

The Pittsburgh Forum - 2013

“Is **SCHOOL**, Life?”

Letter from the Director

Dear Participants,

Welcome to the Pittsburgh Forum! Thanks for joining our inaugural residency. This weekend is designed to be small, honest, and interactive. By limiting registration to just a dozen participants, and our scope to a single theme, we hope to foster meaningful conversations, relationships, and an informed dialogue. In many ways, we want to offer the opposite of a traditional conference experience. Rather than overwhelm with 100 possible lectures and thousands of faces, we will focus on one small group and one big subject. It is our intention that this be a rather humble weekend. No flashy presentations or expensive lodging; just great food, a big old house, and a dozen thoughtful people.

We have two goals for the weekend. First, we want you to become a better learner. By digging into your past student experiences, hearing from educators, and grappling with “*Why school?*” we hope you come away with a renewed vision for your personal development. Secondly, we need your help. In our work at the Saxifrage School, we are committed to an “open source” process in developing our project. As we work to re-design Higher Education, we want to include as many voices as possible in our work. We look forward to this chance to dwell, with a community of collaborators, on one of our most difficult questions: “Is school, life?” And, in that, how we answer the critique of young Calvin who hates, *hates*, school. Throughout the weekend (and after), we’ll ask you to contribute to our first Forum Book in which will capture the trials, errors, creations, and discoveries of the weekend.

I encourage you to read all assign texts listed. We will discuss many of them and they will provide an important context for our conversations. Even if you procrastinate, you should be able to digest them in a couple of days. Although our time will be focused on a single theme, our discussions will touch on games, stories, urban agriculture, civic engagement, abstraction, city planning, and design. In Pittsburgh, we have begun an important conversation on the past, purpose, and future of our schools. We are thrilled to have you join our community for the weekend and look forward to learning with you. See you August 9th!

Cheers,

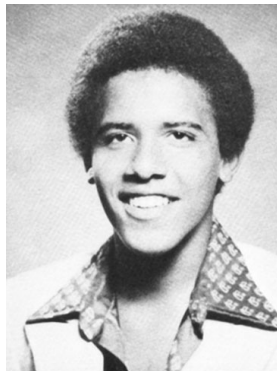


I DON'T WANT TO GO TO
SCHOOL ! I HATE SCHOOL !
I'D RATHER DO **ANYTHING**
THAN GO TO SCHOOL !



Before you Come.

Share a school photo of yourself, from any age, (funny photos preferred) along with a three sentence biography that sums up your life in schools. E-mail it to tim@saxifrageschool.org by July 31st.



Write two biographical accounts (no more than 1 page each), *You will read these to the group during the weekend:*

1. A time when you saw great purpose in your education; A light-bulb moment when school made you excited for tomorrow; a time when school felt really worthwhile.
2. Recount a time when school failed you, when you felt particularly disconnected from real life and questioned the purpose of your education.

What We'll Provide

- For your perusal: a small library of books we love.
- A packet of materials including short readings and a journal for the weekend
- All Meals and Transportation (*let us know if you need a ride from the airport/bus/train!*)

What You Should Bring

- Toiletries, sheets, pillows, and towels (let us know if it isn't convenient for you to travel with these and we can provide some).
- At least one outfit of hardy clothes and work shoes for a short work session at a nearby farm.
- Books or other resources that you think could contribute to our time together.

Read (or watch) a few of our favorite texts:

1. Chapters 1 and 2 of Thoreau's *Walden*

2. "Higher Education and Home Defense" and "The Loss of the University" by Wendell Berry (from the book *Home Economics*)



3. Watch Ethan Zuckerman's [Keynote on Civic Engagement](#) (this link will skip the introductions and start at 22:53)

4. Timothy Cook's post on the theme and central questions of the Pittsburgh Forum (expect this soon!)

5. Read "[Cultivating Failure](#)" by Caitlin Flanagan in *The Atlantic*.

A very timely, devil's-advocate type piece that criticizes the recent trend in food education and edible schoolyards. Although you may likely disagree with her opinions, the piece nicely represents the argument at the core of the disconnect between school and life, between theory and practice. Due to its tremendous recent success (and expansion) the debate around food education is at the center of the cultural and political debates that will, in many ways, shape the future of public education in our country.

Staff Contact Information

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2013 PGH FORUM SCHEDULE

Day One (Friday, August 9th)

- 5:00 pm - Opening registration at 5615 Stanton Ave
- 6:30 - Meet together and walk to Dinner at [E2](#)
- 7:00 - Orientation, Welcome,
First Participant Presentations & Meal
- 8:00 - Opening lecture; Teresa Deflitch
(City as our Campus Dir. at Winchester Thurston)
- 8:40 - Discussion on the relationship of
school communities and the larger community
- 9:30 - Head home; free time and writing time

Day Two (Saturday, August 10th)

- 8:00am - Coffee; Writing and Reflection Time
- 9:00 - Breakfast (On your own, provided in-house)
- 10:00 - Morning Speaker: Lou Fineberg,
Program Director and Co-Founder of BikePGH
- 11:00 - Discussion on Civic Engagement
- 12:00 - Lunch (On your own, provided in-house)
- 1:00 - Afternoon Speakers: Professors
Dr. Keith Martel and Dr. Brad Frey
- 2:00 - Discussion on grounding the ivory tower
- 3:00 - Free/Reading/Writing Time
- 6:00 - Dinner (Prepared in house by Repast chef
Morgan Stewart); biography reading
- 8:00 - Film viewing and discussion (in-house)

Day Three (Sunday, August 11th)

- 8:00 am - Coffee; Writing and Reflection Time
- 9:00 - Breakfast (On your own, provided in-house)
- 10:00 - Morning Speaker: Sean Purcell,
Phd in Philosophy of Education
- 11:00 - Group interactive activity
- 12:00 - Lunch (On your own, provided in-house)
- 1:00 - Afternoon Speaker: John Creasy,
Director of Garfield Community Farm
- 2:00 - Discussion: The rise of food education and what it
means for the purpose of school
- 3:00 - Work at the Garfield Community Farm
- 5:00 - Return to Stanton House
- 6:30 - Dinner at [Bar Marco](#); biography reading
- 9:00 - Games & Growlers back at home (optional)

Day Four (Monday, August 12th)

- 8:00am - Coffee; Writing and Reflection Time
- 9:00 - 12:00: Participant Presentations Roundtable,
over Brunch prepared for you in-house
- 12:30 - Lunch and Conclusion; Lunch is To-Go,
pack up and head home

