

## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE SPEAKERS and other dignitaries gathered on a landing above the crowd that warm, sunlit day in East Harlem in May 1941. The early afternoon celebration featured the cornerstone laying for the school district's long-awaited new high school building. Draped across the building's west portico some fifteen feet above the podium, a U.S. flag at least thirty feet wide and fifteen feet high brushed against a row of scaffolding attached to the as yet unfinished colonnaded façade. Below the speakers, halfway down the wide staircase, an honor guard stood at attention, flags held aloft. Assembled on the sidewalk in front of the staircase, a marching band struck up the national anthem. Facing the oversize flag, their hands raised in salute, stood the students of Benjamin Franklin High School, all boys, in rows fifteen to twenty deep along Pleasant Avenue.

Thousands of spectators crowded the main entrance to the splendid cupola-crowned late-Georgian building of red brick and limestone on a campus bounded by Pleasant Avenue and East River Drive between 114th and 116th streets. Years of unrelenting hard work and political struggle had culminated in the board of education's authorization of this capacious, well-appointed building, designed to function as a "community-centered" high school for boys in East Harlem.

The new building finally opened in the winter of 1942. In mid-April Vito Marcantonio, the district's radical third-term congressman, and Leonard Covello, Marcantonio's mentor and Franklin's founding principal, spoke at the dedication ceremony, having spearheaded the multiyear campaign to obtain this "new, completely equipped high school" for East Harlem. They envisioned the

new Franklin as an institution that would function as a center for educational and democratic development in this densely populated, chronically poor, and ethnically divided area of the city. The school would serve as a catalytic hub for creating and strengthening social networks and fostering community norms of civility, trust, and reciprocity.<sup>1</sup> It was explicitly designed to play a central role in the social reconstruction of East Harlem.

Since the mid-1930s the idea of community-centered schooling had achieved partial realization in the programs and activities of the original Benjamin Franklin High School. Located on East 108th Street between First and Second Avenues, the original building stood in the tenement heart of East Harlem about seven blocks southeast of the new Franklin building. The new high school on Pleasant Avenue was expected to continue and expand the work started at the first site into a fully realized community school. By special decree of the board of education, the new Franklin would be open “every hour of every day of the year” to provide an array of educational, cultural, recreational, social, and health services to the residents of the 271 square blocks that constituted this highly stressed district. Projecting an image of democratic openness and liberality of spirit, the new building and its park-like venue contrasted sharply with the crowded tenement houses that defined most of East Harlem and characterized the neighborhood where the community school idea had first been planted. This dignified Georgian structure was literally and symbolically a beacon on a hill. On the east side of the new building a spacious terrace offered an unobstructed view of the East River, Randall’s Island, and the Triborough Bridge; a manicured lawn and sidewalk provided direct access to 114th Street and the green spaces and playgrounds of neighboring Jefferson Park; and on the west side the main entrance and staircase fronted the intersection of Pleasant Avenue and 115th Street, with a view to the nearby Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Italian Harlem’s spiritual center.

Marcantonio hailed “this great building” as “indeed a monument to democracy in education, . . . truly a people’s school.” Covello, the educator most responsible for Franklin’s creation, solemnly pledged the new high school “to exercise *an influence outside the school* which will help to produce a community worthy of the greatest democracy on earth” (original emphasis).<sup>2</sup> Yet for all the pride, sense of accomplishment, and hopeful anticipation felt at this long-awaited moment, the nation’s entry into World War II cast a long shadow over the ceremony. Covello, Marcantonio, and their silent partner in city government, New York’s flamboyant mayor Fiorello La Guardia, feared the worst for their social experiment in the face of the global conflagration.

JOHN DEWEY NOTED FAMOUSLY that “the true starting point of history is always some present situation with its problems.”<sup>3</sup> Recalling Dewey’s maxim, our true starting point in this book is the contemporary crisis of America’s

underserved schools and neighborhoods, whose dire conditions are symptomatic of a broader crisis of U.S. democracy. Our present civic dilemma involves the corrosive cynicism, alienation, and political disengagement of the American people; the pervasive distrust of our major institutions; and the accelerating movement away from the ties that bind Americans as neighbors and citizens. Emblematic of and integral to the crisis of diminishing citizenship is the widespread civic and political disaffiliation of the present generation of U.S. youth and young adults, the subject of a legion of fire-bell surveys and research reports. Most evidence suggests that young Americans have a limited understanding and appreciation of citizenship consistent with “thin” democracy. They view citizenship in terms of individual responsibilities and helping behaviors, and they do not consider civic participation or political engagement to be a citizen’s responsibility. Though they are volunteering in unprecedented numbers, their volunteerism is largely individualistic, emphasizing altruism and charity, lacking civic or political content.

Writing at the turn of the last century, at a time of great societal disruption and dizzying technological change, Dewey argued that young people’s direct participation in solving the problems of their local community, a “first-hand contact with actualities,” should be made the foundation of the school curriculum; thus reconstructed, public education would become the “deepest and best guaranty” of a democratic society.<sup>4</sup> More than a century later, the priorities of public education stand at a very far distance from Dewey’s deepest and best guaranty. At a critical juncture when the U.S. schooling system and the larger society cry out for a renewal of imagination and a reinvented sense of public possibility, the role of schooling in the democratic development of the nation and the enhancement of the public sphere is not a central concern expressed in our educational reform era of test scores and standards. Unfortunately, even as we hold schools increasingly accountable for student achievement, we rarely seem to hold them accountable for their performance in citizenship preparation, an inauspicious “accountability gap” for a democracy.

Consistent with this observation, sociologist David Labaree writes compellingly that contemporary public education and school reform are dominated by the goal of individual social mobility and status attainment, which justifies public schooling as a private good; the school’s mission is increasingly weighted toward the promotion of private advantage through the competitive allocation of educational credentials.<sup>5</sup> While equity, the *raison d’être* of accountability, is often stated as an explicit concern in policy agendas and proposals, it is all too often implicitly, and narrowly, defined as equal preparation for individual competition in a market economy. The emphasis on students’ market viability contributes to reducing democracy to an economic concept—one that too often breeds selfishness, promotes a narrow conceptualization of the social responsibilities of citizenship, and undermines a vision

of community.<sup>6</sup> Inadequate attention is given to the public purposes that are necessary for schooling to be genuinely a public good—one that has far-ranging benefits that are more than simply an aggregation of private ends.

By no means do we disagree with the argument that public schools should be held accountable for the academic achievement of their students. The inequities in academic opportunities mock any basic sense of fairness and certainly impair societal development. It is clear, however, that schools are not being held accountable for how well they prepare young people as citizens. The omission of citizenship in educational reform debates is a deafening silence, implying that citizenship is a marginal concern, noble-toned rhetoric for commencements. This is ironic, since the primary justification for the school's existence as a publicly funded entity is citizenship training, unequivocally a public purpose.<sup>7</sup> More recent turns in foreign policy foregrounding a renewed proselytizing posture on behalf of democracy and the urgent need for civic reconstruction in foreign lands only highlight and complicate our challenge in preparing future citizens of this republic. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to solving the crisis of diminishing citizenship and the threat to democracy it entails is the paucity of imagination and vision reflected in the nation's understanding of the role of public schooling. Shortcomings in ideas produce real shortfalls in institutions and wasted resources in the education of children and youth. The failure of remedies in the present situation compels us to look backward critically to educational history for promising ideas and strategies. The past must be mined for other visions and models, not to transplant panaceas wholesale across time and space, but rather to nourish rigorous thinking about the broader purposes of public schooling and the lessons of past efforts to attain those purposes, even if incompletely realized. Educators, policy makers, and school reform advocates alike need to recapture past conversations such as those around community-centered schooling and civic development in East Harlem in the 1930s and 1940s, in which the role of public schooling was deemed to be the very foundation of a democratic republic. That civic role implied concrete actions and strategies in which school leaders saw social context as both educational constraint and opportunity.

HOW WE ENVISION the civic role of schools depends on how we understand citizenship. Western democracies are legatees of two traditions that stand in uneasy tension with one another. On the one hand, a tradition of republicanism (a legacy of the ancient Greeks and Jacobin France) envisions citizenship as “an office, a responsibility, a burden proudly assumed”; on the other hand, liberalism (a legacy of imperial Rome and the Enlightenment) regards citizenship as “a status, an entitlement, a right or set of rights passively enjoyed.” In theory, writes political theorist Michael Walzer, “the passive enjoyment of citizenship requires, at least intermittently, the activist politics of citizens”; in

practice, however, “democratic citizenship in its contemporary form does not seem to encourage high levels of involvement or devotion.”<sup>8</sup>

Liberalism is the dominant public philosophy of our era. Liberal political theory envisions a nation of individual citizens freely choosing their own ends and values within a framework of basic rights and liberties that are provided and protected by government. We are, in philosopher Michael Sandel’s apt phrase, a “procedural republic.” This theory appeals alike to egalitarian liberals and libertarian liberals (conservatives, in contemporary political parlance), the former arguing that freedom to pursue one’s own ends is contingent on the state’s guarantee of “minimal prerequisites of a dignified life,” the latter defending the market economy and “a scheme of civil liberties combined with a strict regime of private property rights.” On both views, liberal political theory has no vision of citizens deliberating about the common good or sharing in collective efforts to shape their political community. “The procedural republic cannot secure the liberty it promises,” Sandel concludes, “because it cannot sustain the kind of political community and civic engagement that liberty requires.”<sup>9</sup>

This critique is supported in Benjamin Barber’s 1983 book *Strong Democracy*. Barber makes an impassioned yet carefully reasoned plea for activist politics, taking direct aim at the passivity of contemporary democratic citizenship and sharply criticizing liberal democracy, which he derides as “thin,” a “minimalist” conception that “is concerned more to promote individual liberty than to secure public justice, to advance interests rather than to discover goods, and to keep men safely apart rather than to bring them fruitfully together.”<sup>10</sup> Barber champions “strong” democracy, which he associates with communitarian politics. “In strong democracy,” he writes, “politics is something done by, not to citizens. Activity is its chief virtue, and involvement, commitment, obligation, and service—common deliberation, common decision, and common work—are its hallmarks.”<sup>11</sup>

A coterie of U.S. scholars has suggested ways of thinking about democratic citizenship and provided, usually implicitly, guidance on how expectations for citizenship might be translated into civic education in the schools. Others have been more explicit in extending their understanding of citizenship into the educational arena. A typology presented by social studies educators Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne provides one such example, through their notion of the “personally responsible citizen” and the “participatory citizen.” The personally responsible citizen, an individualistic conception, is described as the helping neighbor who picks up litter, donates blood, recycles, stays out of debt, obeys laws, and volunteers on an individual basis, perhaps at a soup kitchen or a senior center—salutary behaviors, yet insufficient to sustain an effective democratic society. By contrast, the participatory citizen has a collective orientation. According to Westheimer and Kahne, the participatory citizen is actively involved in community organizations and civic affairs, and he or she helps

TABLE I.1 WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “CITIZEN”? A CONTINUUM

PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE CITIZEN	PARTICIPATORY CITIZEN	PUBLIC WORK CITIZEN
<i>Helping citizen</i> who obeys laws and performs individual acts that demonstrate social responsibility, kindness, and compassion.	<i>Corporate citizen</i> who participates in collective action to address a need or alleviate a crisis—action that typically involves a self-selected “little public,” i.e., one that is collectively not equivalent to the larger public in its range of interests and perspectives.	<i>Public-building citizen</i> who engages with members of diverse groups constituting a non-self-selected “larger public” to address and resolve a problem by dealing with underlying causes—a resolution that requires the cooperation and resources of all groups with a vested interest in the problem.
Volunteers in a homeless shelter.	Helps organize a clothing drive on behalf of the shelter.	Engages with members of diverse groups to address and resolve the problem of access to quality housing in a community.

organize such efforts as community economic development initiatives and environmental cleanups.<sup>12</sup>

The most advanced conception in this literature is the “public work citizen.” According to activist scholars Harry Boyte and Nancy Kari, public work harnesses the cooperative efforts of diverse categories and groupings of people, even ones in conflict, to accomplish shared civic and political goals. Examples include, among others, the Civilian Conservation Corps forestry management and Appalachian Trail programs, the Citizenship Schools associated with the civil rights movement, and, more recently, the development of Seattle’s Union Lake as a multiple-use (recreational, commercial, residential) environmental resource.<sup>13</sup> In its strongest form, public work engages citizens in problem-solving efforts that can succeed only through the collaborative efforts of all the groups that have a vested interest in the problem—and their joint initiative is directed toward the underlying causes of the problem.<sup>14</sup>

Table I.1, an adaptation of Westheimer and Kahne’s schematic, shows the continuum of citizenship models on which the status and progress of citizenship preparation may be charted.<sup>15</sup>

Given this continuum of citizenship constructs, the need to address the civic ends of schooling will depend in part on how we see that function fulfilled today. What do we know about citizen development outcomes for youth in terms of their knowledge, behaviors, and dispositions? Acknowledging that there are many factors that prepare citizens—home, community, media, peers, schools, and so on—within this mix, how well do schools contribute to citizenship preparation? To answer the questions about the present and thereby

preface our study of the past, we briefly sketch the state of civic education in the United States.<sup>16</sup>

In the lower grades, children are taught, both formally and informally, that good citizenship means being patriotic, voting, helping others, obeying laws, and respecting individual liberties. At the high school level, the point of heaviest concentration, this version of citizenship is taught through a combination of a textbook-based civics or government curriculum, with a content emphasis on the structure and functions of U.S. government (for example, the Constitution and Bill of Rights, the three branches, “how a bill becomes law”), perhaps supplemented by a We the People program and/or some form of individualized community service. Yet, as noted in *The Civic Mission of Schools*, an authoritative 2003 report authored by leading scholars and foundation officers, “most formal civic education today comprises only a single course on government—compared to as many as three courses in civics, democracy, and government that were common until the 1960s,” in sum, a civic education decline.

In most cases where civics is taught, informed participation in conjoint civic or political activities is not emphasized as a hallmark of responsible citizenship. Service-learning, an increasingly popular approach, usually takes the form of one-to-one volunteerism—it is less frequently participatory and rarely involves public work. Widely distributed cocurricular programs, such as We the People, focus on political knowledge, a necessary but insufficient condition for the more advanced forms of citizenship.<sup>17</sup> Innovative approaches that support participatory or public work citizenship operate in only a fraction of schools, and even here an ambitious program such as Public Achievement is on the margins of the civics curriculum.<sup>18</sup> In sum, civic education seems to be progressing out of its traditional textbook-based, didactically taught *spectator* mode largely by dint of service learning and opportunities for volunteerism, but it is still a far cry from what might be called “change-agent” civics. And as Westheimer and Kahne suggest, it is largely about cultivating personally responsible citizenship.

Viewed holistically and taken at face value, the weight of civic education research supports mapping young people’s citizenship performance to that conception, and that worries knowledgeable observers. While being personally responsible is unquestionably a necessary disposition for a strong democracy, it is a very far cry from a sufficient condition. Survey after survey and a raft of research studies reveal worrisome gaps in young Americans’ civic/political knowledge, behaviors, and dispositions, to the extent that their civic deficits have become a fire bell in the night, and a veritable cottage industry, for social scientists, think-tank researchers, and foundation officers gravely concerned that U.S. democracy has reached a critical juncture.

Readers who are comfortable with personally responsible citizenship are probably content with the current direction of civic education in the schools. Yet if citizenship means something that lies between participatory and public work, the evidence suggests the need for a significantly different approach than

current activities. Certainly schools could do a great deal to promote movement along the citizenship continuum by adopting participatory and social problem-focused service-learning programs. Some observers call for a comprehensive, or hybridized, model that combines some of the best examples of existing efforts. Given the incremental impact individual components appear to have, this would be a good start. Real movement toward public work citizenship, however, requires far more; namely, an *institutional* commitment and *institutional modeling of citizenship* are necessary. Schools would need to move from course and cocurricular components to the *institutional performance* of public work citizenship. The history of community-centered schooling that follows can powerfully inform that institutional transformation.

ONE MORNING IN JUNE 1999 we met at the College Board in New York City to discuss writing a book about Leonard Covello and Benjamin Franklin High School. Earlier in the 1990s each of us, working on separate projects, had reviewed the Covello Papers, an extensive collection at the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies in Philadelphia. We were drawn to Covello's vision of urban community revitalization, his profound understanding of school-community relations, his brilliance as a community organizer and a practical theorist, and his conceptualization of the role of public schooling in a democratic society. We agreed that Covello and Franklin High School would make a good story, but we wanted the book to be more than an engaging read. Later that day, as we walked along the bustling avenues and streets of East Harlem below 116th Street, Covello's old haunts, and visited the Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics, the former Benjamin Franklin High School, we decided that our book would focus conceptually on the major themes of Covello's theory and practice.

At the outset we also recognized that a thorough understanding and appraisal of Covello's work would require an analysis of the origins and early development of the community school idea in the United States and the various strands of that idea which coalesced in the creation of Benjamin Franklin High School. We also wanted to know what became of the idea after World War II and what explained its growing popularity at the fringes of public school reform in the 1990s and into the new century. And, most importantly, we were interested in the lessons of this history for public school reform and democratic renewal.

With an eye to the present situation, our historical inquiry led us to confront two unavoidable questions: What is the appropriate role for the school as a publicly funded institution in terms of preparing citizens? What is the school's appropriate role vis-à-vis the underlying social and economic forces that affect its capacity to educate? Our book lays out a history of how these issues have been addressed over the last century or so through the tradition of community schools. A part of this tradition, highlighted in BFHS, posits a particularly ambitious, public work-oriented vision of citizenship and a correspondingly distinctive approach



to the role of the school as an educational institution. This “outlier” historical case provides an unusual foil to how the country now envisions citizenship and the role it assigns to schools in preparing citizens.

U.S. public schools educate young people for a “thin” version of citizenship, hoping to produce law-abiding, helpful, neighborly citizens who may volunteer from time to time, are basically informed of government structures, and vote. As a nation we seem to have little expectation of a more active participation or any effort to work across the community to solve underlying issues. There is no such required senior project, no such exit assessment tied to community problem-solving competency.

Leonard Covello expected much more of citizenship. At Benjamin Franklin he promoted and, to a certain extent, enacted his ideal of an informed, active citizenry equipped with knowledge, skills, and dispositions to participate in cooperative activity that would involve the contributions of diverse cultural groups, even groups in conflict, to solve trenchant community problems. Put another way, public work would be the means to mobilize the “little publics” of fragmented communities such as East Harlem around a common democratic vision, creating a larger public of shared interests. Public schools would be the primary agency and training ground for public work citizenship.

Our argument to support this position in the present situation is based on the following premises. First, democratic society should aspire to this kind of “active” citizenship, and more adults should be prepared to engage publicly in this way. U.S. democracy has not achieved its full development, and it must do so in order to claim leadership in a world of emerging democracies. Major social problems such as health and environmental issues resist solutions that are not collective by design; individuals acting freely in a market will not suffice. Further, diversity, to be a fully realized resource, requires citizens who can work effectively across social boundaries, being more than just “sensitive” to other cultures and social perspectives; the ability to forge deliberative, principled compromise becomes a strategic asset for achieving a more just and humane society. In sum, to maintain international leadership as a democracy, to resolve critical social issues, to make diversity work toward these ends, and to reconcile divergent interests, democracy requires individuals who are skilled in public work citizenship. If we recognize that public work citizens are fundamental to our national wellbeing, and unless we think this happens by accident or osmosis, we need some mechanism to prepare people for this role.

Is preparing this kind of citizen an appropriate role for the school or does it overburden the institution and jeopardize the school’s educational mission? With Covello we argue that the school, *in order to carry out its educational mission*, has a clear interest and a role to play in resolving issues that affect the education of its students. If, for example, community health or housing issues impinge on classroom learning, the school has a clear interest in these issues; it also *may*, as in Covello’s conception, play a central role in educating young

people to resolve them. This training role enhances the school's effectiveness in two key ways. First, by institutionally modeling public work citizenship, the school strengthens its capacity to engage and prepare young people to be active citizens. Students see the adults "walking the walk" of active citizenship, a critical counter to dangerous cynicism and real food for youth's appetite for inspiration. Second, by helping to resolve community issues that affect students' learning, the training can help lower barriers to their educational success overall. If the school, a centrally placed community institution, were not to assume this training role, then some other institution or configuration of institutions would have to undertake it.

Our argument does not preclude other institutional solutions, such as school-community partnership arrangements that provide health and social services (a direction that is currently in vogue). But integrating health, social, and educational services, while a clear step forward, is at best palliative and may even foster dependency unless it also trains youth to do the work of identifying and resolving underlying social issues across the community and its diverse groups. By no means does this role minimize the school's obligation to prepare students in academic subject matter or in the other skills deemed necessary by a community—but the need to prepare young people for citizenship duties must still be addressed. This need, we argue with Covello, can be met through a community-centered approach in ways that benefit students morally, intellectually, and motivationally.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A COMMUNITY SCHOOL? The definition provided by Paul Hanna and Robert Naslund in *The Community School*, a landmark book on the subject published in 1953, informs our research and analysis. Hanna and Naslund emphasize the role of community schools as agents of social and democratic revitalization. Beyond its purpose of educating young people to become productive workers, the community school, they write forcefully, is "*directly concerned with improving all aspects of living in the community* in all the broad meaning of that concept in the local, state, regional, national, or international community. To attain that end, the community school is *consciously used* by the people of the community." Through the school's curriculum and community program, youth and adults work together to analyze the problems of the community, research and formulate solutions to those problems, and mobilize resources and support for putting solutions into operation. The community school is cosmopolitan in the sense that community problems are always treated as local manifestations of broader societal or global problems.<sup>19</sup> Hanna and Naslund describe an ideal-type community school—a standard against which social reality can be compared.<sup>20</sup> Benjamin Franklin High School was the most extensive and longest-standing effort in the twentieth century to build the kind of community school envisioned by Hanna and Naslund—through its community program and occasionally the regular school curriculum,

the East Harlem high school functioned as a community problem-solving institution. Progressing beyond Hanna and Naslund's conceptualization, Covello recognized that a community-based problem-solving approach could spur democratically motivated community development in a complex multicultural setting—Franklin's East Harlem initiatives, which started in the mid-1930s and resumed after World War II, were attempts to achieve that goal.

The "ecology" of urban neighborhoods and their problems figured prominently in Covello's formulation. A trained sociologist and committed activist, Covello recognized that myriad educational influences, positive and negative, were in play in East Harlem shaping the lives of his students, for better or worse. Accordingly, a vigorous agenda of social research was undertaken under Benjamin Franklin's aegis to specify precisely those local factors. Building on this local research base, Covello and his allies organized a community advisory council (CAC) and a set of affiliated programs as coordinating mechanisms to align the district's constructive forces with the work of the high school.

Every facet of Franklin's community program was education centered, designed to reinforce the high school's instructional program. CAC committees and social clubs, for instance, educated East Harlem parents about interethnic tolerance and cooperation at the same time their sons were learning these lessons in the high school's intercultural education program. Community-centered schooling was at heart an enterprise for the education of East Harlem youth and the cultivation of a leadership class that would continue the project of democratic development and social revitalization after Covello, Marcantonio, and their cohort of community organizers had moved on.

The approach pursued in East Harlem, including its origins and its evolving conceptualization, speaks directly to enduring questions of the relationship of public schooling to its community, and thus the role of public education in a democracy. The evolution of community-centered schooling at Benjamin Franklin High School also reveals the complexity of defining and implementing public purposes in the U.S. schooling system. Leonard Covello and his East Harlem allies defined Benjamin Franklin's primary goal as the democratic development of its local geographic community and constituent ethnic groups. Their goal presupposed that public schools have public purposes independent of, yet interwoven with, the education of individuals; that the school's educational mission includes building and strengthening social networks, developing local democratic processes, and advancing social welfare; and that achieving and sustaining these locally defined ends is an essential precondition for educating the community's youth, as well as for reconciling the claims of individual social mobility and the need for knowledgeable, publicly engaged citizens.<sup>21</sup> Implementing these purposes required agreement among Franklin's various and shifting constituencies that these were indeed legitimate aims for a comprehensive high school. In practice, Franklin was buffeted by claims that often supported the high school's credentialing (social mobility) role as its

primary purpose. At its best, however, community-centered schooling in East Harlem was able to reconcile these claims with Covello's democratic vision, drawing from both academic and civic goals, often for the same set of activities.

Aptly named, Benjamin Franklin High School stood squarely in the tradition of public service represented by its namesake American founder. In his 1749 *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*, Benjamin Franklin, a natural philosopher and public servant par excellence, advocated a decidedly public purpose for American schooling: to cultivate in youth "an *Inclination* join'd with an *Ability* to serve mankind, one's Country, Friends and Family" (original emphasis). The civic themes that permeated Franklin High School's classrooms, corridors, and community programs were markedly Franklinean, notably the emphasis on the institutional modeling of citizenship and the attention paid to collective community problem solving as a civic responsibility.<sup>22</sup>

EMERGENT WITHIN AND COMPLICATING our case study of Franklin High School and our broader narrative of community school history are four recurring critical tensions. The first is the tension within the history of U.S. progressivism between a reform tradition that Arthur Link and Richard McCormick identify as "social progressive" and another they call "reforming professional."<sup>23</sup> These two traditions are reflected in different conceptions of the community school idea, which we label "citizen-centered" and "client-centered," respectively. The former conception envisions community schools as agencies for social change and democratic development. The latter sees them as centers for the delivery of a variety of community services. The client-centered approach, which was infused by an ideology of science, efficiency, and expertise, became the dominant version of the community school idea after World War I and for the remainder of the twentieth century. At present the client-centered approach is evident in the trend toward school-based health and social services, or what one of our colleagues calls the "service-center model" of community schools.<sup>24</sup> In some instances in this history, these different conceptions of community schools were combined, the service-delivery role complementing and supporting the democratic development role, as was conspicuously the case at the service-rich, citizen-centered Benjamin Franklin High School. Accordingly, how Covello and his allies were able to achieve such an integration and what its trade-offs and limitations were—viewed in the context of urban social forces and the constraints of the world's largest school bureaucracy—are issues of vital concern to this study.

The second tension involves the claims of academic, or disciplinary, studies and community studies, or community problem-solving efforts, on the U.S. curriculum. This tension arises largely from a market concern that community studies will dilute the school's academic program and its value for individual social mobility. It was manifested in the Depression era when a minor community school movement was underway and social issues were made the

emphasis of curriculum development in the most publicized projects. Recognizing this tension within his own high school, Covello argued that Benjamin Franklin's community focus was an enhancement of the academic curriculum and an attraction for youth who were otherwise alienated from schooling. Here we explore the extent to which Covello was able to balance the demands of disciplinary studies and the New York State Regents' examinations with his commitment to civic education and democratic community development through a community-studies approach.

The third tension relates to the heavy demands community-centered schooling puts on schoolteachers. Our study highlights and specifies the play of this tension at Franklin and other community school sites, providing a cautionary tale about the complexities of community school teaching and the professional commitments needed to sustain a fully realized community school. Franklin's accomplishments as a community school were attributable in no small way to a group of stalwart teachers who identified themselves professionally as scholars and social activists, *and* who responded with alacrity to Covello's galvanic energy.

The fourth tension arises in the interaction of local and nonlocal influences in a community school. A school eager to serve its local community, though subject to forces beyond the community, Benjamin Franklin was often caught between purposes determined at local and nonlocal levels. Moreover, the nature of those purposes often varied according to who was understood to constitute the local community or the nonlocal authority. The shifting ethnic composition of East Harlem, the variety of distinct groups within it, and their varying roles in community affairs presented an uncertain and changing picture of who "the local community" was. Identifying the nonlocal authority offered similar ambiguity—was it the board of education, the state government, university professors, Italian associations, political parties, educational organizations, or some combination of these entities? Or was it East Harlem's professional class, which represented cosmopolitan values and a vision of cultural democracy that challenged the ethnic parochialism, cultural prejudice, and anti-intellectualism of the district's many *de facto* communities. Embedded in this particular tension is the problem of how to define the meaning of "community."

TWO PERIODS OF INSTITUTIONAL development mark Benjamin Franklin High School's history as a community school, which was coterminous with Covello's tenure as principal. The first period, 1934–41, witnessed the rise of community-centered schooling in East Harlem. These were Franklin's halcyon years, when the center of operations was a terribly cramped, sparingly appointed brownstone edifice on East 108th Street. At this location the structures and programs of community-centered schooling East Harlem-style were developed and linked in dramatic fashion to districtwide housing, health, and citizenship campaigns. Before World War II, Franklin's main constituency was East

Harlem's Italian population, and the problems of poor Italian immigrant families and their adolescent male children played a defining role in the high school's early phase. Any account of this period in Franklin's history must reckon with the salient contributions of the federally sponsored Works Progress Administration (WPA), which provided, at virtually no cost to the high school, indispensable human capital for Franklin's community programs.

The second period, 1942–56, saw the gradual decline of community-centered schooling in East Harlem. After the move to Pleasant Avenue, Franklin was increasingly buffeted by social forces that were beyond the control of Covello and his staff. After losing hundreds of students to the war effort and suffering a debilitating loss of resources to support community-centered schooling, Covello attempted to adapt the high school to the postwar Puerto Rican migration and other seismic changes engulfing East Harlem, unhappily with more losses than gains. By the time he retired in 1956, community-centered schooling was virtually a dead letter in East Harlem.

Threading this history is Covello's formidable presence. Benjamin Franklin High School was virtually inseparable from Covello, indelibly stamped by his charismatic leadership and unstinted devotion to the high school and its community. Covello's boyhood experience as an Italian immigrant in East Harlem, his prominent career as a teacher of second-generation Italian Americans at DeWitt Clinton High School in central Manhattan, his extensive involvement in East Harlem community organizations, and his apprenticeship with educational sociologists at New York University were fertile seedbeds that nourished Covello's social acuity and political savvy, and pushed him inexorably to the decision to undertake the revitalization of East Harlem through the agency of a community high school. While Covello had powerful friends and allies like Vito Marcantonio and Fiorello La Guardia who supported his project, "the zeal, the energy, and the intelligence with which he pursued the ideal" brought it to fruition in 1934 and sustained it for twenty-two years.<sup>25</sup> Covello's biography, therefore, constitutes an indispensable component of the historical background of Benjamin Franklin High School.

Social historians and scholars of Italian American culture have long acknowledged Covello's pioneering contributions to the field of ethnic studies, in particular his dissertation study, *The Social Background of the Italo-American School Child*, completed at New York University in 1944 and published in 1967; and his research at the Casa Italiana, Columbia University, in the 1930s.<sup>26</sup> Other scholars have written glowing encomiums on Covello's contributions as a teacher and school leader qua activist and urban sociologist. In *Beyond the Melting Pot*, a landmark study of five major ethnic groups in New York City, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan (one of Covello's former students) hail Covello as "the most subtle and perceptive writer on the Italo-Americans" and "one of New York City's great educators."<sup>27</sup> In *Managers of Virtue*, an important historical study of public school leadership in the United States, David Tyack and Elisabeth

Hansot call Covello “a pioneer in creating bilingual, bicultural education; storefront schools; community advisory committees for schools; multicultural education; programs to prevent school dropouts; school-based community service and political action programs; methods of troubleshooting in race riots; and much else.”<sup>28</sup> Paula Fass, in *Outside In*, an oft-cited study of the role of minorities in shaping the U.S. schooling system, notes of Covello: “His efforts were praised by contemporaries and have remained a model of cultural contact aimed at the alleviation of the conflicts between the school and the local community within which it was often an alien presence.”<sup>29</sup> In *Teacher with a Heart*, “an extended reflection” on Covello’s autobiography, *The Heart is the Teacher*, teacher educator Vito Perrone salutes Covello’s “vision of what a school at the center of a community, being integral to a community’s well-being, an important resource, a place where children and young people are understood to be genuine citizens, prepared to make ongoing contributions, can be like.”<sup>30</sup>

The most important previous treatment of Covello and Benjamin Franklin High School is Robert Peebles’s *Leonard Covello: An Immigrant’s Contribution to New York City*, which the author completed as a Ph.D. dissertation at New York University in 1967 and published in 1978. In addition to researching the Covello Papers, which were then in Covello’s possession in East Harlem, Peebles conducted multiple interviews with Covello and gathered material from sixty-five other informants, many of whom were former pupils of “Pop” Covello. Peebles’s study is a thorough and reliable source for Covello’s career to 1934 and the founding of the community high school. As a descriptive analysis of Benjamin Franklin, however, the study must be viewed with caution. Peebles did not raise difficult questions or render a critical appraisal; for example, he failed to note that the community high school was in decline after World War II.<sup>31</sup>

No account of Covello and Benjamin Franklin High School is yet available that situates the East Harlem project in relevant historical contexts, attends to the social forces that gave impetus to and shaped the community high school, or highlights the tensions within Covello’s project and his legacy of community-centered schooling. To fill these lacunae, we have organized what is properly viewed as both a case study of Benjamin Franklin High School and a history of community schools in the United States. Here we address the following questions:

1. What were the origins and development of the community school idea in the United States before and during the 1930s and the making of Benjamin Franklin High School?
2. What were the local contexts and social forces that shaped community-centered schooling in East Harlem? How did these factors influence Covello’s career path?
3. How was Benjamin Franklin organized to accomplish its goals and public purposes? What was Covello’s philosophy and how did it shape

and reflect the community high school in action? How was Covello able to advance his civic and political agendas given the constraints of New York City's public school bureaucracy?

4. What explains Benjamin Franklin's decline as a community school? More broadly, what happened to the community school idea after World War II? What explains the resurgence of this idea at the opening of the twenty-first century?
5. What do we learn from the East Harlem community school about how to advance U.S. democracy and citizenship development through public education in the twenty-first century?

We are mindful of Franklin High School's exceptionality. The combination of Covello's visionary, indefatigable leadership, powerful political allies such as Marcantonio and La Guardia, and a New Deal funding agency make Franklin a problematic "model" of community-centered schooling. Yet here we make no claim for replicability. We are interested primarily in Covello's community-centered approach as an alternative vision to the current conception of the role of schools. We take readers to a place where the public purposes of schooling were taken seriously, where a very different set of decisions than the ones governing our era of accountability were involved.

Our study locates BFHS within a chronological progression of ideas and developments in the history of the "wider use" of schools as social centers, community centers, and community schools, applications of what is variously called the "community school idea," "community schooling," and "community-centered schooling" (Covello's preferred term). This historical framework spans a period of some 120 years from the early Progressive era to the present day. We also examine Covello's project within East Harlem, using the lenses of ethnic history, Depression-era sociological studies, and contemporaneous accounts of East Harlem life, work, and welfare. We analyze key developments and trends in community school history, holding the Franklin High School case study continuously in view for purposes of comparison and critique. Finally, we sift our findings through a hopper of relevant social and political theory to specify the bearings of this history upon public school reform and civic education in particular.

This book is divided into three parts. Part One, "Contexts and Social Forces," looks at historical and sociological/demographic factors that illuminate Leonard Covello's life and career, his educational philosophy, and the structure of community-centered schooling in East Harlem. Chapter 1 specifies, through a narrative historical framework, the different institutional forms and ideologies associated with the community school idea in the Progressive era and between the world wars, and it locates Covello's project within this national context of ideas and developments. Chapter 2 shifts our focus to East Harlem and the local contexts of Covello's project, highlighting the growth and expansion



of Italian Harlem, the emergence of East Harlem's Puerto Rican colony, and the immediate social contingencies of community-centered schooling. Chapter 3 presents Covello's biography from 1887 to 1934, with particular attention to the varied influences that shaped his conception of Franklin High School.

Part Two, "The Making of Benjamin Franklin High School," looks at the structure, programs, and evolving philosophy of the East Harlem community high school. Chapter 4 describes Franklin's organization at the East 108th Street location from 1934 to 1941, with particular attention to the school's innovative community program and the committee work of the Community Advisory Council. Chapters 5 and 6 include Benjamin Franklin's efforts to overcome ethnic and racial divisiveness in East Harlem and to organize the district's disparate groups around critical quality-of-life issues; these two chapters illustrate the linkages that were made between the high school curriculum and East Harlem's social problems. Chapter 7 looks at the community high school from 1942 to 1956, focusing on Franklin's wartime programs, the effects of the post-war Puerto Rican migration to East Harlem, and the social forces and internal tensions that combined to undermine the community high school.

Part Three, "The Community School Idea since World War II," traces the community school idea from the 1930s to the present. In Chapter 8 we take up the downgrading of the community school idea in the years following the Depression. Here we sketch the history of the community education movement, which built a national organizational apparatus under the aegis of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation from the 1940s to the 1990s and conveyed a somewhat more limited version of community-centered schooling. We also describe variants of the community school idea that at this writing appear to be coalescing into a minor social movement. Chapter 9 concludes the book with discussion of the implications of the Benjamin Franklin case study and our broader historical analysis for a renewal of public purposes and reinvigoration of citizenship preparation in the U.S. schooling system.

We list our names alphabetically on the cover of this book. This arrangement denotes that our work has been truly a collaborative endeavor, a coequal partnership of intellectual inquiry, lively conversation and debate, and shared decision making about every aspect of the study.

