



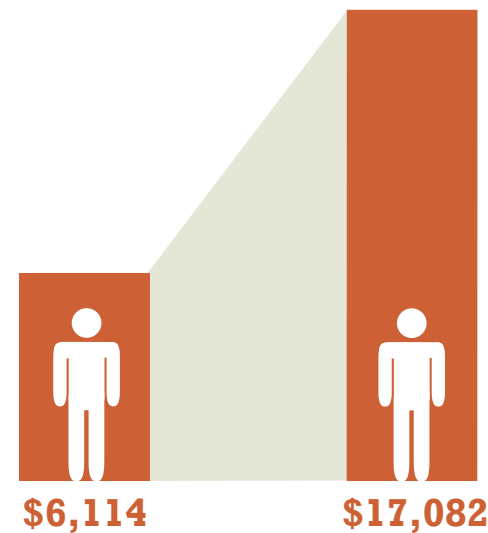
Aiming for the Best in Education

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A look at the numbers...

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All school districts are not funded equally. In one state, **per-pupil spending ranges from \$6,114 to \$17,082** across 500 districts.

22 points

Amount that test scores in poor urban districts of New Jersey have increased after reforming their school funding system.

Estimates suggest that we'll need between:



to rebuild the country's **deteriorating school buildings.**

\$15 billion

Amount the Obama administration has pledged to rebuild school buildings that are worst-off, but more is needed.

Struggling cities will not be able to rejuvenate without education, yet many organizations estimate that every 26 seconds a student drops out of school in America. **That's more than 1.3 million students per year.**

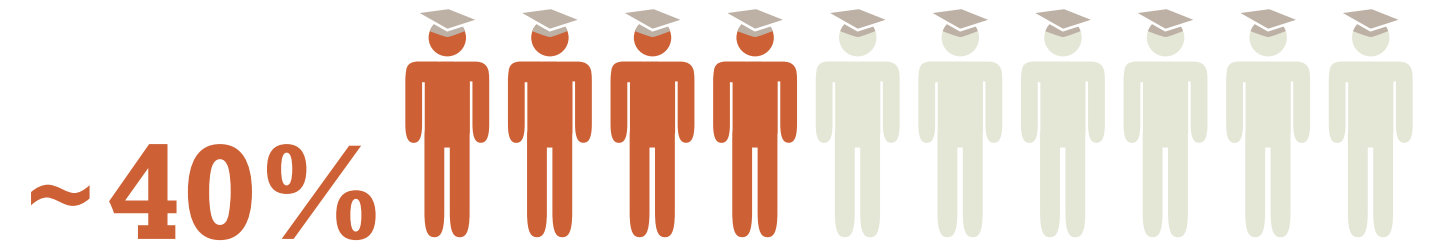


\$900 million

Amount President Obama has promised for the 12% of American schools that produce 50% of dropouts.

\$400 – \$670 billion

How much higher the GDP would have been in 2008 if the US had narrowed the gap between low-income students and their peers.



of high school graduates lack the skills necessary to succeed **in college and the 21st century workplace.**

75%

Increase in math and reading proficiency scores in Portland's SUN Community Schools, which coordinate extended learning, service learning, health and social services and parental engagement programs to support their students.

90%

Percentage of graduates from the Harlem Children's Zone (where they are held to the highest expectations) who go on to college.

MEDIAN ANNUAL EARNINGS

High School Dropout

\$31,400

College Graduate

The median annual earnings of **college graduates** are \$31,400 more than high school dropouts.

Addressing the achievement gap:

2x

How much more likely low-income students and students of color are to be taught core academics by out-of-field teachers.

Providing low-income students with highly effective teachers **virtually closes the socio-economic achievement gap.**

Education is the foundation for success in modern society. The quality of our educational system directly influences the strength of our nation. Educated citizens solve tough problems and contribute to society in meaningful ways. Yet the US is one of only two industrialized countries in which today's young people are less likely than previous generations to complete high school—with nearly one-third of students failing to graduate on time. Among those who do, 40 percent lack the skills to succeed in college and the 21st-century workplace.

Fortunately, there are passionate teachers and administrators, concerned citizens, elected officials and organizations working across the country to create an equitable, effective, high-quality educational system for our students. They are pioneering new models of success that are challenging convention, changing the definition of what education means and catalyzing transformation.



“Despite the big, tough challenges for our public education system, I am convinced that we are **at the verge of a transformation.** This is still America—we have unparalleled resources, and “change” is in our DNA. We know the way to fix this, and Americans are awakening to the challenge and finding the will to tackle it.”

Geoffrey Canada



Seeing Education in a New Light

: Geoffrey Canada,
: Harlem Children's Zone

At a very early age, I knew what I wanted to do with my life: save children who grew up like me—in poor communities, the odds stacked high against them. But I wanted to do more than just help the successful exceptions to the rule of failure in poor neighborhoods: I wanted to change the odds for all the children.

Now that I'm 58, I've seen over and over how a lousy education can destroy a child's chances for a comfortable life. I've seen how failing generation after generation of children can destroy a community.

Though I have concentrated my efforts at helping poor children who have fallen behind, I have also seen that the crisis in education today goes beyond the inner city. America has fallen behind other industrialized countries in educating all of our children. We need to improve our devastated communities, but we also need to improve our entire public education system.

Put simply, we need to place the needs of our children first and we need to look at our education system with new eyes and rethink how schools operate.



We are working to create a **tipping point for the neighborhood. We want kids to look around and see peers and older siblings readying themselves for college and the workplace.**

Students participate in class at the Harlem Children's Zone's Promise Academy 1. More than 8,000 students are part of the Harlem Children's Zone Project.

Strengthen the Community

Education, which is the key to breaking the cycle of generational poverty, has to begin before kindergarten and go beyond the walls of the classroom. As every good parent knows, a child can suddenly stumble off track at any stage of their development, so there is no age when adults can stop being vigilant.

We need to tackle all the various problems that our children are facing. If a child is in a great tutoring program but misses it regularly because of asthma or has to leave it because his or her family is evicted, the program is really of limited value.

From our experience working with families at the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), we saw that for children to do well, their families had to do well. From our experience working in a devastated neighborhood, we also knew we had to strengthen the community to support the families.

We have an overall goal of getting children successfully through college so they can enter today's high-skills job market. Toward that end, we try to organize the

broadest possible cross-section of community members around these children. To make sure our efforts are on track, we rigorously evaluate how each program is working every step of the way.

Today, the HCZ Project covers 97 blocks and serves more than 8,000 children from birth through college. We are working to create a tipping point for the neighborhood. We want kids to look around and see peers and older siblings readying themselves for college and the workplace. We want college and success to be in the air, a given as it is in middle-class communities.

Programs for Each Stage of Development

The HCZ Promise Academy Charter Schools were created to directly impact the centerpiece of a child's educational life. Since their creation in 2004 and 2005, the Promise Academy schools have done well enough to lead Harvard economist Roland Fryer to conclude that the many of the students had actually closed the black-white achievement gap.¹

The schools have a longer school day and year, and feature wide-ranging, enriching after-school programs.



“The objective is to create a safety net woven so tightly that children just can’t slip through.”

➤ The New York Times



Children receive community support and a high quality education from birth through college.



In 2010, the students at our Promise Academy II had the highest overall scores in the district.

But any teacher in America can tell you a story about a child whose potential was lost because of a problem outside the classroom. That is why we work to remove any barrier to a child’s education. The Promise Academy has a great school-based health center that gives the kids free medical, dental and mental-health services, and it has a social work team.

But we also work to support the children at nine public schools in the Zone. We have young men and women from AmeriCorps who we call Peacemakers who work as teaching assistants during the day and then run enriching after-school programs when the school day ends. We make the same promise to these children as we do to our charter school students: we will work with you to get you successfully through college.

We also take a holistic approach at our Beacon Centers, which turn public schools into community centers. In the middle of a block where drug-dealing was once rampant, at the Countee Cullen Beacon Center,

children are now working on computer-based literacy programs after school, earning points for prizes. Where youths once carried, and regularly used, guns and knives, they now prep for the SAT exams, volunteer to help in hospitals and run food drives at our Teen Center. Countee Cullen serves more than 2,200 people annually, from kindergartners to seniors, with a full range of academic, social, recreational and support services.

For years, we informally supported young people once they enrolled in college because we found that many struggled in the new environment. In 2004, we formalized those efforts by establishing the College Success Office. The goal is to give students the resources they need in order to become successful college graduates and active members of their communities. The program now serves more than 640 college students and

The cost of keeping children on track is a fraction of the cost of what happens when young people drop out.



Students are collaborating on a problem in English class at Promise Academy I.

provides year-round academic, administrative, financial and emotional support.

Scaling Up

HCZ has been changing the odds for an unprecedented number of children. Communities from across the country who have heard about our work are coming to see what we are doing. We tell them that they don’t need to exactly replicate each of our programs, but that they should adhere to the basic principles that keep us on track.

Investing in Children Pays Off

Providing free high-quality services and programs to more than 10,000 children and nearly as many adults in 2010 cost \$77 million with an average cost of \$3,500 per HCZ participant. Eighty percent of our budget goes to direct program costs.

The cost of keeping children on track is a fraction of the cost of what happens when young people drop out. One recent study found that the median annual earnings of college graduates are \$31,400 more than high school dropouts.² High school dropouts soon discover how hard it is to make a comfortable living. Many young people who cannot find a job drift into anti-social behavior, which has tremendous costs financially

Geoffrey Canada is the president and CEO of the Harlem Children’s Zone (www.hcz.org). He was named as one of the most influential people in the world in Time Magazine’s 2011 Time 100 list. HCZ’s work has been profiled by The New York Times Magazine, 60 Minutes, The Wall Street Journal, The Oprah Winfrey Show and the documentary Waiting for Superman. President Barack Obama is seeking to replicate the HCZ Project in 20 cities in his Promise Neighborhoods initiative.



Scaling Up

- ① Work at scale within a specific geographic area where you can meet the needs of a significant number of children and families.
- ② Create a pipeline of best-practice programs for children in every age group. Begin working with children as early as possible and stay with them until they graduate from college.
- ③ Build community among residents, institutions and stakeholders.
- ④ Evaluate programs rigorously and make sure that the information cycles back to management to help improve programs.
- ⑤ Cultivate a culture of passion, accountability, leadership, and teamwork within the organization.

and otherwise. The cost of locking up one young person in the juvenile justice system for a year in New York State can be between \$140,000 and \$200,000.³ Prison routinely costs \$30,000 or more a year—many times higher than the costs of education or support services—yet incarceration produces almost no benefits.⁴

Despite the big, tough challenges for our public education system, I am convinced that we are at the verge of a transformation. This is still America—we have unparalleled resources, and “change” is in our DNA. We know the way to fix this, and Americans are awakening to the challenge and finding the will to tackle it.

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Fair School Funding and Equal Opportunities

Many wealthy industrialized countries have built comprehensive social welfare systems that subsidize income, healthcare and housing in order to create more equality among their citizens. In contrast, the US historically has relied on the public school system to be the prime means of improving the lives of the poor and disadvantaged. However, the irony of the American educational system is that low-income children who come to school with the greatest educational needs generally have the fewest resources and least expertise devoted to them—and therefore the least opportunity to improve their futures.

Why Are Some Schools Shortchanged?

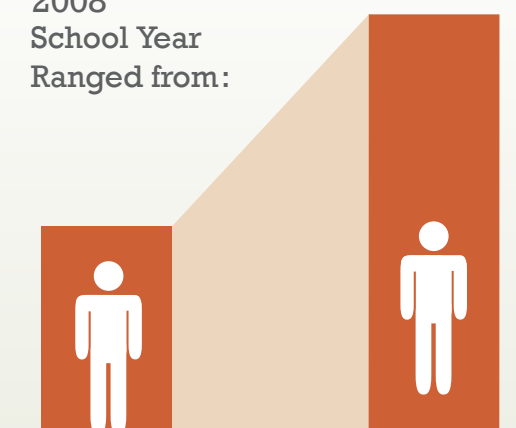
Our nation's enormous educational inequities result, in large part, from our tradition of depending on local property taxes for school funding. If a community is poor, it is less able to raise large revenues for its schools. State school funding dollars targeted to poor districts can help to even things out. However, even though state aid formulas often purport to be “equalizing,” they rarely are because of the strong political power of affluent districts. For example, in Pennsylvania, per-pupil-spending ranged from \$6,114 to \$17,082 across 500 school districts.¹ And while the federal government provides additional funding for schools that serve low-income children, it generally amounts to less than 10 percent of school funding nationwide.

• Jessica R. Wolff
• Campaign for Educational
Equity, Teachers College,
Columbia University

As a result of inequitable local, state and federal funding formulas, many schools in low-income communities lack sufficient funding for basic education essentials.

Per-Pupil Spending in Pennsylvania

2008
School Year
Ranged from:



\$6,114 to \$17,082

Across 500 school districts.

**That's a difference of
\$10,968**

The way school districts typically budget for teachers—paying for a number of positions rather than providing a specific amount of money toward teachers' salaries—means that less money is spent on schools that serve low-income students. This is because experienced teachers with higher salaries tend to move to more-affluent schools where working conditions are frequently better. High-poverty schools are then left with higher teacher turnover and many more inexperienced teachers.²

A *Washington Post* analysis found that students in DC's poorest neighborhoods are nearly twice as likely to have a new or second-year teacher as those in the wealthiest.³ Urban districts continue to lack enough effective, diverse teachers who are committed long-term to high-needs schools.

A new model showing promise in Chicago and Boston is Urban Teacher Residencies. The goal of this model is to use best practices in recruitment, preparation, placement, induction and teacher leadership to foster long-term teacher success in urban school districts. Aspiring teachers are selected according to rigorous criteria aligned with district needs. These “residents” integrate their master's-level course work with a full year in the classroom alongside experienced mentor teachers. In their second year, they become teachers with their own classrooms while continuing to receive intensive mentoring.⁴

A *Washington Post* analysis found that students in DC's lowest-income neighborhoods are nearly twice as likely to have a new or second-year teacher as those in the wealthiest.





Children in lowest-income schools and districts frequently have to contend with overcrowding. This is in spite of evidence that shows smaller classes are directly correlated with improved student achievement, especially for low-income students.

Nearly 90 percent of the students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in North Carolina are categorized as economically disadvantaged. In 2008, only 29 percent of the students tested at or above proficient in reading, 44 percent in math and 13 percent in science. The district implemented a Strategic Staffing program, which began with a comprehensive understanding of the needs of the lowest-performing schools, providing appropriate support and taking dramatic action to change staff where needed. As a result, within one year, test scores increased on average 6 to 10 percent.⁵

The Consequences for Our Kids and Our Nation

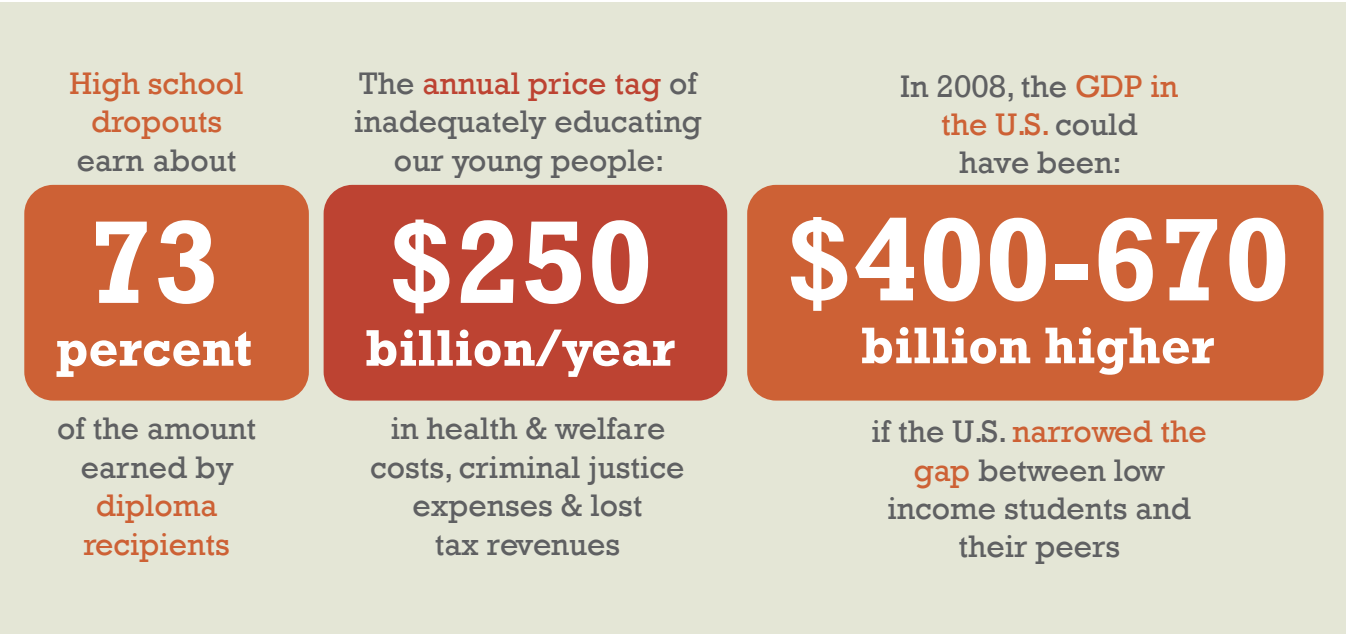
As a result of inequitable local, state and federal funding formulas, many schools in low-income communities lack sufficient funding for basic education essentials.

On average, low-income students are roughly two years behind in learning compared with financially better-off students of the same age.

Children in the poor schools and districts frequently have to contend with overcrowding.⁶ This is in spite of evidence that shows smaller classes are directly correlated with improved student achievement—especially for low-income students. These students are more likely to attend school in dilapidated buildings with insufficient or out-of-date technology and textbooks.⁷

US schools received a D grade on the most recent *Report Card for America's Infrastructure* issued by the American Society of Civil Engineers.⁸ The Obama administration recognized that schools are overcrowded, in disrepair and outdated and pledged \$15 billion to fix leaky roofs and boilers, install new windows and bring buildings up to a level of acceptable repair and modernize classrooms. While this is a step in the right direction, estimates suggest that between \$100 and \$360 billion are needed to address the country's school buildings.⁹

High schools in low-income communities often are not able to offer the college preparatory curriculum required for application to universities. Many schools lack science labs, even though students are expected to pass a laboratory science exam to meet state high school graduation requirements.



After-school and summer learning opportunities are limited or non-existent. In spite of steady improvements in the overall caliber of the American public school system and in the educational attainment of the general public, wide achievement gaps exist between low-income students and their peers in more affluent communities.¹⁰ On average, low-income students are roughly two years behind in learning compared with financially better-off students of the same age.¹¹

Low academic achievement has a devastating impact on the opportunities available for millions of low-income children. High school dropouts earn about 73 percent of the amount earned by diploma recipients.¹² There are also enormous costs for the nation. The price tag of inadequately educating our young people is staggering, in the realm of \$250 billion per year in health and welfare costs, criminal justice expenses and lost tax revenues. The achievement gap also has an effect on the economy. If the US narrowed the gap between low-income students and their peers, GDP would be between \$400 billion and \$670 billion higher, a 3 to 5 percent increase.¹³

What More Can Be Done? Promising Practices in School Funding Reform

Advocates for low-income children have long sought a fairer system for funding public schools. In many states, parents and advocates have gone to court to fight for these changes. Courts have been asked to decide whether students' rights were being violated as a result of unfair funding. In the majority of cases, the courts held that money matters and additional resources are needed to provide meaningful educational opportunities to poor children. As a result, many courts have ordered changes to state funding formulas.

New Jersey has been in pursuit of a fair funding system the longest of any state and is showing positive results with its targeted population. Thanks to a series of rulings in the landmark *Abbott v. Burke* case, new dollars have enabled urban districts to provide their students with educational programs that are on par with their suburban counterparts. These include smaller class sizes; art, music and technology specialists; student support services; and modern facilities. As a result, more

Money matters and additional resources are needed to provide meaningful educational opportunities to low-income children. As a result, many courts have ordered changes to state funding formulas.



A number of states, including New Jersey, Vermont and Kentucky, are developing effective funding reforms to provide urban districts with educational programs that are on par with their suburban counterparts.



These include small class sizes; art, music and technology specialists; student support services and modern facilities.

Kentucky's Education Reforms:

- Increased funding & improved equity
- A state-funded preschool program
- Extended school services & family support centers
- Higher student outcome goals & a model curriculum
- Improved state oversight of education



**= Consistent
MODERATE TO
LARGE GAINS**
in National Assessment of
Educational Progress scores

than 80 percent of eligible three- and four-year-olds are enrolled in preschool programs. Additionally, test scores in the Abbott schools, as measured by both state and national assessments, have risen in the fourth grade and eighth grade as much as 22 points, narrowing the performance gap between poor urban and other students in the state.¹⁴

Court orders have led to promising practices in other states too. Vermont, for example, leads in school funding formula reform. Its school districts are now primarily state funded, and state law requires that dedicated revenues from a number of statewide sources be deposited into a state education fund that is used only to fund schools and to maintain a reserve for times of economic crisis.

Kentucky implemented a thorough set of education reforms, including increased funding and improved equity;

a state-funded preschool program, extended school services and family support centers; higher student outcome goals and a model curriculum; and improved state oversight of education. In the years since then, student achievement in the state has shown consistent moderate-to-large gains in National Assessment of Educational Progress scores.¹⁵

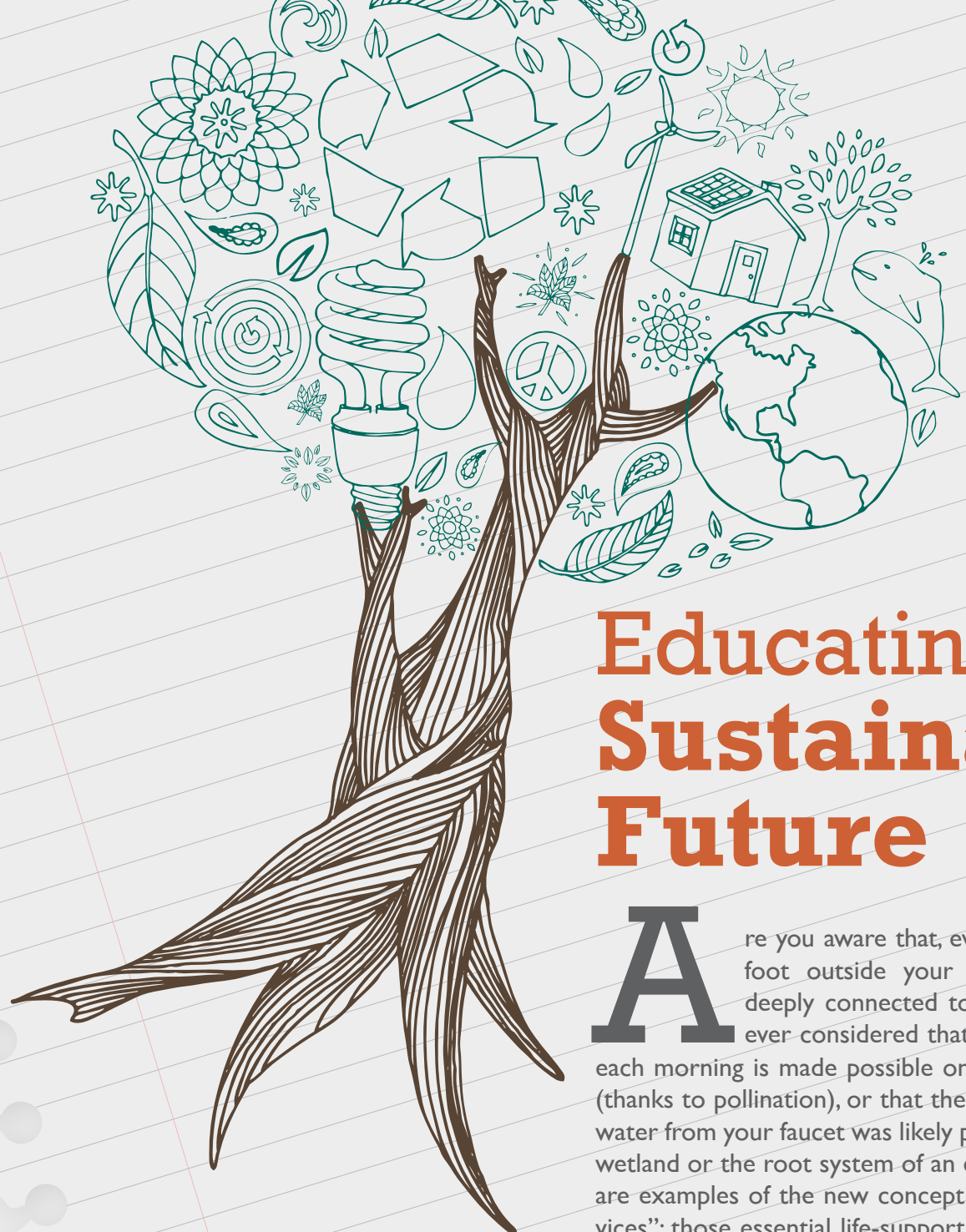
Providing equal educational opportunities regardless of socio-economic status is vital to our nation's economic well-being as well as to the future of our democracy. All 50 states and the federal government should work to narrow the achievement gap and promote equality in education through fair funding and budgeting practices. For the future of our country and the generations to follow, we can't afford to do less.

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The Campaign for Educational Equity at Teachers College, Columbia University, is a non-profit research and policy institute that champions the right of all children to meaningful educational opportunity and works to define and secure the full range of resources, supports and services necessary to provide this opportunity to disadvantaged children.

Jessica R. Wolff is the policy director of the Campaign for Educational Equity at Teachers College, Columbia University, (www.tc.columbia.edu/equitycampaign) and conducts policy research in educational accountability and comprehensive approaches to educational opportunity. She is the executive editor of the Equity Matters research review series, has authored and co-authored numerous articles and two books and directs the campaign's Comprehensive Educational Opportunity Project.



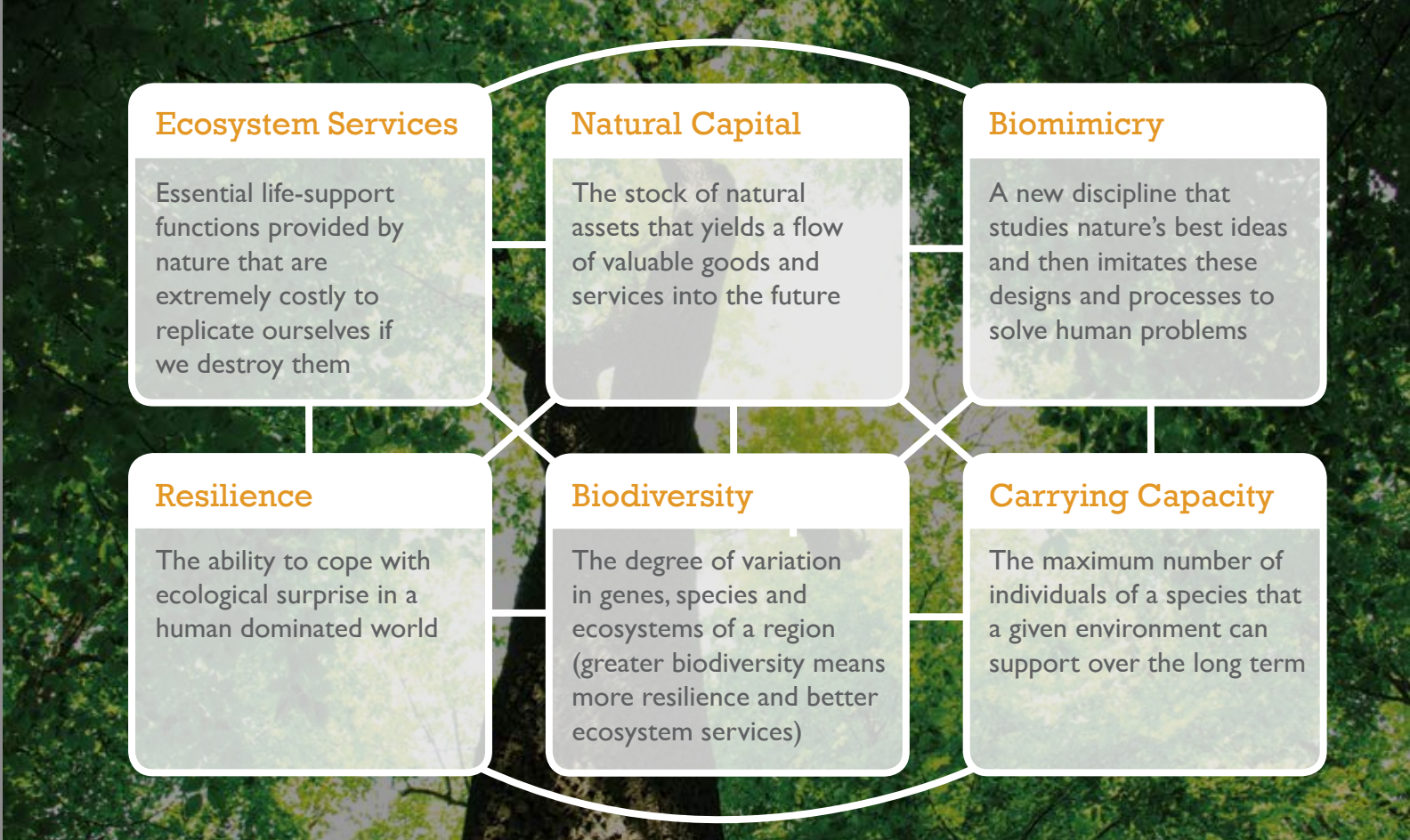


Educating for a Sustainable Future

Are you aware that, even if you never set foot outside your house, you're still deeply connected to nature? Have you ever considered that the cereal you eat each morning is made possible only due to the wind (thanks to pollination), or that the glass of clear, clean water from your faucet was likely purified for you by a wetland or the root system of an entire forest? These are examples of the new concept of "ecosystem services": those essential life-support functions provided by nature that are extremely costly to replicate ourselves if we destroy them.

A new way of understanding how critically dependent our lives are upon nature's support is emerging. Much of this new perspective is grounded in the growing recognition of the interconnectedness and interdependency of all life on the planet. New concepts such as natural capital, biomimicry, carrying capacity, resilience and biodiversity along with ecosystem services and many others are illuminating

James L Elder
Campaign for
Environmental Literacy



our deep relationship with the natural world, and these concepts are forming a new foundation for the field of environmental literacy.

Environmental literacy has profound implications for how we understand our place on this planet. It grows out of the deep recognition that we humans are part of a larger system that has important limits as well as rules by which we have no choice but to live if the human species is to survive over the long term. It also incorporates "systems thinking"—a way of thinking that emphasizes the qualities of relationships, connectedness and context present in any system, whether an ecosystem or a school system.

This new perspective is emerging not a moment too soon, as we wrestle with finding systemic solutions to

the interconnected challenges of mitigating and adapting to climate change; sustaining our nation's lands, waters and other natural resources as well as our economic competitiveness; achieving energy independence and security; creating more livable communities; and transitioning to a green economy.

Successful Models for Teaching Environmental Literacy

Successful models of schools committed to environmental literacy are leading the way. They share a set of embedded values in common that drive all school activity toward helping students become true citizens of the 21st century. The best of these model schools employ a comprehensive "whole school" approach, seeking to both produce environmentally literate graduates as well as to eliminate

their negative environmental impact, while using their own built and natural environment as a learning laboratory and a model of best practice for their host communities.

We humans are part of a larger system that has important limits as well as rules by which we have no choice but to live if the human species is to survive over the long term.

The best of these model schools employ a “whole school” approach, seeking to both produce environmentally literate graduates as well as to minimize or eliminate their environmental footprint.

A teaching garden at the Environmental Charter High School provides hands-on learning that compliments the vigorous in-classroom curriculum.



For example, the Environmental Charter High School in Los Angeles combines “a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum with hands-on learning opportunities in the community.” While 80 percent of the students are financially disadvantaged, all students must be admitted to a four-year university in order to graduate. The school’s philosophy employs project- and service-based learning as well as an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates environmental science and ecology-inspired activities across all disciplines. In addition to classroom programs, students are required to apply concepts and skills gained in class to problem-solve local civic and environmental issues. Founded by a group of parents, educators, businesses and non-profits in 2000, the school has experienced dramatic improvements in academic results. The school was called “a model of learning” by President Obama,¹ and *US News & World Report* placed it in the top 3 percent of US public high schools.

The Willow School, a small independent K–8 day school in New Jersey, is committed to combining academic excellence, the joy of learning and experiencing the wonder of the natural world. With the help of the Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education, the school faculty has seamlessly embedded the attributes of sustainability education across the curriculum. The buildings and grounds are a laboratory for academic inspiration and sustainability education where students develop a sense of place, become stewards of their environment and learn to appreciate their role in restoring balance to the natural world. For example, students have the opportunity to plant, weed and harvest crops; in social studies, they study cultures and consider the reciprocal relationship between humans and their environment.

Environmental Charter High School • Los Angeles, CA

- Rigorous college-preparatory curriculum
- Hands-on learning opportunities in the community that support real-world applications
- Interdisciplinary approach that incorporates environmental science and ecology-inspired activities



Photo courtesy The Willow School

The school grounds were designed to be integral to all aspects of the curriculum, incorporating natural meadows, butterfly gardens, water harvesting, hedgerows and a constructed wetlands to filter wastewater so it provides clean water to the groundwater system.

Evergreen Community Charter School, a public school in North Carolina, aims to prepare students for successful lifelong learning, environmental responsibility and service. Environmental education and thinking critically about community issues are woven throughout the curriculum, fostering an understanding of ecology and environmental stewardship as well as a sense of respect and wonder for the natural world. Every student is empowered to take action and seek solutions for environmental concerns. Students learn from local experts in many fields, including natural history and conservation, government, business, current events, education and social studies. The school’s property is home to many sustainable features such as rooftop solar panels, biodiesel-powered school buses, rain gardens, organic gardens, a greenhouse, bioswales, a natural trail and woods play area and composting systems.

Evergreen Community Charter School • Asheville, NC

- Rooftop solar panels, rain & organic gardens, composting
- Aims to prepare students for successful lifelong learning, environmental responsibility and service
- Students learn from local experts in many fields, including natural history and conservation, government, business, current events, education and social studies

The Willow School • Gladstone, NJ

- Building and grounds are a laboratory for academic inspiration and sustainability education, with meadows, butterfly gardens, water harvesting and wetland
- Students have opportunity to plant, weed & harvest crops
- School faculty have seamlessly embedded the attributes of sustainability education across the curriculum

The Need for Systemic Change

Successful model schools offer hope. But with over 100,000 public K–12 schools in the nation, they remain a drop in the bucket. After 30 or more years of environmental education, how environmentally literate are our students? All indications are that we fail as a nation to grasp those essential insights necessary to function on a daily level as proper stewards of both our environment and our children’s future. While our awareness of environmental issues appears to be growing, our understanding of these issues is not, and this gap seems to be increasing at the very moment in history when it needs to be rapidly shrinking. For example, a recent study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that the average US student scores only just above basic proficiency in environmental science, and ranked the US 34th out of 57 countries.² While the US ranked above Uruguay and Thailand, we fell below Estonia, Croatia and the Slovak and Czech Republics as well as Canada, Japan, Australia, Russia and the UK.



Photo courtesy Evergreen Community Charter School

In students' knowledge about the environment and environment-related issues, the US ranks:



• While the US ranked above Uruguay & Thailand, we fell **below** Estonia, Croatia, the Slovak and Czech Republics, Canada, Japan, Australia, Russia and the U.K.

Systemic change—changing whole education systems, not just changing individual schools one by one—is clearly needed to move our education system quickly in the right direction. One of the more promising systemic change efforts is California's Education and Environment Initiative (EEI), a \$9 million partnership between the State Board of Education, the Office of the Secretary for Education, the State Department of Education and the California Natural Resources Agency. The EEI curriculum, comprising 85 units teaching science and history-social science academic standards, is expected to bring environmental education into the classrooms of 1,000 California school districts serving 6 million students by using the environment as a context for standards-based instruction. The EEI website notes: "Everyone and everything is linked to the environment. California's economic prosperity, the health of its citizens, in fact, our whole future depends on the health of the environment in which we live. Integrating education about the environment into our K-12 school system will make learning relevant to today's world and prepare students to be knowledgeable citizens who can make informed decisions about California's future."³ Unfortunately, this terrific state-level initiative is the exception rather than the rule.

The Need for Leadership

Systemic change needs to be led from the top as well as the bottom. As acknowledged by President Obama, the transition to a clean, green economy needs to be a top priority—a transition that recognizes and supports the vital connections between climate change, economic stimulus, energy security and job training. Navigating this transition to a green economy will require creating a broad base of environmentally literate citizens who can make well-informed decisions as consumers, workers, business owners, investors and voters. Each year, 3 million graduates enter the workforce armed with the attitudes, skills and knowledge either to advance a green economy and a sustainable future or to continue "business as usual." The impact, good or bad, of each of these 3 million individuals lasts a lifetime.



Photo courtesy gardenproject.wordpress.com

California's Education & Environment Initiative (EEI) curriculum is expected to bring environmental education into the classrooms of 1,000 California school districts serving 6 million students.

"96% of educators reported that students developed higher-level, critical thinking skills than those of their traditional peers,"



Environmental Education Improves Learning and Behavior

Environment-based education is much more than learning about the environment. The natural world is a foundation for acquiring learning skills and creating a wider learning context, all of which are guided by teachers using proven educational practices.

Studies show that environment-based education leads to higher scores on standardized tests. Ninety-six percent of educators from 40 schools reported that students developed higher-level, critical thinking skills than those of their traditional peers. Ninety-eight percent reported increased ability to think creatively. Ninety-seven percent reported greater proficiency in solving problems and thinking strategically and 89 percent saw a better application of systems thinking.¹

Environmental education improves more than just test scores. Studies also show increased attendance, fewer discipline problems, better behavior and increased enthusiasm for learning.

from the editor

One step in the right direction is the Green Ribbon School Award recently announced by the US Secretary of Education and the EPA Administrator, and originally conceived by the Campaign for Environmental Literacy. The Department of Education will honor with a Green Ribbon those schools which come the closest each year to achieving three interrelated goals: 1) 100 percent of the school's graduates are environmentally literate, 2) the school has a "net zero" environmental impact, and 3) there are no negative health impacts on students or staff from participating in school. More than just another award program, it puts the weight of the US Department of Education behind a comprehensive vision for green schools.

Few doubt that we will leave our children a more problematic and difficult world than the one we inherited from our parents. We are morally bound to provide them with the knowledge, skills and training required for coping with this new world. Parents and local community leaders can encourage their schools to incorporate environmental education and sustainability principles and practices. It just takes a bit of focus and dedication to make it happen. Given the degree to which the environment affects everything from our economy and health to our security and well being, let's do what it takes to get the US to rank first in environmental literacy.

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Dr. James Elder is a prominent environmental/sustainability education policy expert and strategist who founded the School for Field Studies, building it into the nation's leading environmental field program for undergraduates. He subsequently founded the Campaign for Environmental Literacy (CEL: www.FundEE.org), a national advocacy network of stakeholder organizations. With the help of its partners, CEL has restored \$200 million in federal environmental/sustainability education funding, passed the Higher Education Sustainability Act and initiated both the No Child Left Inside Act and the Ocean, Coastal and Watershed Education Act.

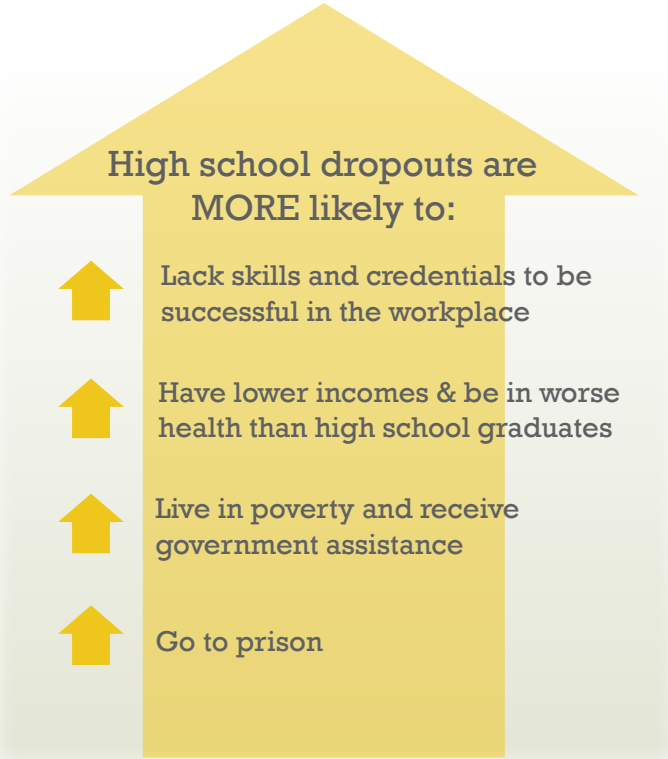


A School and Community Strategy for the 21st Century

• Martin J. Blank
• Coalition for Community Schools,
Institute for Educational Leadership

America’s schools now enroll the most diverse group of young people in history, and their progress depends on the environment in which they live and learn. Many states are experiencing stagnant high school graduation rates and unacceptably low performance in math and science. Many students are disengaged, and young people are seen as problems rather than as individuals with assets, hopes and dreams. As a nation, we must act collectively to ensure that the youth of today succeed as workers, family members and citizens.

Obviously, to improve our educational system, we need effective teachers, and schools like all public institutions must be accountable. But in order to be successful, young people and their families also need more connections, more support, more opportunities, more learning time and more engaging learning opportunities from the entire community. Schools need to develop and maintain robust relationships with families and other community institutions. At the heart of these efforts must be a commitment for schools and communities to work together to create strong and purposeful partnerships for change and results.



Communities and Schools Move Forward

There are a growing number of communities that are moving this school and community agenda forward. Cincinnati’s Board of Education established a policy that all schools built under a major school reconstruction program will be Community Learning Centers. Each school has a different physical and program design that reflects the needs and aspirations of neighborhood residents. The intensive community engagement process that led to these school plans distinguishes Cincinnati’s initiative. Networks of community partners focused on extended learning, physical health, mental health, college access and parental engagement, and the partners provide these services at the schools. A full-time resource coordinator, employed by an external partner (i.e., YMCA) integrates the work of community partners in the school, while

parents, educators, residents and community partners provide guidance and oversight. School personnel, the YMCA and an independent intermediary provide day-to-day management of the enterprise. The Community Learning Centers are showing improved academic performance, higher attendance rates and greater parent involvement and, moreover, are attracting new families in some neighborhoods.¹

Multnomah County, in partnership with the city of Portland and six school districts in the county, organized 58 Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) Community Schools. The initiative provides an array of extended learning, service learning, health and social services and parental engagement support to schools. A Community Coordinating Council led by the county executive and made up of representatives from the city, school districts, non-profit partners and families guides the initiative. Within a decade of their foundation, SUN Community Schools showed a 75 percent increase in reading scores, a 77 percent increase in math scores, an average daily attendance of 95 percent along with student behavior improvements such as increased class participation and homework turned in on time.²



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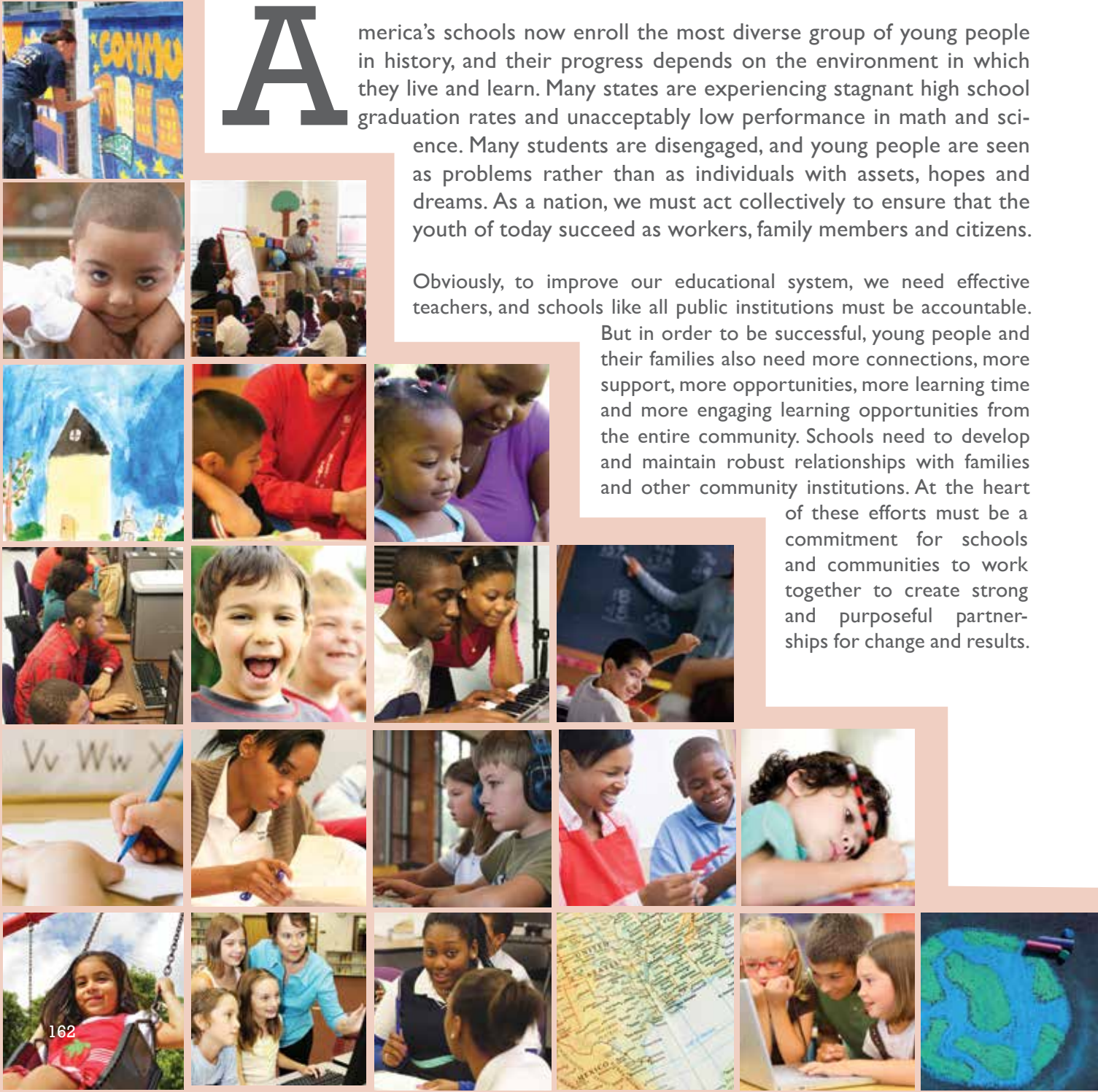




Photo courtesy Marty Lipp and the Harlem's Children Zone

education as well. In 2010, HCZ successes included: 100 percent of third-graders tested at or above grade level on the math exam; 100 percent of high school after-school program participants remained in school; 90 percent of high school seniors were accepted to college.³ The commitment from the White House to the HCZ vision through the Promise Neighborhoods Initiative is a recognition that our society must target its resources intensively to support our most valuable asset: today's youth.

Strategies that Work

More and more school districts and their communities are moving in this direction. They are positioning schools as centers of community. These are places that have transformed their curriculum and instruction, scheduling, school layout and especially their relationships and responsibilities among school staff, students, families and community partners. They rely on multiple inter-related strategies that combine broad-scale learning along with community involvement to achieve results: They set high expectations for all students, integrate real-world learning, focus on the whole child, and are conduits for engaging people and resources from within the community.

Harlem Children's Zone successes include:

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Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) represents an intensive effort in Harlem to ensure the success of students and to rebuild the community. Its work reflects many of the principles and values of community schools, including the need for a high-quality academic program, enriched and extended learning opportunities, an array of health and social services as well as engaged families and an engaged community. HCZ also has an intensive focus on early childhood opportunities through its Baby College for young parents and its Harlem Gems preschool program. It extends its efforts to support students who enter post-secondary

Scaling up the Nation's Schools

Moving community schools and initiatives like the Harlem Children's Zone to scale requires significant shifts in how we view public schools along with federal and state policy. When introducing the new US Education Secretary Arne Duncan, President Obama agreed, "We need a new vision for a 21st-century education system—one where we aren't just supporting existing schools but spurring innovation; where we're not just investing more money but demanding more reform."⁴ This is what it will take to make this happen:



Photos courtesy Arts @ Large

Why Art is Essential in our Public Schools

by Ryan Hurley, Arts @ Large

The arts inspire. The arts challenge. The arts educate. The arts build relationships. The arts provide fresh and creative ways for teachers and young people to interact and learn together.

Studies have shown that involvement in the arts helps kids increase test scores and promotes academic achievement. Kids who are involved in the arts are:

- * **4 times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement.**
- * **3 times more likely to be elected to class office within their schools.**
- * **4 times more likely to participate in a math and science fair.**
- * **3 times more likely to win an award for school attendance.¹**

With so much focus and pressure on standardized testing, little time is left for creative engagement, especially in underserved schools that are so often working impossibly hard to live up to these standards with very limited resources. Most kids are not getting enough art—in or out of school.

At Adams Elementary School in Hamilton, Ohio, Children experience the arts as part of each of their core subjects—math, science, language arts and social studies. They also participate in a class in each of four art disciplines—visual art, music, dance and drama—every week, taught by a certified arts instructor.

Kids at Adams have multiple opportunities to learn and experience a concept. They “don’t just learn to tell time, for example, by hearing a description of an abstract concept and watching the teacher move the arrows on a cardboard display. They’re taught a dance where they become a clock, with their movements changing to reflect the changing hours. They become time.”²

Here, art becomes the vehicle for learning and it nurtures the learning process because each child learns differently—some read well, others write well, while others learn by listening and speaking. Programs such as the one at Adams not only offer art for art’s sake but also support the learning process in general.

The arts are essential to a child’s development and more art education opportunities for children are important. If you are a parent, enjoy the arts with your child together, encourage your child to participate in the arts inside and outside of school, tell your child’s school that the arts are an important part of a quality education. Anyone can be an arts advocate by supporting funding for arts education and the local, state and federal levels.

This editor's box was developed with Arts @ Large; a non-profit organization that provides multi-disciplinary arts programming for public schools in Milwaukee. www.artsatlargeinc.org

from the editor

Communitywide Planning and Decision-making:

Youth, parents, community and school leaders should become partners in the planning and oversight of school reform. If the people and places affected by change have a voice, implementation will be most effective.

A New Accountability Framework:

A single standardized test should not be the basis for judging schools or students. “Teaching to the test” doesn’t benefit the child’s overall education and preparedness for the world. Instead, schools should rely on an accountability model that includes multiple measures of academic achievement as well as measures of engagement, attendance, social, emotional and ethical competencies, physical well-being and family and community involvement.

Learning to Work Together:

Teachers, principals, other school personnel and people in social work, youth development, health and mental health and community development have different experience and academic backgrounds. Some have limited experience working directly with students, families and the average citizen. They need training and support to enable to work more effectively together and in partnership with families and communities.

Increased Funding

Ensuring that disadvantaged students in under-resourced communities have access to an excellent and equitable education has been a cornerstone of the US public school system for more than 40 years. Even as schools work to use resources more efficiently, additional funding is essential for school functions such as early



The graduating class of 2011 are seated for their commencement ceremony.

John Dewey said that “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” This rings true when we reflect upon the potential of a fully functioning educational system that is grounded in the community, serves the whole student and draws the best from each one.

care and education; out-of-school enrichment opportunities; mentoring; preventive health, mental health and family services; family and community engagement; and service, civic, and environmental learning opportunities.

Education Is Life

John Dewey said that “education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”¹⁵ This verity rings true when we reflect upon the potential of a fully functioning educational system that is grounded in community, serves the whole student and draws the best from each

one. The strength of our evolving democracy requires our ongoing and renewed commitment to this cause. Those that have blazed the trail of reform and innovation live and breathe to see students succeed. They have developed a recipe for success that is dynamic and needs only to expand through a unified vision, creativity and partnership. Only by intentionally and relentlessly working together across organizational boundaries will our nation get the results we need for the 21st century and beyond.

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Martin J. Blank is the president of the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) in Washington, DC. He leads IEL in its efforts to build the capacity of people, organizations and systems—in education and related fields—to cross boundaries and work together to attain better results for children and youth. Blank has been associated with IEL since 1985, focusing his work on building bridges between schools and other institutions with assets that can support student success. Blank also serves as the director of the Coalition for Community Schools (www.communityschools.org), which is staffed by the Institute for Educational Leadership. The Coalition is an alliance that brings together leaders and organizations in education, family support, youth development early childhood, community development, government and philanthropy.

For more information on the Coalition for Community Schools, at the Institute for Educational Leadership visit www.communityschools.org or www.iel.org.

A photograph of a female teacher in a classroom, smiling and standing in front of a green chalkboard. Several students in the foreground have their hands raised, indicating an interactive lesson. The chalkboard has a list of words and a spelling challenge.

Communitywide Involvement + **A New Accountability Framework** + **Increased Funding** = **More Successful Students and Communities**

Making Education Work for All Students

The US is one of only two industrialized countries in which today's young people are no more likely than previous generations to complete high school.¹ In fact, about one in four students doesn't graduate on time.² And even among those who do, about 40 percent of them lack the skills necessary to succeed in college and the 21st-century workplace.³

Once the global leader in educational attainment, the US school system is no longer keeping pace. Now, America has slipped to eighth in the world in the percentage of young adults with college degrees.⁴

And at the K–12 level, one-fourth of eighth-graders and one-third of fourth-graders still read below the basic level on national examinations.⁵ In math, 29 percent of eighth-graders and 19 percent of fourth-graders scored below basic.⁶

⋮ Kati Haycock
⋮ The Education Trust



Although it's difficult to track the national dropout rate, many organizations estimate that **every 26 seconds, a student drops out of school in America. That's more than 1.3 million students per year.**¹

from the editor

To reverse this trend, the way we “do school” in this country has to change. Two steps are crucial: setting higher expectations for all students and hiring and supporting strong teachers.

High Expectations for All Students

Historically, the highest expectations and most resources have typically been set aside for the highest performing students. However, schools with the strongest records of student achievement set high goals; they also leave nothing about teaching and learning to chance. Teachers in these schools work together to ensure that they are all providing the same rigorous content at the same high levels to all students. States like Arkansas, Florida, and New York are making serious progress in closing gaps by adopting robust policies aimed at preparing every student for life beyond high school.

In recent years, Arkansas has ratcheted up expectations by emphasizing instruction across subject areas (for example, ensuring that social studies lessons reinforce reading and math) and by linking assessments and curricula to state standards. State standards are reviewed regularly to ensure appropriate rigor, beginning as early as kindergarten. And as expectations are raised, so too are minimum requirements to be deemed “proficient” on state tests. The result: Achievement is going up for all student groups, and

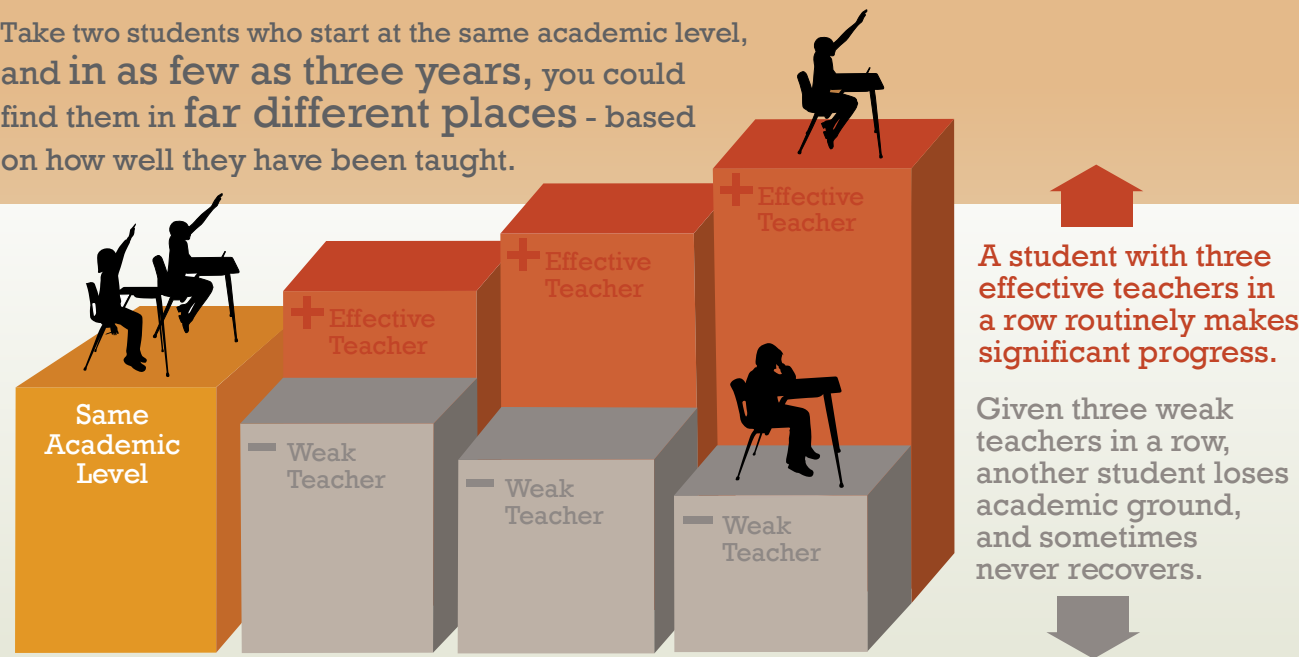
Decades of research tell us that the single most important factor in a child's education is the quality of their teacher.

gaps between racial and ethnic groups are narrowing on both state and national exams.

On the national exams, Arkansas was the biggest gainer in fourth-grade math achievement from over the past decade, and the second-biggest gainer in eighth grade. Arkansas also ranked among the top states in boosting math achievement in both grades for low-income students. Similarly, the state's improvement in writing was among the biggest in the nation, slashing by nearly half the number of low-income eighth-graders who scored below basic.

This kind of statewide improvement doesn't happen without a lot of local schools and districts pulling in the same direction. Norfolk Elementary School is a particularly good example. Located in a rural area known as the methamphetamine capital of the Ozarks, the school enrolls mostly children from low-income families. In recent years, four out of five Norfolk sixth-graders met or exceeded Arkansas' math standards. In fact, the school's test scores were so high

Take two students who start at the same academic level, and in as few as three years, you could find them in far different places - based on how well they have been taught.



that the state sent a monitor to the school in 2008 to ensure there was no cheating. That year, Norfolk's success continued: its sixth-grade literacy scores were third highest in the state.

A few years earlier, the district had put into place a number of improvements, including raising teacher salaries to compete with nearby districts, expanding communication with parents and families, and improving instruction. But the teachers themselves are adamant that one of the giant steps in the school's improvement was the implementation of Arkansas state standards. The standards allowed teachers to set clearer goals for classroom instruction and to fully align the curriculum so each year's learning provides the foundation for the next.

Reading classes also were increased to 90 minutes, which allows for whole-group instruction, cooperative learning, and independent time to allow teachers to work one-on-one with students. And as their results improved, and the teachers saw their kids could surpass the state standards, they chose to tie the curriculum closely to the even more rigorous national standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

Hire and Support Strong Teachers

High standards, of course, don't accomplish very much without strong teachers to teach them. And not surprisingly, research tells us that the most important variable in a child's education is his or her teacher.

Take two students who begin second grade at the same academic level. By the end of fourth grade, you could find them at vastly different levels, depending on who teaches them. In fact, a student assigned to three effective teachers in a row will gain ground on peers, while one with three weak teachers in a row will lose ground, regardless of family background.⁷ One study found that providing low-income elementary students in Texas with highly effective teachers (rather than merely average ones) would close the achievement gap.⁸

When it comes to strong teaching, content knowledge is critical. On national math exams, eighth-graders taught by math majors scored ten points higher than those assigned to teachers who majored in other subjects. That ten-point difference is equivalent to roughly a year's worth of learning.⁹ But tragically, too many students in America are assigned to teachers with inadequate training and skills. And in our middle and high schools, it's even worse for low-income students and students of



Teachers should be supported and evaluated based on the quality of their teaching and student results rather than contractual terms.

Re-thinking Teacher Tenure

A teacher's effectiveness has more impact on student learning than any other factor including class size, school size and quality of after-school programs.¹ Many national education reform movement proponents are calling for an end to the tenure systems in an effort to ensure all students have access to effective teachers.

When created early 20th century, the tenure system was designed to protect teachers, who were often fired for reasons unrelated to their work, including race, sex, political views or favoritism. Although it doesn't guarantee lifetime employment, the tenure system makes it difficult to let go of ineffective teachers. New York, Chicago and Los Angeles have each fired fewer than 1 out of 1,000 of their tenured teachers in recent years. Those numbers are not unusual. Reviews of dismissal cases can take years to make their way through the system, costing tens of thousands of dollars each.²

Michelle Rhee has been tackling teacher tenure debate since 2007 and it is a cornerstone of her national educational reform organization, StudentsFirst.

"Tenure is the holy grail of teacher unions," Rhee said, "but has no educational value for kids; it only benefits adults. If we can put veteran teachers who have tenure in a position where they don't have it, that would help us to radically increase our teacher quality."³

Several state governors are pushing to eliminate tenure and many districts are working to change teacher evaluation practices.⁴ Whether or not the tenure system is abolished, the fact is teachers should be supported and evaluated based on the quality of their teaching and student results rather than contractual terms.

from the editor



Photo courtesy Phil Manno/The New York Times/Redux

Math teacher John Squillace teaches a class for students who need extra help before school starts at Elmont Memorial High School.

color: They are about twice as likely as other kids to be taught core academics by out-of-field teachers.¹⁰

Successful schools are acutely aware of the importance of strong teachers, especially for their most vulnerable students. Take, for example, Elmont (NY) Memorial Junior-Senior High School, where most of the students are African American or Latino and the school's 96 percent graduation rate is almost twice the statewide average for similar students.¹¹ Early in the school's improvement process, then-principal Diane Scricca made sure all students had access to college-preparatory Advanced Placement (AP) classes, but she knew that some students would need considerable support in order to succeed in them. To teach AP US History, she assigned a dynamic teacher she had recently hired, supplanting a long-standing teacher who objected to working with students thought to not be "ready" for AP-level work.

"Every one of those kids passed [the class]," Scricca said, largely due to the skill, knowledge, and high expectations of the new teacher, John Capozzi. Fittingly, Capozzi is now the principal at Elmont and shares Scricca's passion for ensuring that his neediest students get the best teachers.

Like professionals in other fields, teachers should be paid more if they are especially effective, and effective teachers should be paid more to take on the biggest challenges.

At Elmont, school leaders spend a great deal of time ensuring that every new hire not only has the content knowledge and teaching skill needed to make a rigorous curriculum come to life, but also the "Elmont heart"—a love of kids, high expectations for all, a strong work ethic, and a willingness to spend time outside of the classroom to ensure that struggling students catch up.

Unfortunately, in too few places, teachers aren't supported or evaluated with the kind of single-mindedness employed at Elmont. The performance evaluation systems used in virtually every school system in America fail to differentiate between individual teachers who boost student learning and those who desperately need to improve. As a result of this quality-blind approach,



If we don't start to turn the trends around, to learn from the schools that are getting results, and to refuse to buy into the myths about who can learn & who can't, **we will relegate another generation of young Americans to lives on the margins.**

Not because they couldn't learn, but because we simply didn't bother to teach them.



New Haven Public Schools have implemented a new evaluation system that will help make sure New Haven students get the best teachers possible.

In every part of the country, there are schools that powerfully demonstrate that when you teach all students at high levels and provide them with adequate supports, all students can achieve at those high levels.

the students who need the most from their teachers are far less likely to get those who can help them achieve at high levels—and the teachers who need help to improve are never identified for targeted training and professional development.

But some districts around the country, including the New Haven (Conn.) Public Schools, are beginning to change. In New Haven’s recently implemented evaluation system, all teachers will be evaluated on student progress on both statewide and teacher-generated exams, in addition to their instructional practice and professional values. School leaders can then use this information to assist them in teacher assignment, support, and dismissal decisions.

In 2010, after years of negotiation, a groundbreaking collective bargaining agreement was ratified in Washington,

DC, that revises the rules associated with developing and retaining teachers, all with the final goal of ensuring that a strong teacher is working in every city classroom.

No matter how you think about this—through the lens of the children or that of their teachers—more districts need to move in this direction. In communities big and small, all across the country, some schools are powerfully demonstrating that when we focus on high expectations and strong teachers, our children can achieve, even when they live in challenging circumstances.

Unless we stand up for quality schools for all, we will continue to relegate thousands of young Americans to lives on the margins. Not because they couldn’t learn, but because we simply didn’t bother to teach them.

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Kati Haycock is the president of The Education Trust (www.edtrust.org). She is one of the nation’s leading advocates in education. She previously served as executive vice president of the Children’s Defense Fund, the nation’s largest child-advocacy organization. A native Californian, Haycock founded and served as president of the Achievement Council, a statewide organization that helps teachers and principals in predominantly minority schools improve student achievement. Before that, she served as director of the outreach and student affirmative-action programs for the nine-campus University of California system.



College costs have risen more than 400% in the last 25 years, while the median family income has increased less than 150%.

Making Higher Education Affordable

A postsecondary credential—whether it’s a bachelor’s degree, associate degree, apprenticeship, or certificate—is increasingly important for success in today’s economy. By 2018, more than six in 10 jobs will require some sort of postsecondary education.¹

While college enrollment is at an all-time high today, more than half of all students who enter the postsecondary system don’t earn a degree or credential within eight years of enrolling.²

The number one reason students leave school is due to the stress of going to school and working at the same time. More than half of those who left higher education before completing a degree or a certificate said that the “need to work and make money” while attending classes was the major reason they left.³

According to one recent analysis, college costs have risen more than 400 percent in the last 25 years, while the median family income has increased less than 150 percent.⁴

Achieving a postsecondary credential can lift people out of poverty and into the middle class. National statistics show that young people who leave college without a degree are more likely than their peers to come from less privileged backgrounds and to live in more precarious economic circumstances.⁵

Making loans more available and keeping tuition costs in line are important for raising college completion, but the vast majority of young people who left college without a degree said more flexible schedules and help mitigating the challenge of working and going to school at the same time would also make graduation feasible.⁶

One set of solutions might revolve around making part-time attendance more viable by giving those students better access to loans, tuition assistance and healthcare—benefits and services that are frequently available only to full-time students. There may also be implications for employers. Business owners could find ways to help part-time workers to pursue higher education by providing access to health benefits and by offering more predictable or flexible working hours so that students can more easily schedule their classes.⁷

The emphasis on the importance of a higher education credential makes sense given that the country is moving into a more knowledge-intensive-workplace economy. As a society, we need to support secondary education students all the way through graduation.

from the editor