the case for national standards and national testing from both the policy standpoint as well as politically.

What's held these efforts back in the past? I think the obstacles are still present today, and there are a number of them, but I think the two largest from the political right and left are ideology and social consequences. On the right, the ideological concerns, most people in this room know, are self evident with respect to the federalism issues—local control and federal intrusion into local schools….

But there is also ideology on the left…. I think the big issue on the left is the social consequences issue, and this may extend even beyond the political left. America likes to think of itself as the land of second chances. For national standards to have any real meaning, there have to be national tests, and for national tests to have any meaning, there have to be national consequences beyond just stigma associated with not passing. And those consequences mean sorting of kids into those deemed successful and those not and that could potentially impact social opportunities for those kids. Folks on the left are worried that with national standards and national testing, opportunities for poor kids and minority kids are going to be even more limited, because society has already done them wrong when it comes to the provision of public goods and services, that society has set them up to fail.

We are worried about kids who are not getting the resources they deserve. Let's talk about teacher quality…poor and minority kids are not getting the high-quality teachers that more affluent kids are getting…. And you say to the superintendent, why don't you change that?

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Petrilli: We are worried about kids who are not getting the resources they deserve. Let's talk about teacher quality…poor and minority kids are not getting the high-quality teachers that more affluent kids are getting…. And you say to the superintendent, why don't you change that? Why don't you find some way to pay those teachers a bonus to go work on the poor side of town, or do whatever it takes to improve the working conditions of those schools, or put more resources in those poor schools? And what do they say? They say, "If I did that I'd get killed and sent on my way because I have to pay attention to the powerful interests." The powerful interests are the affluent parents in those communities and the teacher unions. Those are the ones who have power in our education system today.

So you have a NCLB accountability system that tries to change the political dynamics on the ground…that says these kids now are going to have power that they didn't have before because bad things are going to happen to schools unless the test scores happen. The crazy people in Washington are going to do bad things, so finally the superintendent—this is a whole theory, right?—is going to be able to say to the unions and affluent parents, "Look, we have to figure out a way to get our better teachers into these poor schools or else they're going to come down on us like a ton of bricks." And maybe those conversations then can happen that couldn't happen before…. It's not a mistake that we have these inequities in every community in this country. It didn't happen by accident, and it's not going to go away by wishing it away. So we're getting at the systematic pieces here.

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Learning on the Job

A Review by Bill Tucker

LEARNING ON THE JOB: When Business Takes On Public Schools

By Steven F. Wilson

Harvard University Press, 356 pages, $29.95

Public-school management companies—both for-profit and nonprofit—have been at the center of intense controversy since their emergence in the early 1990s. *Learning on the Job*, a new book by Steven Wilson, is a welcome addition to the debate—not because it adds more fuel to the ideological fire, but because it examines the actual experiences of school-management organizations.

Wilson knows the field well. He helped write the original Massachusetts charter schools law in 1993 and then founded and served as CEO of for-profit Advantage Schools, Inc., one of the nation's first education management organizations. He led Advantage during its rapid rise from two schools in 1997 to a company serving over 10,000 students in fall 2000. But he also presided over the financial problems that led to his losing both his job and the company. He now works as a consultant to the largest education management organization (EMO)—Edison Schools, Inc.

Those hoping to find an insider's tale of the rapid growth, struggles, and eventual sale of Advantage Schools will be disappointed. The terms of Wilson's separation from the company preclude him from writing a tell-all. Instead, Wilson writes a more academic—and important—analysis of the successes and challenges of the school-management industry. To do so, he profiles seven management companies: six for-profit EMOs including Advantage, Edison Schools, and SABIS, and Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), a nonprofit organization. While Wilson does not hide his disdain for traditional "district" schools, he is frank about the numerous mistakes made by private managers. Even educators strongly opposed to charters and for-profit education will find value in his work.

The book is organized into nine chapters, each focusing on a specific dimension of school management. The chapters on "Execution" and "School Leaders" in particular should be required reading for both for-profit and nonprofit education entrepreneurs. This is where Wilson is at his best, describing the real world challenges school operators faced as they attempted to meet their lofty goals of both financial and academic success. Operators promised their investors large financial returns, thus requiring rapid growth. Yet, such growth required management organizations to induce large numbers of local districts and charter school boards into contracts—setting unreasonable expectations in the process. In turn, rapid growth required enormous amounts of investment capital to meet the high initial costs of launching new schools, making the companies vulnerable to the whims of investors.

Wilson reveals the flaws in the original, seemingly simple premise that spawned the management industry—that the elementary and secondary education market was so large (about $300 billion in the early 1990s; $500 billion today) that the companies would have no trouble growing rapidly. Wilson uses specific examples to show the execution challenges and enormous financial capital requirements that many initial education investors failed to anticipate.

Wilson's chapter on school leadership is particularly compelling. He details the central role of the principal in each school model, then chronicles each organization's specific strategy for this role: How much autonomy? What types of persons to recruit? How to scale across multiple schools? He cites a number of different strategies, from SABIS's preference for noneducators to Advantage's admiration of independent school leaders. Among the various strategies, Wilson cites KIPP as the organization that places the most emphasis on school leaders, building each school first around an entrepreneurial leader and providing those leaders with an intensive leadership training program. The study of these different approaches to common problems is applicable to all school managers—whether they function in public, private, or nonprofit management organizations.

The book is less powerful when it moves away from a discussion of the companies' business and educational strategies and tactics to the philosophical debate over the performance of traditional public schools and the private management of publicly funded schools. Despite his generally factual approach, Wilson at times relinquishes his role as an industry analyst and engages in the debate himself. He spends 10 pages telling the morality tale of the San Francisco school board's battle against Edison's charter school in the city. Right or wrong, strong opposition to for-profit school management exists and school operators must adapt to this environment. Wilson is much more salient in observing how one EMO, National Heritage Academies, succeeded by aligning its conservative, values-based approach and slow-growth strategy to geographic areas where the company would face relatively little opposition.

Wilson returns to his more pragmatic approach in a chapter on aca-

demic performance, where he analyzes both the companies' claims and those of outside researchers about student achievement in the privately operated public schools. He finds flaws in both the schools' and outside researchers' studies, with differences in research design, method, and intent clouding an already murky issue. As in other parts of the book, well-designed charts and graphs would have greatly improved the quality of the presentation and helped the reader see the data that Wilson describes only in prose. And, while not necessarily Wilson's intent, this confusing discussion of the various research studies illustrates the need for rigorous, objective research not tainted by advocates' claims. One such study, of Edison Schools, by the RAND Corporation, appeared after Wilson's book went to press. Though funded by Edison, the 5-year, $1.4-million report doesn't endorse Edison's often-extensive claims for its schools. But it also silences critics of the company who charge that Edison and other management companies aren't capable of contributing to public school reform. The Edison design works, the report concludes, but it's not a guarantee of success.

While acknowledging the many miscalculations and problems faced by education management organizations, Wilson concludes his study on a positive note. He describes the increasing emphasis on standards and potential for school re-structuring as two changes in the regulatory environment that could benefit strong EMOs. In addition, EMOs have learned from almost 10 years of operation, building their capacity to overcome early mistakes. Finally, he notes that two companies, Mosaica Education, Inc., and National Heritage Academies, are reportedly profitable.

Ironically, Wilson's story manages to at least partially vindicate the traditional school district-operated public schools that Wilson disparages in his book. Education is an extremely difficult business, especially if growth, scale, and quick returns (either academic or financial) are demanded. Any potential for-profit education investor should read Wilson's chapter on execution at least twice before succumbing to the charms of a snappy PowerPoint presentation and utopian promises.

Education Dragonslayer

A Review by Andrew J. Rotherham

EDUCATION MYTHS: What Special-Interest Groups Want You To Believe About Our Schools And Why It Isn't So

By Jay P. Greene

Rowman & Littlefield, 2005, 256 pages, $24.95

Education policy, rarely offers epic figures as alluring as Guinevere, yet Jay Greene says we are nonetheless deluded by mythology when we think about our schools.

In *Education Myths*, Greene sets out to debunk his list of 18 prevalent educational misconceptions and myths. Some of his "myths" cover spending, class-size reduction initiatives and school vouchers, debates well-known to even casual observers of education. Others, such as the often-arcane disputes about special-education policies and how to most accurately compute graduation rates, are only hotly debated within education circles.

The prolific Greene, who heads a new education research center at the University of Arkansas, is a key player on many of these issues. As a result, much of this book is a compendium of his previous work and his disagreements with various other researchers and analysts.

This doesn't mean he's all wrong. On the contrary, Greene's work on graduation rates was instrumental in forcing states to more forthrightly report high-school-completion data.

But there are interests groups and wild claims on all sides of education debates and they don't get equal scrutiny here. Greene enjoys punching left, but generally avoids criticizing the right.

For example, he debunks the myth that public schools aren't as good as they used to be. But he uses an obscure 1993 quote to portray Clinton-era Education Secretary Richard Riley as the myth's purveyor. This line was no staple for Riley, but was standard fare among more than a few conservative commentators.

Likewise, Greene devotes more time to unsettled debates than to issues where public policy clearly runs against the grain of the empirical evidence—such as the attachment of the public and policymakers to the worth of "certified" teachers in the face of abundant evidence that today's policies not only fail to ensure quality or add value, but may actually dissuade would-be teachers. School choice, a Greene favorite but an issue where the research raises as many questions as it answers, garners much more attention.

What's most striking is how little impact most of these myths have on education policymaking today. Greene wants to debunk misconceptions about the harms of accountability, school choice and spending. Yet choice is slowly but steadily expanding in education, schools are increasingly held accountable for results and few states or the federal government are on much of an educational spending binge. Greene may be too late; many of the dragons he seeks to slay don't have much fire left anyway.

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"65 Percent Solution" Doesn't Add Up

By Kevin Carey

Two thousand three hundred years ago, Alexander the Great cut the Gordian knot with one slice of his mighty sword. This was most unfortunate, inspiring countless men to believe that the path to greatness lies with simple solutions to complex problems. So it is with a small new education reform idea called the "65 percent solution."

The would-be Alexander here is Patrick Byrne, founder of Overstock.com. He wants to regulate the spending of every Florida school district based on federally mandated accounting categories, so at least 65 percent of expenditures are labeled "instruction."

This makes sense for about five seconds. Four of five people asked to evaluate a one-sentence idea while trying to hold the phone and cook dinner at the same time agree that it sounds great.

But then you realize that "instruction" doesn't include libraries, computer labs, security, maintenance, school lunches, nurses, teacher training, guidance counselors and much more. And that Standard & Poors found no statistical relationship between the 65 percent threshold and student performance.

Indeed, the 65 percent solution is remarkable for the unanimity of criticism it has inspired. Liberals, conservatives, teachers unions, school boards—people who usually argue about the time of day—all agree that it's bad policy. And it flies in the face of local control.

Yet the 65 percent solution is the belle of the 2006 education-policy ball, enacted in states such as Georgia and considered in at least 20 more.

More than anything, this shows fundamental disrespect to education. Imagine someone pitching a poll-tested plan to require every hospital in Florida, no matter its location, size or specialty, to spend at least 65 percent of its money "in the operating room." You'd be laughed out of the statehouse. Why? Because people take public health seriously.

In that sense, the 65 percent solution serves one useful purpose: Its roster of supporters provides a useful guide for identifying politicians who show disregard for the hard work needed actually to improve public schools.

Frustration with the large and long-tangled knot of contemporary education policy is understandable. Far too many entrenched interest groups work night and day pulling on one end of the knot or the other, knowing full well they're only making it tighter. And far too many so-called reformers are content to spend their time messing around with the odd protruding string.

But facile ideas like the 65 percent solution are no better. The tempting image of Alexander's solution should be set aside. History offers many better lessons to learn.

Originally published in the Orlando Sentinel April 28, 2006 (www.orlandosentinel.com).

Virtual Schools, Real Innovation

By Andrew J. Rotherham

A Wisconsin court rejected a high-profile lawsuit by the state's largest teachers' union last month seeking to close a public charter school that offers all its courses online on the ground that it violated state law by depending on parents rather than on certified teachers to educate children. The case is part of a national trend that goes well beyond virtual schooling: teachers' unions are turning to the courts to fight virtually any deviation from uniformity in public schools.

Unfortunately, this stance not only hinders efforts to provide more customized schooling for needy students, it is also relegating teachers to the sidelines of the national debate about expanding choice in public education.

Virtual charter schools grab headlines, but they are actually relatively minor players. The Center for Education Reform reports that there are 147 online-only charter schools in 18 states, with 65,354 students. In other words, virtual schools make up just 4 percent of the entire public charter school sector. And a third of them can be found in just one state, Ohio.

Still, they are valuable for many students. For example, a student in a rural community with few schooling options who finds the curriculum in her school too limiting might be better served through an online program that allows her to learn at her own pace. So, too, might a ninth grader who finds unbearable the jock-and-popularity culture that still largely prevails in our high schools. And some parents may want to be more involved in their child's education than is possible in traditional public schools but don't have the time or resources to do fully independent home schooling.

To be sure, virtual charter schools raise some accountability problems. The Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow, Ohio's largest virtual school, and two online charter schools in Florida ran into trouble recently for such practices as enrolling ineligible students.

The schools clearly need better state regulation and oversight.

What they don't need is reflexive opposition from the teachers' unions. And virtual charter schools are just part of a larger debate about public education. There is a universal American desire for customization and variety in goods and services, and education must respond to that demand, whether the unions like it or not.

The two main issues, of course, are giving vouchers to students who switch to private schools and offering more choices through public schools in an effort to improve quality. While there are legitimate reasons to be skeptical of school vouchers as a remedy for our educational problems, it makes no sense for teachers' unions to continually fight against the idea of more choices for parents even within public education.

Public charter schools, in particular, are a worthy effort to provide non-standard students with non-standardized options. On average, charter schools are smaller than traditional public schools and often have longer school days and more intense curricula; they also experiment with using instructors without traditional teacher training or having the teachers collectively manage the school themselves without a principal. This sort of variation should be welcomed, not tamped down.

America's teachers are ill served by the unions when policymakers and politicians are increasingly forced to work around them rather than with them; and the important contributions teachers' unions can make are lost. In an era of strained budgets and competing priorities, it is politically foolish for the unions to alienate parents and essentially encourage families to leave public schools.

This debate, like the ones over many other education issues, is fundamentally about who gets to have power. Yet the power the teachers' unions now wield will be fleeting if public schools do not become more responsive to parents.

An industry cannot survive by rushing to court every time a new idea threatens even a small slice of its market share. Instead, maintaining, and even broadening support for public schools means embracing more diversity in how we provide public education and who provides it.

Originally published in the New York Times, April 7, 2006 (www.nytimes.com).

Hollow Victory for Voucher Foes

By Andrew J. Rotherham

In the wake of the recent Florida Supreme Court decision overturning the state's flagship private school voucher program there were the usual cheers from opponents and jeers from voucher supporters. It is a predictable scene routinely played out in Florida and other states where school vouchers are a hot-button issue. Yet for supporters of public education, the court's ruling is a hollow victory, not a cause for celebration.

That is because the Opportunity Scholarship Program and Florida's two other private-school choice programs are proving very popular with parents. Florida is not an anomaly; various choice schemes offered in other states and cities are popular as well. In fact, whenever parents are given greater educational choice through private or publicly funded voucher programs or through public charter schools they've responded enthusiastically. This vigorous demand for choice among parents should be a wake-up call for supporters of public schools.

This is not to say that vouchers are a panacea. On the contrary, it's hard to see vouchers as a widespread solution to educational problems in Florida or elsewhere. For instance, a lack of transparency and public accountability with public dollars has created problems in Florida and in other states and the modest gains in student learning so far produced by these initiatives show they are no silver bullet.

Nonetheless, an industry that finds itself relying on the courts rather than consumer preference and loyalty to maintain its market dominance lives on a razor's edge. Unfortunately, as last week's court decision illustrates, this is exactly where the public schools often are right now. However, for the public schools to endure as a durable and high-quality institution parents must be choosing them as a matter of preference, not coercion. The demand for choice and the growing need for voucher opponents to fight in the courts rather than at the ballot box or in state legislatures shows how this is often not the case.

During the last century many industries, from the old trusts to modern industries like telecommunications and airlines, experienced fights between producers and consumers. Producers of goods and services naturally seek to protect their market share any way they can while new providers fight to enter the marketplace.

As one of the last quasi-monopolies, public schools are now facing these same pressures. Consequently, producer interests such as interest groups representing teachers, principals and school superintendents fight against vouchers while advocacy groups representing parents fight for them. It is an old story, just relatively new in education, in its intensity, and in its current form—school vouchers.

The best way for the public schools to resist vouchers is not in the courts but instead by adopting their best aspects while addressing the problems. For starters, more choice for parents among public schools offers the promise of greater educational customization for students and healthy competitive pressures along with transparency and public accountability.

Unfortunately, most voucher opponents are also opposed to real pa-

rental choice among public schools and public charter schools and to many other reforms that threaten to displace the established producer interests in public education. Over time that is a self-defeating strategy, because as the voucher debate plays out a lot of students in Florida remain poorly served.

For instance, according to data from Standard and Poor's Schoolmatters.com, by the time they reached 10th grade barely three in 10 Florida students are reading at grade level and only six in 10 are doing math at grade level. And enormous racial disparities divide Florida schoolchildren. While, statewide, six in 10 white students are reading at grade level, only one in three black students are. This is why cheering the court decision is almost obscene. Vouchers are not going to solve those problems statewide but neither will their defeat in court.

Meanwhile, because of these issues, parental demand for school improvement and more choices in public education is growing, not dissipating. Rather than dancing on the grave of the voucher program, public school supporters in Florida should see it as a warning sign and get serious about making the state's public schools a first choice for parents, not a forced one.

Originally published in the St. Petersburg Times on January 14, 2006 (www.sptimes.com).

Here Today, Here Tomorrow

By Elena Silva

The month of May marks graduation for more than three million U.S. high school students and many will soon turn to calculating the cost of college tuition against the scholarships, work-study jobs, and loans that they've managed to pull together. But for some students there is only one deciding factor in figuring the price of higher education: immigration status.

Many undocumented students have been enrolled in U.S. public schools since kindergarten, but their education effectively ends at high school graduation. Without citizenship, these students do not qualify for federal student loans, grants or scholarships, nor are they eligible for most private scholarships. As a result, it is nearly impossible for these students to finance any form of higher education.

In-state tuition at public colleges and universities is thus often their last best chance to afford college, although by federal law undocumented students remain ineligible for this residency benefit regardless of the number of years they have lived in the state. This situation poses a difficult dilemma. Should these students, many of whom have attended the same schools as their citizen peers since grade school, be granted legal status for the purpose of higher education? Given the significant investment taxpayers have already made in these young people, the answer is a resounding yes.

As the public debates "paths to citizenship" for the nearly 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, proposed federal legislation would give undocumented students provisional legal status to qualify for in-state college tuitions. The DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act, would repeal the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, and provide qualified undocumented students conditional legal status to attend college. Specifically, the terms would apply to students who are under the age of 21, have lived in the United States for at least 5 years, have earned a high school diploma or equivalent and who demonstrate "good moral character." Qualified students would be granted conditional permanent resident status for six years, during which they must graduate or accrue at least two years of either military service or higher education.

The DREAM Act would also give states the power to determine residency policies for tuition purposes, an especially important provision as states move forward with their own immigration legislation. According to the National Conference of State Legislators, 46 bills related to immigrant education assistance and enrollment requirements have been introduced in 20 states so far this year. Last month, Nebraska became the tenth state to pass legislation that would make certain undocumented immigrant students eligible for in-state tuition. Other states, most recently Wyoming, have enacted legislation that would bar undocumented immigrants from participating in certain scholarship programs, or from enrolling in state public institutions altogether.

College is a financial stretch for most students so the debate over providing tuition benefits to an additional group of students is understandably a heated one. The heart of the matter, however, is not about in-state tuition rates or even about fairness over who deserves what in America.

The real issue is about consistency in our message about the value and purpose of education. According to a recent Pew Hispanic Center report, there are more than 1.5 million undocumented children currently living in the United States. These kids will get a free public elementary and secondary education, provided by law to all students regardless of immigrant status. To effectively drop them from the system once they meet, and even exceed, the requirements for high school graduation and college admission, is simply inconsistent and illogical. Just when these young peo-

ple have proved that they can achieve academically, when they are ready to refine their skills and learn how best to contribute to society, we pull the rug out.

Regardless of their immigration status, it is unlikely that these students, a population which is projected to rise for at least the next several decades, will leave the United States. What role, then, will they play in our society? Is the cost to the nation of granting legal status and college access more or less than doing nothing? See such students as an untapped resource of talent and intelligence, or see them as "returns on investment" for years of publicly funded elementary and secondary schooling. Either way, they offer more potential if they are college educated than if they are not.

Originally published in The Education Sector, May 2006 (www.educationsector.org).

Expand the Pool of America's Future Scientists

By Kevin Carey and Andrew J. Rotherham

The conventional wisdom among business leaders and politicians is that vast hordes of highly trained Chinese engineering students are poised to descend, Khan-like, upon the plains of the global labor market, leaving the ruins of the American economy in their wake.

Ominous reports from high-profile studies and commissions have prompted calls for a new emphasis on mathematics and science from the Bush administration, the US Chamber of Commerce, and others. Yet in the rush to act on this latest surge of concern about our global position in science and engineering, there's a real danger our leaders will misread the problem and mishandle the solution.

America has been down this road before, first with the Russians and, more recently, the Japanese. And though gloomy predictions in the 1950s and the 1980s never came to pass, that does not mean the problem should be ignored. America faces a growing competitive challenge from countries such as India and China, which are quickly improving their educational systems, attracting more investment, and becoming hotbeds of innovation.

Yet the nature of the challenge is still not well understood. Many of the statistics commonly used to describe the new wave of Asian engineers are of dubious or nonexistent origin. The real numbers are likely much less than that. For instance, a recent study from Duke University found that many new Chinese "engineers" are actually technicians, working in fields such as automobile and HVAC repair.

Most of the solutions being trotted out are similarly suspect. For the most part, the solutions to this "new challenge" are a familiar mix of scholarships and student loan-forgiveness programs. Even the Bush administration's sensible emphasis on helping high school students take more advanced courses is a small scale add-on rather than a substantial assault on the issue. Unfortunately, all these ideas ignore the fact that scientists, mathematicians, and engineers are disproportionately white, male, and from economically advantaged backgrounds.

Unless we believe that a substantial number of such students are failing to choose science careers for want of proper inducements, many of the scarce resources devoted to new scholarship programs may well reward people of means for choices they would have made anyway. In fact, the richest untapped source of future talent will likely be found in our underserved cities and among low-income and minority students who are failing to receive a good education in our public schools. A college scholarship is worthless unless you graduate from high school, but only about half of America's minority students even finish high school on time.

Likewise, few students can handle college-level science without first completing a high-quality secondary math and science curriculum, but many disadvantaged students attend high schools that don't even offer those classes or where the courses are often taught by teachers who do not know the material themselves. Consequently, minority students who do reach 12th grade lag behind their white peers by four grade levels, on average, on national tests of reading and math.

As a result, the best long-run strategy for boosting America's global economic standing isn't giving more students a reason to choose careers in science. It's giving more students the ability to choose careers in science. Without expanding the pool of well-prepared students who can take advantage of them, no amount of scholarships will make a difference.

For the business leaders calling this latest alarm, that means less emphasis on photo opportunities and quick fixes and more time with rolled-up sleeves in state capitals. Calling for more math and science graduates and offering scholarships is easy; engaging on the tough policy questions about finance, human capital, and governance in our elementary and secondary schools that must be addressed to improve student learning and help clear the way for more scientists and engineers is much harder. To date, with a few noteworthy exceptions, such heavy and politically contentious lifting is something the business community has mostly eschewed.

The new challenges of globalization are real, and America's past success in meeting competitive threats doesn't guarantee similar success in the future. But we'll need more than anecdotes and statistics to guide us. And we'll need newer, better ideas to help the disadvantaged students who are most vulnerable to the turmoil that global competition will create. They may be our best source of new talent to meet this challenge.

Originally published in The Christian Science Monitor April 20, 2006 (www.csmonitor.com)

Now It's Time to Work on an Effective Preschool Program

By Sara Mead

Proponents of universal preschool are obviously disappointed that California voters rejected Proposition 82, the so-called Preschool for All Act. Yet, in the long run, the defeat is actually the best possible outcome for those seeking to expand access to high-quality preschool.

If voters had approved the proposition, national attention would have focused like a laser on how California's experiment with universal preschool was working. Proposition 82's supporters made a lot of promises: Universal preschool would close academic achievement gaps between poor and affluent students, improve California's dismal public school performance and be a boon to the economy. A failure to deliver these promised results quickly would have had devastating consequences for the preschool movement, both in California and nationally.

There's a real risk that's exactly what would have happened. The initiative lost public support for a variety of reasons. But its opponents were ultimately successful because voters had real reasons to be concerned about how it would have worked in practice. Many, including Silicon Valley technology leaders, feared that the initiative's goal of providing preschool for all four-year-olds, rather than just the most disadvantaged, meant poor children might still be left behind. Vital questions were also left unanswered. Who would be in charge of the program? Which preschools could participate?

In some ways, the initiative would have been a step forward. It would have offered free, publicly funded preschool to all California four-year-olds, and it required preschools to have small class sizes and certified teachers.

But it was missing the infrastructure needed to make universal preschool work as an effective public policy and a model for other states.

California must build and support both a variety of high-quality preschools and public or private agencies capable of overseeing them. The public agencies currently do not have this capacity. Further, the initiative was vague about whether or how different types of preschools—such as community-based and private preschools—would be incorporated into the program. These flaws could have made implementing universal preschool a fiasco and also harmed educational results.

Ironically, universal preschool's opponents have already helped lay some of the political groundwork to support incremental steps toward universal preschool access

What should preschool supporters in California do now? First, they should think about what mixture of preschools—including community and faith-based preschools, Montessori preschools and public school programs—would best serve California's diverse families. They must also realize that poor children need more intensive preschool experiences than this initiative would have provided, and support preschool programming that meets the needs of both low-income and middle-class youngsters. Preschool supporters then need to build the supply of quality preschools by improving existing programs and helping create new ones.

Preschool advocates must also identify organizations that can effectively select, oversee, and hold accountable a variety of preschools. Los Angeles Universal Preschool, which uses tobacco tax money to provide free preschool, funds a diverse portfolio of preschools while ensuring they all meet quality standards. California needs more such agencies. In addition to establishing new organizations like LAUP, preschool advocates should identify existing people and organizations—mayors, foundations, universities—that can fill this role. San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales, who has supported early childhood education, is a prime candidate.

Ironically, universal preschool's opponents have already helped lay some of the political groundwork to support incremental steps toward universal preschool access. During the campaign, many acknowledged that preschool benefits poor children, and said they supported publicly funded preschool for low-income youngsters, but opposed funding preschool for middle-class children. Now that the campaign is over, preschool advocates should hold these individuals accountable for their words and push for publicly funded preschool for all low-income children. Such investments would help provide funding to build the state's preschool infrastructure.

This agenda is not as flashy as the preschool initiative voters just rejected. In the long run, however, a slow and steady approach is more likely to produce good results for California's children. The story of the tortoise and the hare is a preschool staple; preschool advocates could benefit from heeding its lessons.

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EDUWONK.COM

Time to Take a Deep Breath: It's OK to Criticize the President, but Ranting Isn't Teaching

Bush bashing is rampant in the high schools! In February, a student from Aurora, Colorado, recorded his teacher giving a ranting lecture against Bush. The student gave the recording to a radio station, and the story then made Fox and a number of major newspapers. Later in February, attention turned to another case in New Jersey where a teacher had his AP government class conduct a mock war crimes trial of the President.

In both cases teachers faced criticism for teaching/saying controversial things about President Bush. The Lefty bloggy storyline basically goes like this: Say something critical of Bush, get in big trouble because we live in an Orwellian dystopia under the Bush Administration. The Righty bloggy storyline basically goes like this: More evidence that liberals are traitors and have ruined the public schools.

The story took on a life of its own divorced from the more basic issues: What the Colorado teacher did was pretty ridiculous. His lecture is not a lesson or even a lecture, it is a wild rant and it is inappropriate for a public elementary and secondary school.

The New Jersey case, however, is a lot different. There, the teacher who arranged the mock trial had students arguing both sides of whether President Bush was guilty of war crimes in light of the events of the past few years. It was a lesson, not a rant. A mock trial is a great way to engage kids in thinking about a question from multiple perspectives (and there is no evidence that arguing multiple perspectives wasn't the point of the lesson or was not, in fact, happening) and to use contemporaneous events to get students to think critically about larger issues. Remember, these are advanced students taking a college level course and no one, especially not the president, is above having their public actions and policies debated. It's unfortunate that the New Jersey teacher is getting painted with the Colorado brush and the back-and-forth that story kicked up. It looks, though, like cooler heads may prevail there on the ground, if not on talk radio and blogs.

On the larger issue of "academic freedom" for elementary and secondary teachers, it's pretty much a non-issue. The federal courts have been clear on the point and have upheld adverse employment actions against teachers terminated for expressing their own views contrary to the guidance/regulations of their local boards of education (in fact, it's not even an unfettered right at public colleges and universities either).

In the public schools, Liberals should be cautious about jumping on the academic freedom bandwagon anyway. While it might sound like a great idea to let people like this clown in Colorado rant and rave about the President, the reason he can't do it and expect legal protection is the same reason school boards can prohibit things like Intelligent Design: Local school boards get a say in what gets taught. In fact, most of the "academic freedom" cases at the elementary and secondary level deal with various kinds of religious proselytizing. So, jumping up and down about absolute academic freedom in our public schools is actually a dopey idea and at odds with more fundamental liberal principles like not putting kids in the position of being indoctrinated in the public sector.

By Andrew J. Rotherham

Originally posted on March 6, 2006. Read this and other blog postings in their entirety at www.eduwonk.com.

The QUICK and the ED

World Cup 2007: Thanks Title IX

Today marks the 34th anniversary of Title IX, the federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in education. I didn't realize that I was a Title IX baby (the law passed just three months after I was born), until I was an adult. But I know I reaped the benefits, along with millions of other little girls who were given new opportunities to play hard and learn more.

I hope by now there's some common knowledge about Title IX, but just in case, here's a quick reminder. Title IX is not just for girls. The law protects male and female students and employees from sex discrimination at all K-12 and higher education institutions that receive federal funding.

And it's not just about sports. Enforced by the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights, Title IX covers recruitment, admissions, course offerings, financial aid, scholarships, housing facilities, and more…. It is intended to guarantee equal access and opportunity to education for both genders. It is wide-reaching, and that's why it has made such a difference.

So I hate to return to sports on a Title IX blog, since most of the public attention to Title IX has been chronicling the woes of "at-risk" men's wrestling teams rather than the many other more important educational issues. But I watched the U.S. men's team sadly lose to Ghana in yesterday's World Cup match.

I know U.S. soccer fans are really depressed. But all is not lost for four more years. The women will be back next year for the FIFA 2007 Women's World Cup, to be held in China.

And thanks to Title IX, the U.S. women's team is a pretty good shot on goal.

By Elena Silva

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