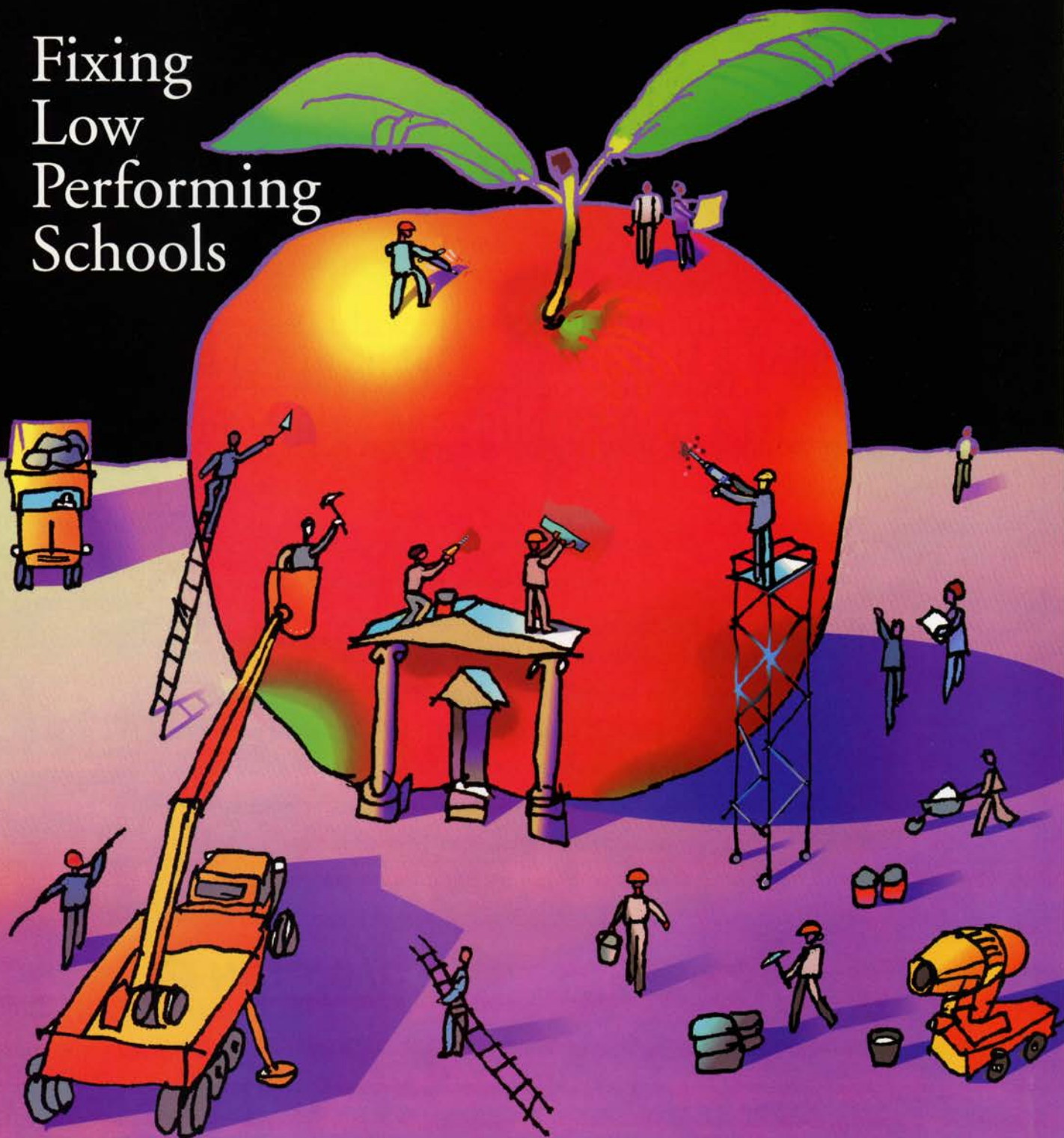


AMERICAN **Educator**

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
FALL 1998

Fixing
Low
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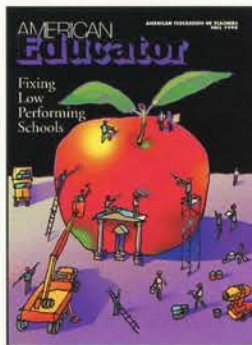
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The Professional Journal
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LETTERS

READERS RESPOND TO SPECIAL ISSUE ON READING

I just finished reading the articles in your recent publication [*The Unique Power of Reading and How To Unleash It*, Spring/Summer, 1998] and felt it was the most complete, concise, and well-researched series of articles on reading I have read to date. I would like to request four additional copies to give to my principal, my friend who instructs beginning teachers, my daughter who is studying to become a teacher, and one for the teachers' lounge to check out! Everyone should read this publication!

—PEGGY ENGARD
Costa Mesa, CA

As a nationally certified academic language therapist working as a special educator in a public school, I was thrilled to receive and read your Spring/Summer issue and proud that such an excellent issue came from my teachers' union. As a long-time practitioner of the methods discussed in this recent issue, I have often felt as if I were sitting on a gold mine, delighted to see my own dyslexic students make significant gains in reading and spelling, but frustrated to see so many other students go unserved. This issue should be mandatory reading for all education professors and for all language arts teachers, K through 12.

I would like to request a minimum of fifteen copies, which I will proudly deliver to members of the Southwest Branch of the International Dyslexia Association (SWIDA). If an additional thirty copies could be sent to me, I would disseminate them to teachers enrolled in upcoming workshops on reading methods.

Thank you for your commitment to educational research and dissemination.

—MARY POIRIER GILROY
Taos, NM

The AFT *American Educator* Spring/Summer 1998 issue on the power of reading was superb. But what made it particularly powerful

was to see the insert by the Learning First Alliance demonstrating what twelve organizations have committed to *do* in the form of an action plan. The reading research covered in the magazine is critical, but teachers who are supported by administration, school boards, parents, and state leaders will truly make a difference to children. Thanks to AFT's leadership on reading—a fundamental first start.

—ANNE L. BRYANT
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION
Alexandria, VA

I have just completed reading your series of articles in the Spring/Summer issue and I appreciate your taking the time to focus on reading. I am a second year humanities teacher in a New York City urban area, and I find that very little emphasis is placed on reading.

The article "What Reading Does for the Mind" was particularly enlightening. I cannot remember ever reading an article that so effectively documents the positive effects of reading on the human mind. As educators, we oftentimes speak of reading as an important basic tool for continued learning; however, we sometimes fail to provide our students, parents, and colleagues with indisputable scientific research that demonstrates the value of reading. We live in a society that provides us with information from several different sources, and our students for the most part have chosen television as their sole source of in-

Editorial Change

Elizabeth McPike, editor of *American Educator*, is on sabbatical leave. She will resume editorial responsibility for the magazine with the Summer 1999 issue. In her absence, Marcia Reecer has been appointed acting editor. Ms. Reecer, a former K-12 and college English teacher and managing editor of *Science and Children* magazine, has been a member of the staff of the AFT president's office since 1989.

formation. This article shows that excessive television watching of certain programs does not necessarily build vocabulary and useful general knowledge. Teachers have known this for years in theory; yet, until recently, we lacked demonstrable evidence.

Please continue to publish articles that focus on the importance of the value of reading. I plan to use this article next year to help motivate both my students and colleagues to use reading as a tool for building cognitive structures. And personally, I am determined to use reading as my main source of information.

—CHRISTOPHER BURNSIDE
Ossining, NY

I simply wanted to take this time to say thank you for this very informative magazine. As soon as I received it, I read it from cover to cover. I am grateful to the entire staff of the *American Educator*. It is a teacher's dream come true. Keep up the good work.

—DINA BROWN
Brooklyn, NY

The recent issue of *American Educator* on the importance of reading, including knowledge about phonics

Ordering Information and Correction

The toll-free number for ordering the book *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children: A Classroom Curriculum*, from which we adapted the article "The Elusive Phoneme" that appeared in our last issue, is 1-800-638-3775 (Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company).

In the article "Teaching Decoding," by Louisa C. Moats, two letters were inadvertently transposed during the production process. The last two sentences of the first full paragraph on p. 45 should have read as follows: *The letter c is redundant for /k/ and /s/. The letter q is redundant for the sound of /k/, and the letter x redundant for the combination /ks/ or the phoneme /z/.*

and encoding rules, was most gratifying and appreciated. I avidly read every article while nodding my head in agreement with one idea after another.

I am a community college instructor at the largest ESL department in the United States. Last fall during a class evaluation, I was given a poor appraisal for having used phonics to teach sound and spelling rules. I was told that I was wasting the students' time.

English is not my native language. Unlike most of my immigrant adult students who are learning English as a second language, I was raised speaking four languages before encountering English. Consequently, linguistically I have well-trained ears and throat muscles for recognizing and reproducing a wide variety of sounds while matching sounds to various writing and spelling systems. Mastering the English spelling system was a consternation until, as a new teacher, I accidentally ran across some basic phonics and spelling association patterns in an out-of-print text.

Over the last ten years, in all sorts of ESL classes (even with pre/semi-literate adult students and prison inmates), I have successfully taught spelling patterns based on phonics awareness. I know that when I was evaluated poorly last fall, part of the problem was that the evaluator only saw one lesson in isolation from the overview of the semester's lesson links; in addition, she harbors a whole language approach to teaching. Nevertheless, again and again over the years, students in class and after the semester ended have enthusiastically thanked me for making spelling more accessible because of the sound exercises and mini phonics lessons we did in conjunction with spelling (which in turn enhances reading, writing, and overall understanding). A few students have even reacted in anger, wondering why, when they were first taught English, they were not taught to spell based on phonics!

I will keep this recent issue of *American Educator* among my favorites and refer student teachers to it for a long time to come.

—NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST
San Francisco, CA

(Continued on page 48)

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A TEACHER QUALITY MANIFESTO

BY SANDRA FELDMAN

THE LATEST issue to be caught up in political agendas is teacher quality. I'll start with teacher incompetence and the tenure issue—not because it's the greatest problem in teacher quality; it is not. But even one incompetent teacher is too much for the children she teaches, the parents she faces, the members who get her students in subsequent grades—and, frankly, for the good of our union.

So let me state unequivocally: We believe all students have the right to a high-quality teacher, a teacher who both knows her subject matter and how to teach it, who both cares about children and knows how they learn. And we believe that the union has a responsibility to help ensure that the members of our profession meet high standards.

But the idea that ending tenure—eliminating due process for teachers—is the way to ensure a quality teaching force is ludicrous.

Teachers are entitled to fair dismissal procedures—to protection from arbitrary, capricious, and unreasonable dismissals. Moreover, children and the public also need to be protected from schemes to replace competent, experienced teachers with unqualified but cheaper labor—or someone's relative.

The fact is, this nation doesn't have to choose between teacher quality or the individual rights of teachers, which also protects teacher quality. We

need to do both. We can do both.

So let me propose a partnership on behalf of teacher quality. Because we can't do it alone—and political and school officials have certainly demonstrated they can't do it.

First, instead of capitalizing on dismissal proceedings that are time-consuming, costly, inefficient, and more adversarial than professional, let's streamline them and professionalize them, as we've already done in a number of states and districts. Let's use these model laws and contracts.

Second, instead of blaming seniority rules for all the ills of the world and proposing to give principals sole discretion over hiring, let's treat teachers as professionals and involve them in the hiring process. Instead of trying to end rules established to protect against arbitrary and capricious decisions, let's make sure that a teacher's qualifications and demonstrated fit with a school's educational philosophy or program are what count. We have such schools. We have contract language that achieves this goal.

Third, instead of capitalizing on lousy, top-down teacher evaluation systems that make it too easy to get tenured, that are indifferent about teachers who are falling down on the job and offer no assistance to teachers who need help, let's negotiate a peer-review and intervention program. Because believe me, no one is more knowledgeable and rigorous about teacher performance than first-rate teachers!

We pioneered peer review and intervention. Many of our locals are doing it. It works, not only in our eyes but according to the experts on teacher evaluation. Yet negotiation is a two-way street. We can't ram even the most effective programs down

Sandra Feldman is president of the American Federation of Teachers. This article is taken from her keynote speech to AFT's 1998 Convention, July 17, 1998.

Emergency licenses and teacher misassignment have created a structural teacher quality deficit in this country.

management's throat; believe me, we've tried. Let's negotiate.

Fourth, instead of allowing new teachers to sink or swim, let's set up teacher internship programs. They work. Yes, they cost money. But those costs are nothing compared to the cost of the talent we lose in the first, difficult year of teaching because no one is there to help. Those costs are nothing compared to the education that's lost to children when the new, struggling teachers they happen to have are sinkers rather than swimmers.

Fifth, let's make schools learning

communities for teachers, as well as for students. Provide for master teachers, teacher centers, real professional development in the schools—with time for teachers to work with one another to overcome children's learning problems as they come up.

My last point is really the first. Because our teacher quality problem is far more of a future problem than a current one. Our teaching force is "maturing." We are on our way to replacing two million teachers. Who will these new teachers be?

We've seen progress on more rigorous licensing standards. Now, we also have advanced certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Those high standards are beginning to be reflected in teacher education and licensing requirements, including testing for new teachers. Teacher quality is on everyone's mind, as well it should be.

But so long as state and local education authorities continue to issue emergency credentials and to misassign teachers into subjects they are not qualified to teach, higher standards will be a fiction.

So let me issue my final challenge for a partnership on behalf of teacher quality: Instead of blaming teacher unions for policies we didn't create and don't defend; instead of blaming us for mistakes we

didn't make and don't defend in hiring, promotion, or tenure, end emergency credentials and the misassignment of teachers now! Let us end politics as usual as we face preparing and hiring two million new teachers.

You know, there are people who want to do away with standards for teachers altogether, who mock the need for teacher education and for licensing requirements, who consider certification a desire on our part for bureaucratic control—nutty as that may be. They like to tell us that teaching standards are keeping brilliant historians out of our schools, or retirees from the military and aerospace industry, or Warren Buffett, or—my personal favorite—Albert Einstein.

By the way, I don't see any of the folks who say this lining up to teach in our public schools.

Well, Albert Einstein just happened to be a proud and active AFT member. And he would have been the first to tell us that, when it comes to teaching children, it's simply not enough just to know your subject matter well; you also have to know how to teach it to children. It's not either/or; the two go hand in hand.

Einstein also would have pointed out—not just because he was a good union member, but because he also had common sense—that if you want qualified math or science or other teachers in our schools, you'll need to pay them.

Isn't it curious that those who love to talk about markets and about competition never talk about a competitive salary, a fair market price for teachers?

Now, the AFT is on record in support of good alternative certification programs. We also want to see standards in the traditional route raised. We like to see retired military folks in our schools; in fact, we proposed such a program to Congress, and it's in effect. We like to see poets and artists in our schools. And we welcome scientists and mathematicians now working elsewhere into our classrooms.

But they, just like other teachers, ought to demonstrate that they know their subject matter. They, even more than new teachers—who at least have had student-teaching experience—ought to be under the supervision of expert teachers during their first year of teaching. And, if they decide to make teaching their career, they, just like other teachers, should demonstrate that they know how to teach—not for our sake, but for the sake of their students.

But really, isn't all this talk about John Hope Franklin or Warren Buffett or Albert Einstein being kept out of our schools because of teaching standards just a red herring?

Let's face it, every profession and trade has licensing requirements, from doctor, lawyer, architect, or accountant to plumber and cosmetologist. Don't our kids deserve standards, too, for the people who serve them? Doesn't the public's interest in educa-

tion need to be protected just as much as the public's interest in health or in buildings and bridges that don't fall down?

Isn't the real story, the one no one wants to talk about, a story about how, in districts where attracting teachers has become a chronic problem, alternative certification doesn't get us many geniuses or poets or even a modest number of Teach for America kids?

The truth is, in places that have the toughest conditions and pay the least—translation: the schools serving our poorest, neediest children—teaching standards aren't the problem. The problem is the chronic undermining of those standards through "emergency" credentials and misassignment of teachers to classes they aren't trained to teach. That's our teacher quality problem!

Let's face it. Emergency licenses and teacher misassignment have created a structural teacher quality deficit in this country. And this ought to be taken as seriously as the budget deficit has been.

And the elimination or lowering of standards for entry into the profession in any school, including charter schools or voucher schools, can only make it worse.

So let me repeat my challenge to state and local education authorities: If you're really serious about teacher quality, stop undercutting even the standards we have now. Stop creating and perpetuating a structural teacher quality deficit into the next century. This school year, put an end to emergency credentials and the misassignment of teachers.

This is not a proposal lightly made. Because if it is implemented, we would have a crisis in many schools. I should say, a more visible, more difficult-to-deal-with crisis than we have at present. Because we would have many classrooms throughout some of our cities that go not only without teachers, but without babysitters. And the structural teacher quality deficit would be shamefully exposed.

But we cannot allow this problem to continue. And we cannot allow state and local education authorities, and others, to get off the hook with talk about how they can't precipitate a crisis. As I said, this already is a crisis, especially for our neediest children.

SO, TO AVOID any excuses—and because it's the right thing for us to do—I also call on our affiliates and on our members to help get through such a crisis by negotiating ways to accommodate the additional shortages until qualified teachers are found.

Here are some examples of solutions that can be negotiated:

One, offer incentives to experienced teachers seeking to retire so they will stay longer.

Two, offer flexible scheduling and part-time teaching to retirees or teachers who are presently

on child-care leave.

Three, offer incentives for teachers to become certified in an additional field, such as a shortage field.

Four, make sure that the liberal arts graduates, the retirees or career-switchers from other fields, and others willing to teach—the historians and Einsteins—take and pass entry-level exams that regular teachers are required to pass. And then provide them with training before they practice on kids. We can help.

Five, have them, and all new teachers, be mentored by master teachers. Many of our contracts already include such programs.

Six, ask qualified teachers now working in shortage areas to voluntarily take on additional classes—with appropriate additional pay, of course. And give teachers the autonomy and flexibility to arrange classes of different sizes among themselves. Many contracts already provide for this.

Seven, recruit paraprofessionals with college credits and offer more support for them to obtain teaching credentials.

Eight, put qualified supervisors and administrators into the classroom.

Nine, allow the parents of children in classrooms without qualified teachers to transfer their children to another classroom or public school in the district that has enough qualified teachers.

Ten, find a way, in this upturned economy, to raise teachers' salaries, particularly where they are lowest, to put the profession where it belongs in a hierarchy of values—to show that education matters, that children matter in America.

Let us stop the forays and skirmishes over demonstrably ineffective and conflict-producing measures, like meaningless recertification or threatening teacher due process rights, or seeking union-free environments or vouchers for a few.

Let us provide what the millions upon millions of children need and deserve in America—free and equal access to high-quality public education.

This is my challenge to those who run public education—the state and local officials, the boards of education, the superintendents—and to our own local and state unions:

Measure every school by the highest standard: Would I want my own child to be there?

And, in addition to all the other school improvement efforts we are making and working on together—high standards, good discipline, programs that work—together, let's take this basic step: Enforce high entry standards into the teaching profession, so that as we face the next century, the children of America—no matter their parents' wealth, no matter the wealth or status of their neighborhood—have truly equal access to this essential element of a good education: well-educated, qualified teachers in their classrooms. □

FAR AND WIDE

Developing and Disseminating Research-Based Programs

BY ROBERT SLAVIN

EVERY METROPOLITAN area has at least one widely known school that has been able to demonstrate, year after year, extraordinary student performance. When these schools serve poor and minority children, they are often held up as examples of what all schools could achieve with at-risk children.

On further examination, these exemplary schools sometimes turn out to be less than extraordinary because they operate under conditions that other schools cannot emulate. Some are magnet schools that can select their students (and reject those who are difficult to teach). Some have high levels of funding or other special circumstances. Yet it is not unusual to find schools with none of these special circumstances that are nevertheless producing outstanding student success.

Exemplary schools that operate without the extras play an important role in broader school reform because they demonstrate that all children can learn. When the late Ron Edmonds made his famous claim that "wherever and whenever we choose [we can] successfully teach all children...,"¹ he was saying that the existence of even a handful of exemplary schools serving poor and minority children demonstrates beyond any doubt that the fault is in our education system, not in our children.

The problem, however, with exemplary schools is that we have not known how to replicate them. So they have provided visions of what *can* be done but not models of *how* to achieve excellence in the thousands of schools that need improvement. Often, an exemplary school will be just down the street from a school serving the same neighborhood that is producing results that are far from exemplary. Even the exemplary schools themselves don't remain consistent over time; changes in principals, key staff, district policies, funding, or even just the passage of time may undermine a school that once gave poor, minority children an education equal to the best.

Robert Slavin, the developer of Success for All, is currently co-director of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk in Baltimore, Maryland.

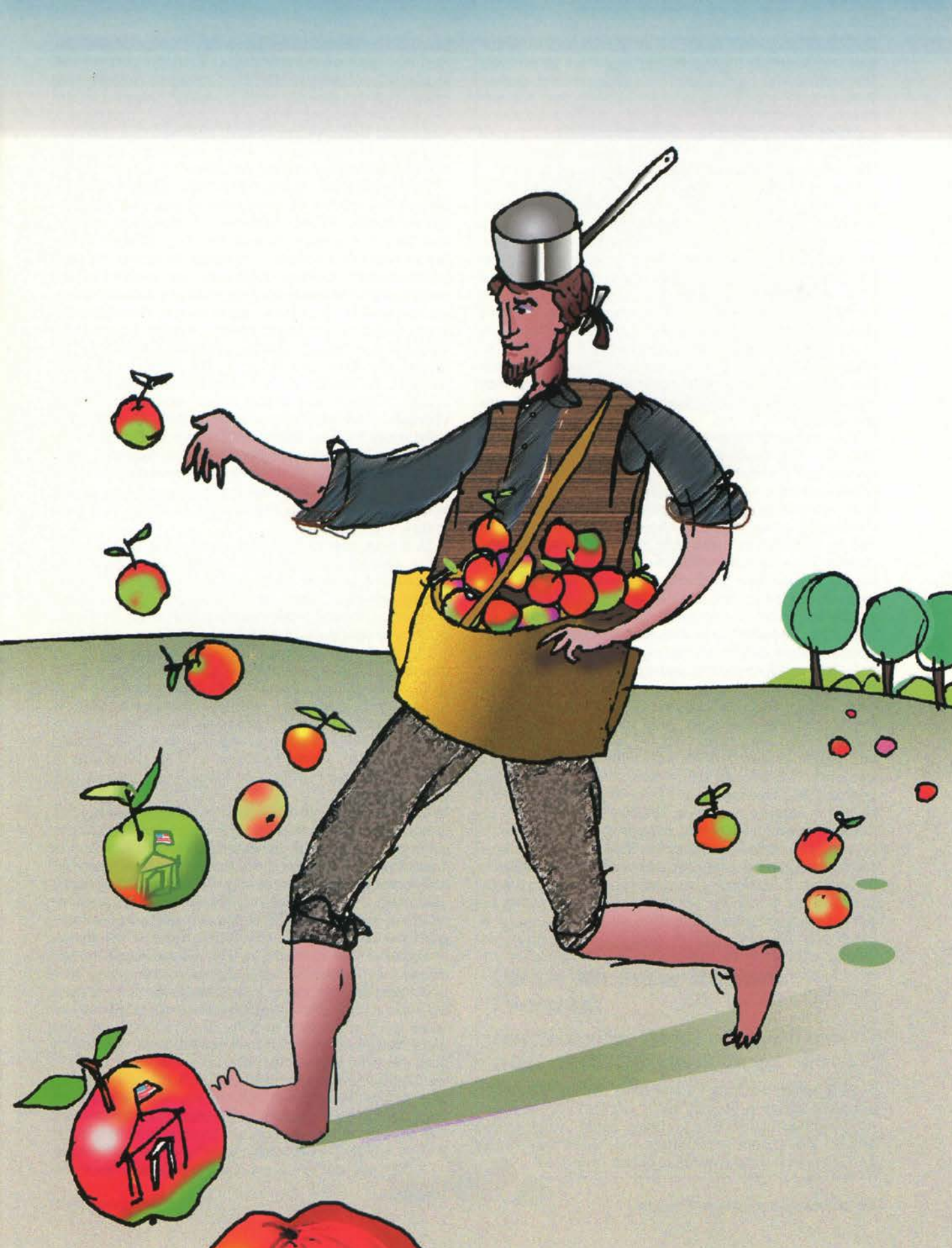
What practices create a successful school? And even harder, if we isolate these practices, how can we make sure they become commonplace? Though replicability is not the same thing as excellence, the question of how to disseminate existing programs, in particular, has consumed researchers and reformers for decades. Yet finally, a confluence of developments in research and in policy has produced a breakthrough that allows us to replicate programs in thousands of schools.

Replicable Reform Designs

What has happened is that a number of organizations, mostly universities, have developed, evaluated, and learned how to disseminate programs capable of translating best practices into replicable individual programs and replicable schoolwide reform designs². These programs vary widely in their particulars, but all are built around the idea that externally developed programs, with appropriate adaptations to local circumstances, can be disseminated to hundreds or thousands of schools. Our own program, Success for All, is in more than 1,100 schools in forty-four states (and five foreign countries). Henry Levin's Accelerated Schools model is also in more than a thousand schools. James Comer's School Development program is in about six hundred, as is a program called High Schools That Work. Schoolwide programs based on Direct Instruction reading and mathematics programs are used in more than a hundred schools. Core Knowledge is rapidly expanding in hundreds of schools. A set of eight comprehensive programs funded by the non-profit New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC) is used in several hundred schools. In addition, there are dozens of replicable programs in every subject and for every grade level, as well as replicable programs for dropout prevention, tutoring, and so on.

Some of these programs are carefully structured, with specific student materials, teachers' manuals, training procedures, and other elements, while others provide powerful ideas and connections with other innovative schools but expect teachers





and other educators to create all the classroom strategies and materials for themselves. Some are extensively researched and have undergone independent evaluations, while others can only point to a few schools (perhaps out of many) that have made substantial gains in a given year, and some lack even this type of evidence. Yet what all of these programs share is that they were designed from the outset to be replicated.

One of the most important factors in the successful replication of a reform design is the process by which a school adopts one of these designs. The selection must be based on a voluntary choice made by the professionals in the school. Our own programs require an informed vote by secret ballot and a supermajority of at least 80 percent of a school's teachers, and we do everything in our power to see that the vote is free and uncoerced. We try to make sure that teachers have visited other Success for All schools, had access to written materials and videotapes, and had opportunities to question program representatives before they make this important decision. Most other programs use similar procedures.

This buy-in process ensures that the overwhelming majority of educators who will actually carry out the reform had a decisive role in selecting it and are therefore committed to high-quality, thoughtful implementation. Admittedly, given the pressures on schools to do something about student achievement *right away*, it can be difficult to make sure that teachers have the chance for an uncoerced choice. It is nonetheless essential. In our own research, we have found that poor implementation can usually be traced to a hasty, poorly informed or pressured choice that failed to secure the commitment of the school staff to put their hearts and minds behind making the program work.³

However, this is not to underplay the importance of the implementation process in replicating a reform design. A Success for All implementation involves training teachers so that they fully understand both the ideas behind the design and the specific procedures and practices they will be following and adapting for use in the classroom. It involves coaching and being coached and constant assessment of students to see if they are moving ahead or falling behind. And it involves learning how to use parents as an important resource. The network of Success for All schools, a continuing resource for all participating schools, can play an especially important role when a school is implementing the program. The network allows those involved to share ideas and strategies with people in other schools and work through problems they are having. Ultimately, the network also helps build a common language and norms of professionalism and collaboration.

Discrediting the Rand 'Change Agent' Study

The existence and widespread dissemination of comprehensive programs have discredited once and for all the influential Rand "change agent" study of the 1970s.⁴ The change agent study concluded that lasting and effective school reform could only take

place if the participants themselves designed and carried out their own innovations. Based in part on this study, school reformers often came to believe that even well-developed, well-designed school change models could never work, could never be maintained, and could never be replicated. People in each school had to try to reinvent the wheel—and hope they were not proceeding on a faulty premise.

The belief that reform has to take place school by school and cannot be promoted by external agencies led to despair of ever achieving widespread reform, and this was a major reason for the embrace at the policy level of "systemic" reforms. Systemic reforms concentrated instead on district and statewide and even national reforms such as changes in assessment, accountability, standards, governance, the introduction of charters or privatization or other innovations that did not directly change classroom practice. The theory was that only reforms like these were likely to make a difference on a substantial scale; and systemic reforms did bring about some important changes. Standards and accountability, for example, have made us look anew at what students can be expected to achieve and how we can measure their achievement. And they have been essential in motivating the search for effective programs and giving schools feedback on the results of their new programs.

However, recent research confirms what common sense also tells us. Systemic changes mandated from Washington or from state capitals do not have a sufficiently powerful effect on student achievement unless they are coupled with reforms that directly target classroom practices. In addition to knowing what their students should be learning—and whether they are meeting external standards—teachers also need effective, well-tested, and replicable classroom techniques to help them guide their students' learning. Replicable reform models that are selected by educators and provide materials and support for teachers who put the programs into practice can be used in thousands of schools, and they offer a promising antidote to top-down policies.

The advantages of having well-worked-out programs to adopt or adapt, rather than having every teacher or school try to reinvent the wheel, are many. First, a program developer has far more time and resources to try out many draft prototypes, get feedback from many teachers, see the effects on many different types of children, and continually revise the program until it is practical and effective. In addition to sound materials, program developers can work out assessments and training procedures. A widely used program is also likely to have videotapes demonstrating effective practices and a network of implementing schools that gives teachers opportunities to share ideas, adaptations, supplementary materials, and so on. Program developers have the time and resources to follow developments in research, adapt to changes in standards, and keep up with the latest trends in curriculum. They are able to evaluate their program (though, unfortunately, not all do so). This is not to say that teachers cannot create their own effective innovations—far from it.

Yet the great majority of teachers prefer to



innovate beginning from a solid base of materials and methods, rather than starting from scratch. Given the enormous job teachers have to do just to teach every day, it is unrealistic and unwise to expect them to invent everything they use.

The rationale behind the Rand change agent study, still believed by many educators and academics, is that teachers will not implement an externally developed program because they themselves were not involved in creating it. This is half true; if external reforms are forced on teachers, they may, in fact, resist or engage in only token or surface compliance. However, if teachers have taken part in identifying a program that is appropriate and practical for their school, and if they have been involved in modifying the program to fit their needs, they are likely to feel ownership and commitment. It is the buy-in process used with most current reform models that makes the change agent study wrong. It is not necessary for teachers to invent a program in order for them to be fully committed to making it a success; it is necessary that they have unfettered choice.

The insistence that each teacher develop his or her own teaching tools, techniques, and even curriculum materials is unique to the education profession. What physician would ignore the research, pass up the array of available medications, and make up his or her own concoctions? What farmer would try to develop new seeds or better tractors just for use on his or her own farm? In every successful part of our economy, professionals select and intelligently apply well-developed tools rather than inventing new ones exclusively for their own use. Why should education be different? Can it afford to be?

Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR D)

Recently, the U.S. Congress passed an important bill to support the adoption of comprehensive reform designs, ones that affect all aspects of school functioning. The 1997 Education Appropriations bill crafted by Congressmen David Obey and John Porter allocated a total of \$145 million, most of which is to provide grants of at least \$50,000 per year for up to three years to schools proposing to adopt comprehensive reform designs. This Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR D) program, now just getting under way, will help schools pay for the start-up costs of adopting programs that affect all aspects of school function. Each state is establishing its own guidelines and review procedures, but most will focus the available money on relatively high-poverty, low-achieving schools.

For the first time, CSR D puts serious money behind supporting programs that can be replicated. If it lives up to its potential, it could be extremely important in disseminating proven programs. However, there is a serious problem with CSR D. As it is currently written, the legislation sets relatively low standards of research evidence for the programs it now funds. It is not hard to understand why. Until now, there has been no demand that programs back up their claims of effectiveness with research. So there are too few programs with solid evidence of success to serve the more than two thousand schools likely to be funded in the first round (1998-99). However, if CSR D funding continues, there is a good chance that evaluation standards will become more stringent.

(Continued on page 45)

Resources

Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR D) Web Site (www.aft.org/edissues/csr d).

Find out how your school or district can participate in a three-year federal program, which, in its initial year, will provide \$145 million to help improve low-performing schools—especially those serving economically disadvantaged students. The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSR D) program, also known as “Obey-Porter,” will fund schools to select and adopt research-based, whole-school reform models that can prove their effectiveness and replicability. AFT’s CSR D web site includes materials, contact information, and Internet links to give states, districts and schools the necessary information about CSR D. The site also includes a calendar of nationwide events on school reform and CSR D.

Raising Student Achievement: A Resource Guide to Redesigning Low-Performing Schools.

Designed to provide ideas, information and materials, the guide includes profiles of research-proven, school-wide programs; materials to audit a school for its most pressing needs; and a review of contract language that supports reform and protects the rights of staff members during the transition. Available on AFT’s web site (www.aft.org/edissues/r s a).

What Works. A series that provides information about research-based programs. Currently available: “Six Promising Schoolwide Reform Programs” and “Seven Promising Reading and English Language Arts Programs.” Single copies free from AFT Order Department, 555 New Jersey Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20001. Also available on AFT’s web site (www.aft.org/edissues/whatworks/index.htm).

Every Child Reading:

An Action Plan. Outlines research-based practices for helping children become successful readers and presents a plan for reforming reading instruction that covers professional development for teachers; early childhood and community outreach; and research, development, and materials. Sponsored by the Learning First Alliance, a coalition of 12 national education organizations. Write AFT Order Department and ask for item 180. Single copies are \$5; \$3 for five or more.

Principles for Professional Development. AFT guidelines for reviewing, evaluating, improving, and designing professional development programs. Write AFT Order Department and ask for item 176. Single copies are \$2; \$1 for five or more.

—AFT Educational Issues Department



CHOOSING SUCCESS

BY SAM STRINGFIELD

THERE IS no shortage of programs that promise to turn around low-performing schools, but how can you tell which ones will live up to their claims? The key is to approach the choice of a school reform program as an important and complicated consumer decision. Schools or school systems will have a better chance of making a good choice if they ask these three questions about any program they are considering:

■ First, are the goals and objectives of the program in line with the goals and objectives of your school or school district? No matter how sound a program is, or how successful elsewhere, it will be a waste of everyone's time and effort if it is not designed to get your school where you want it to go.

■ Second, how strong is the research supporting the program's claims of success? Answering this question, which hinges on a number of technical issues, is likely to be the most daunting of the three. It is also essential. As Al Shanker often observed, none of us would use a medicine that had not been found safe and effective in rigorous research. Why should we expect anything less of the programs we hope will reform our schools?

■ Third, given the money you have to spend and the people you have to work with, is a given plan practical for you? A program might come with the best possible pedigree in terms of research design and prior success, but if the financial or human costs are beyond the resources of your school or district, the design is of no real value to you.

Making any kind of major change is hard work. A program that is no good—or not right for your school—involves just as much work as one that would fit your school like a glove and help you raise your students' achievement. What follows is a kind of road map to help schools or districts attempting reform to be intelligent consumers. I'll pay particular attention to the question of the research base for a design, as that is the most technical and the least a matter of common sense.

Sam Stringfield is principal research scientist at the Johns Hopkins University Center for the Social Organization of Schools, Baltimore, Maryland.

1. A Program's Goals and Objectives

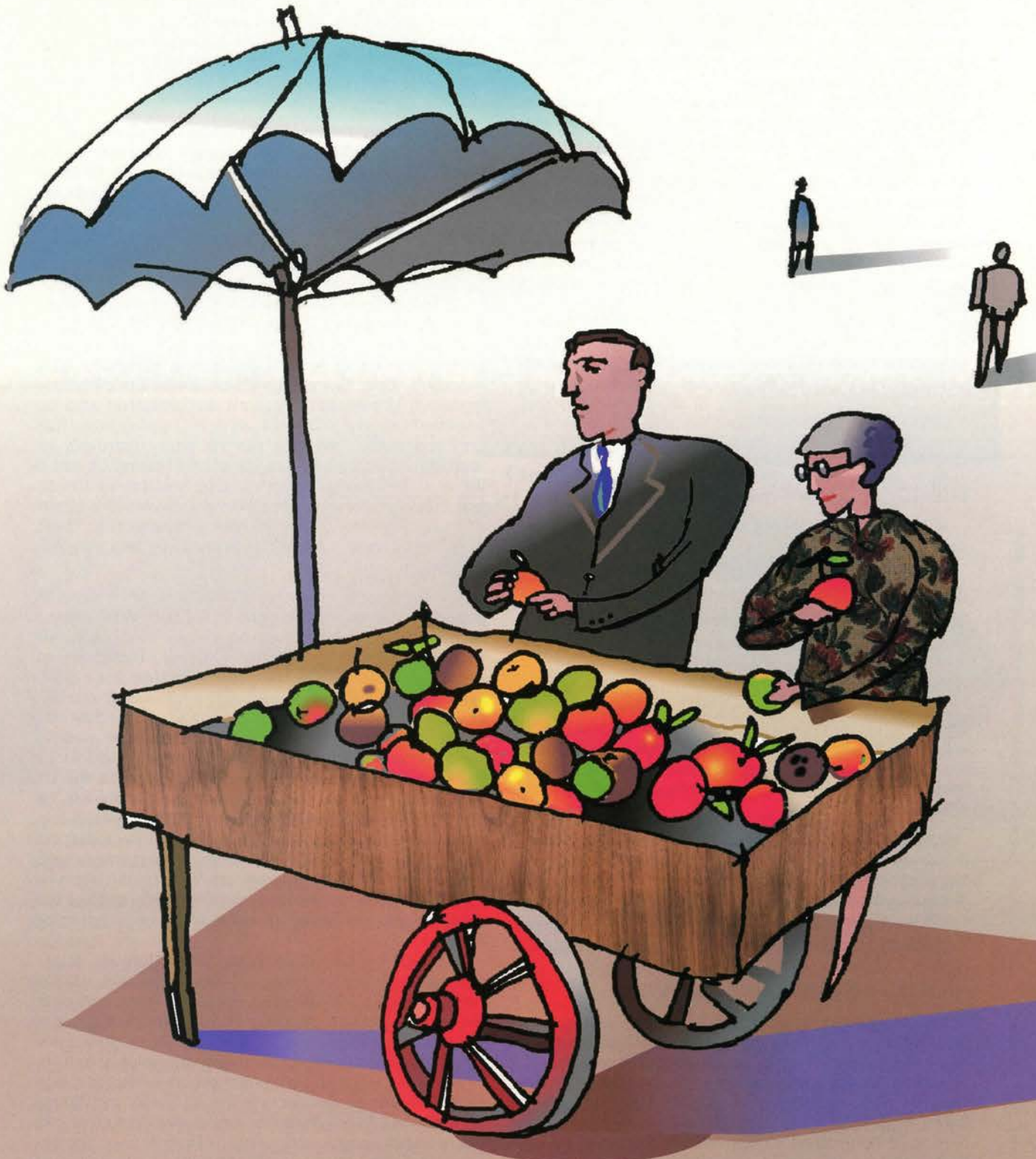
The first job in evaluating the appropriateness of a program is to see how closely it matches your goals and objectives. To do this, you may have to cut through the marketing verbiage of brochures and videos and the rather abstract statements that are the currency of the school reform movement to uncover the program's specific goals and objectives. They should be readily translatable into working hypotheses that you can test. Statements like "All children can read by the age of nine" or "Today's students must be prepared for 21st century jobs" sound impressive and are certainly valuable, but they don't tell you enough about what a program proposes to accomplish and how. In Maryland (Tennessee, Illinois, Florida, etc.), where every school will be judged by its mean scores on the MSPAP (TCAP, IGAP, etc.), the questions you need answered are, "What effects can hard-working practicing professionals expect this design to have on our MSPAP (TCAP, etc.) scores?" and "Over what period of time?"

Or, if your MSPAP scores are already above the district or state average and you're worried that your students aren't learning enough about other cultures (or aren't attending regularly enough or whatever the goal of your reform happens to be), the question again is exactly how this design proposes to help you. Does it offer more help than would be offered by an alternative design? What *measurable* changes will you see in students' achievement or knowledge or attendance? Are they in line with your expectations?

2. A Program's Research Base

The next and far more difficult question is, "How strong is a program's research base?" What kind of proof is there that a program will live up to its claims? In some cases, the research base will be very sturdy. The program will have been put into practice in a number of schools over several years or even longer, and careful data about results will have been kept and analyzed. I call a program that meets these stringent criteria an A-level or A-list program, and I describe how you can recognize an A-level program in





more detail in the following section.

In 1998, there are still very few programs that meet these criteria, and it would be impractical to limit people's choices to A-level programs. So, in two subsequent sections, I provide descriptions of programs with increasingly less sturdy research bases—they are B-level and C-level programs.

A solid research base, while extremely important, is not the only criterion for choosing a program, so you would not necessarily be making a mistake in choosing a C-level program over an A-level one. The issue of a good match in terms of goals, already discussed, and the issue of practical viability, which I'll discuss in the final section, are also important in making a choice. Nevertheless, a program's research base provides essential information about how likely the program is to perform as advertised. All other things being equal, a school should take an A-level design much more seriously than a C-level.

What about programs that do not even meet C-level standards? There are a large number of such programs being successfully marketed in the U.S. today; they may even be in the majority of school reform programs. These designs should be avoided, however, until better research on their effects is available.

How to recognize an A-level program. A strong practical research base would include the following:

- A number of studies of the program's effectiveness, preferably carried out by independent experts.

- Detailed information about the kinds of students the program is designed to serve. For example, did the students attend urban, Title I, schoolwide project schools? Schools in middle-class suburbs or in small rural school districts? All of the above?

- Several studies that include carefully matched control groups. These might chart the progress of the program schools compared with progress in other local schools that are demographically similar, comparing, for example, reading scores (or math scores or student attendance or whatever) in program and control schools.

- Studies in which indicators of success, determined in advance, are plausibly related to what the program has promised to deliver. For example, a program designed to raise scores might use gains on a widely used reading test as a standard of success.

- Several studies that are at least two, and preferably three or more, years in duration. (As an example, see *Special Strategies*, Stringfield et al., 1997.)

- In a majority of the studies, proof that program schools produced educationally significant student gains in the target areas (e.g., student achievement, attendance, graduation rates, rates of disciplinary referrals, or whatever else was promised). The gains would be represented as either moderate-to-large effect sizes (E.S. = .4 or greater) or experimental-control means that certainly appear educationally significant, combined with tests of the statistical significance ($p < .01$) of differences between experimental and control groups. Effect sizes in this range almost always

translate into achievement gains greater than 10 percentiles. Ideally, the studies would provide both effect sizes and tests of statistical significance. If your school improvement team does not include a person who has studied statistics, you should recruit technical assistance from your district's central administration, a federally funded consolidated center, or a nearby university.

- A number of carefully conducted case studies. This is a plus rather than a necessity. The case studies would include both the strong points of the program and the problems that became apparent during its implementation, as well as the reactions of the various groups involved in the implementation described.

- An even-handed article written by a third party, reviewing multiple studies of the effects of the reform. Such an article is not essential to the credibility of an A-list program, but if one exists, it should be taken quite seriously. For example, Fashola and Slavin (1997) review studies of several promising programs and, based on what the studies show, divide the programs between those that are well documented and researched (for our purposes, an A list) and designs that are "promising" but have not yet been rigorously researched. These latter designs would belong on our B list or C list. Stringfield et al. (1997, chapters 10-12), and Ellis and Fouts (1997) provide shorter but somewhat overlapping sets of designs and programs. These could be similarly valuable to persons seeking research reviews.

The designers of the program must be willing to provide a full list of participating schools, their names, addresses, and phone numbers. (Ask about schools that are no longer participating, as well.) Using a set of questions that members of the selection team have agreed upon, call five participating schools at random and ask about their experiences (cost: under \$20 and under two hours). You should get a strongly positive set of reviews about the design's feasibility and its effects on students. Pay particular attention to the reviews from schools that are most like your own. Of course, the comments from former participants, if any, should also be added to the mix. For decisions that are this practical, a seeing-is-believing test is important. Visits to at least two program schools should give you a lively sense of the challenges involved in putting the program into effect and an equal sense of its potential benefits.

In short, an A-level program has undergone multiple, rigorous evaluations, and the evaluation studies provide clear information on implementation and clear outcome measures, and they show significant gains as a result of participation. With an A-level program, you are unlikely to find many troubling examples of failure.

There is currently no reform program that is a perfect A. However, the Success for All/Roots and Wings (Slavin et al., 1996) design comes closer than most others to meeting this definition, as do a few of the designs described in the review provided by Fashola and Slavin (1997) and Stringfield et al. (1997).

B-level programs: less of the same. Since in 1998, the list of A-level programs is



Examine your options aggressively. If you choose a reform program, implement your choice relentlessly.



very short, a school may also need to consider (with caution) promising programs from the B list. B-level programs are still in the top 10 percent to 20 percent of all school reform programs. A program that looks promising may not be on the A list because it has not yet been the subject of rigorous, well-controlled, longitudinal studies of the kind described in connection with A-level programs. This could be a matter of choice (not a good sign), but since such studies are expensive, it could be that the developer has not yet found the money to finance them. Also, a new design will, by definition, lack the longitudinal data necessary for these kinds of studies.

The fact remains that B-level programs do not have the kind of evidence of success that the A-level programs have. Given the weaker research base, credible B-level programs should offer the following:

- Two or more studies reporting student outcome data, each lasting at least one year, and preferably at least two. Or the research base might include a half-dozen or more rigorously conducted case studies carried out over several years.

- Positive results in cases where the program has been used in schools or school districts like your own. This is especially important when the data are limited.

- Alternatively, well-documented studies (like those described under the A list) showing that the design tends to produce positive but relatively small effects on desired student outcomes (e.g., an effect size greater than .2, or at least a 5 percentile gain).

- Data from process-only evaluations (e.g., “the students and teachers enjoyed the program” or “a majority of the parents expressed great satisfaction” or, better, “measures of student engagement indicated a significant rise in students’ involvement”). These data can be considered, with the caveat that they don’t take the place of clear student-outcome data: The fourth-graders who say they love a program could still



be reading at a second-grade level.

- As at the A level, the designers of a program should be willing to provide a full list of participating schools, their addresses, and phone numbers. Since the proof that these programs can produce what they promise is not as strong as it is with A-level designs, the calls and follow-up visits are even more important. A random calling of seven of these schools (cost: under \$30 and under three hours) should produce a positive set of reviews of the design, its practicability, and its effects on students. Again, pay particular attention to the reviews from schools like your own and visit the two nearest schools that are serving communities similar to yours.

You should be very cautious about any reform that has been in existence for five or more years and has not met B-level research specifications. The absence of adequate data is just as damning as data pointing consistently in the wrong direction. Not every reformer wants to become a psychometrician; but any group asking school people to spend tax dollars, and the time and work of teachers and others, must understand that its word that a program will work is not enough.

C-level programs: One could be right for you. What if neither the A list nor the B list offers a program that is just right for your school? You may find a new program that has only been tried in a few schools but is interesting and looks like a good fit with your school and your goals. Or perhaps one or more influential people in your school are passionate believers in a particular C-list program and seem willing to work relentlessly to make it successful. Under these circumstances, you could choose such a relatively untried design and have a chance of success, but only if the program has the following bare-minimum research support:

- Strong links to convincing research in areas related to the program. (For example, the program might involve research-proven types of cooperative learning.) A vague claim based on research that does not have much to do with the operation of American public schools (like one asserting that the program is related to recent “brain research”) should be regarded with skepticism. So should a simple assertion of the developer’s expertise, however impressive. (He or she may be an expert, but that does not prove that this particular program will work.)

- Two to five published case studies demonstrating the positive effects of the design in schools like yours.

- An open acknowledgment by the design team of any research or case studies that found mixed or negative student outcomes and a willingness to discuss why you might expect different results in your school.

- A list of all schools currently using the program. Since the formal research is not strong, it is all the more important to make calls and follow-up visits to program schools. A random calling of ten of these schools (cost: under \$40 and under one day)

should produce a set of reviews that are nearly all positive as to the design of the program, its implementation requirements, and, above all, its effects on students. Pay particular attention to reviews from schools like your own.

■ A frank discussion of the characteristics of schools that have discontinued participation in the design. Ask the designers for the names of these schools and discuss their reasons for leaving the program with the schools as well as with the developers. While this step is important with any school reform design, it is essential with a C-list program.

A C-level design should be chosen only if it provides an excellent match to the needs of a particular school. No matter what its strong points, you should avoid any

reform in existence for five or more years that is not able to meet these C-level research-and-practice specifications.

3. Practical Considerations

Before selecting a program, think about whether you have the resources necessary to make it succeed. If there isn't enough money to do the program right or if the administration, faculty, and community associated with a school don't have the will to make the program work, you should not attempt it. Failure is terribly expensive, in terms of dollar costs and professional morale, and it is best to conserve both until you find a program with which you can succeed.

'Success for All' in East New York: A research-based

BY MARYANN MARRAPODI

SOMETIMES THE tried and true really does work best. Just ask teachers in PS 159, an overcrowded school in the economically devastated East New York section of Brooklyn. As they searched for new ways to stem the increasing rate of reading failure among their students, the teachers kept coming back to what they knew worked: effective, research-based practice; ongoing professional development and support; family involvement; continuous assessment of student progress; and a structured framework to draw these elements together in a coherent, but not prescriptive way.

With district support, the teachers identified a program that took these elements of success and packaged them in a way that enabled teachers to teach reading more successfully: Success for All, a program developed by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, organizes effective practices to ensure that all children will read in the early grades and that none will fall through the cracks.

The teachers read about and discussed the program, reviewed program materials, visited Success for All sites, participated in a presentation by Johns Hopkins staff, and decided to apply to become a Success

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Remember that in a free-market system, the buyer has to beware. Today, the descriptions of most reform programs sound more like marketing campaigns than scientific presentations. Without careful probing on the part of a school, the marketers will not always come forward with a full list of the fiscal or human costs required to make a design succeed. This fact underscores the importance of three types of data gathering I described above: the examination of case studies, phone interviews, and site visits. Here are some of the specific resource issues you should consider:

■ **Out-of-pocket dollars.** What could the costs be for the program's first three years? For equipment and materials? For training? For teachers' time? How much

will it cost to sustain enthusiasm for and commitment to a reform in years four and beyond? (Schools and districts almost invariably underestimate these costs, and the program developers may not be much help.) Where will those dollars come from?

■ **Work hours.** How many people will have to work how many hours per week for how many months or years to achieve what you expect from the program? If some of this will be unpaid time, which is likely to be the case, will the leadership of the design, district, and school be able to sustain sufficient teacher and administrative enthusiasm to see the design through? Where will the union weigh in on the issue? (Some, but rarely all, teachers view working on a design over the long

(Continued on page 46)

program pays off

for All school. This required that 80 percent of all the teachers vote to commit to the program for three years. "Our teachers are hard-working, committed, and enthusiastic," said Harriet Krohn, the SFA teacher facilitator. "Success for All offers a structure for shaping their passion, their skills, and their efforts. It makes sense and it works. Just look

Left: Alicia Vincent puts her kindergarten class through listening comprehension exercises. Below: Aura Fabré watches two bilingual first graders practice partner-reading.



at the faces of the children—they glow with pride at their ability to read."

"Show me your ick," said kindergarten teacher Crystal Hyman to the group seated around her. The youngsters smiled and giggled as they tried to out-do one another making "ick" faces in response to a story they read together. In another part of the room, a trained paraprofessional led a second group of children through a series of chants accompanied by dramatic movements. Across the hall, another kindergarten class moved swiftly through a ninety-minute sequence of activities ranging from writing with magic pencils to identifying words on charts hung throughout the room. Each child was engaged. Each was focused on the task at hand. Each child was reading successfully.

"Cooler" than the kindergarten and first-grade children, students in the upper grades were more apt to show their delight through the eagerness of their responses, and the occasional comment. Arms waved high in the air in response to Nancy Miloscia's questions. "Can you support that idea?" Miloscia asked her reading group. "Think of the problem he had to solve. What else could he do?" Acting more like a book-group leader than a traditional teacher, Miloscia led the mostly fourth-grade youngsters through a lively session in which she pushed for the deeper answer, gently challenged them to defend their ideas, and encouraged each student to

think in new and different ways. "I wasn't a good reader last year," one child confided. "Now I love to read."

Success for All is in its third year at PS 159, and the impact of the program on the school is apparent. Students, teachers, parents, staff, and volunteers work together with a shared sense of purpose and a clear understanding of the high expectations in place for each member of the school community. And they are working hard.

"Make no mistake about it, this is hard work," explained Chapter Leader Judy Esposito. "But good teachers have always worked hard. The difference for us is that now we can really see the impact of our hard work. Our children are reading." This sentiment was echoed by a parent volunteer who stated, "I didn't know what to think at first. But when you see something working, when you see your children reading and loving it, you do what you have to do to support the program."

Why is Success for All working at PS 159 and in more than one thousand schools around the country? It is working because each of its essential elements—a research-based, effective approach to reading, student assessments every eight weeks, family support teams, a school-based program facilitator, reading tutors and, central to all of this, ongoing, continuous professional development and technical assistance—is a proven, effective practice. □



MODELS FOR REFORM

BY LYNN OLSON

WHEN RESEARCHERS asked teachers in Memphis recently what they thought about some of the school reforms they were being asked to try out, the academic experts got an earful.

Teachers complained, in particular, about approaches that required them to rewrite the entire curriculum or create instructional materials themselves.

Said one frustrated teacher: "There is no model for me to make a prediction about. How can we put into practice a design that has not been developed, explained, or modeled for us?"

They can't, a growing number of experts have come to believe. Teachers, they say, need more than philosophy if they are to overhaul the way their schools work and the way they do their jobs.

"It is unfair and unrealistic to expect America's overburdened teachers to reinvent their roles and redesign their organizations without providing explicit and proven means of doing so," said John A. Nunnery, an associate research scientist at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, who worked on the Memphis study.

Mr. Nunnery is one of many researchers who are beginning to question the usefulness of reforms that fail to provide teachers with the nuts and bolts. Reforms work best, they argue, when they come with explicit teaching techniques, curriculum materials, and instructional tools attached.

"Reform strategies that work are curriculum-based, have extensive and ongoing professional development that helps teachers deal with classroom instruction, and have clear goals that are well-matched to school goals," Mr. Nunnery said.

To improve student achievement markedly requires changing what happens in classrooms every day, said Sam Stringfield, principal research scientist with the Center for the Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins.

"You basically have to replace what's going on and make it more difficult for teachers to go back to what they were doing before," he said. "There has to be specificity about what the teacher does on Tuesday morning, if you want to change what happens on Tuesday morning."

Lynn Olson is a senior editor at Education Week. This article originally appeared there April 30, 1997. It is reprinted with permission.

Mr. Stringfield was the lead researcher for the Special Strategies Studies, a congressionally mandated effort that tried to determine which of 10 popular school reform strategies work best for poor children.

The study focused on 25 schools as models for their particular reform programs, ranging from the School Development Program, a whole-school strategy developed by Yale University psychiatrist James P. Comer, to tutoring programs designed by individual schools.

The study found a wide variation in how faithfully schools carried out reforms, with the greatest variety in quality coming among programs that provided guiding principles but expected teachers to fill in most of the details.

Those findings are echoed by the Rand Corp., the Santa Monica, Calif.-based research organization, in a study it is conducting of how schools are implementing the design sponsored by New American Schools. NAS, a non-profit group based in Arlington, Va., supports the dissemination of seven reform designs in communities across the country.

Seeing It Clearly

Susan Bodilly, the social scientist in charge of the Rand analysis, said schools have had the most difficulty carrying out designs that expect teachers to construct their own curriculum and instructional strategies.

"They need strong curriculum models, and they need people who can show them how to use those models, and who will be available to do follow-up with them," she said.

"Some of it is 'seeing is believing,'" Ms. Bodilly added. "But some of it is that teachers need to see what they're supposed to be doing in very clear terms—and then they can take it, innovate with it, and be adaptive on their own."

A smaller study on the use of whole-school designs in Memphis, by researchers at Johns Hopkins and the University of Memphis, reached similar conclusions.

During the first few months the designs were in use there, the researchers found, the four that teachers viewed most positively also had the lowest percentage of teachers who complained that their training lacked explicit techniques or sample instructional materials.

Designs that required teachers to rewrite the curriculum and develop new pedagogy had by far the largest proportion of teachers who reported feeling overwhelmed.





'Focused Creativity'

Stanley Pogrow, an associate professor of educational administration at the University of Arizona, has accused the education policy and research community of lacking interest in finding "effective, focused tools" to improve schools.

Mr. Pogrow—the creator of HOTS, or Higher Order Thinking Skills, a supplemental curriculum for middle school students—has argued that too many reforms are based on small-scale experiments, a reaction to failed innovations of the past, and the philosophical leanings of their designers.

He contrasts such approaches with a handful of programs—including his own—that were extensively field-tested and that give teachers specific tools and techniques to use in the classroom.

"The problem with the 'teacher proof' curricula of the 1960s is that they were terrible," he said in a recent interview. "But that doesn't negate the use of tools."

To illustrate the point, he compares teachers using such tools to actors reciting written dialogue: "The existence of a present script does not deter human creativity. Rather, it allows for focused creativity."

'A Dynamic Environment'

One of the programs that has taken the heaviest hits for providing schools with only vague reform principles is the Coalition of Essential Schools, the high school reform network pioneered by Theodore R.Sizer.

Though the coalition has reported some positive effects on student outcomes such as attendance and graduation rates, several studies have suggested that the amorphous nature of its guiding principles makes it difficult to carry out.

None of the five coalition high schools examined in the Special Strategies Studies, for example, had achieved more than partial implementation of its ideas.

Coalition officials have argued that schools and communities must be free to adapt its principles—such as making learning more personalized, teaching fewer subjects in more depth, and awarding diplomas based on demonstrated performance—to fit local needs.

They also say that teachers need to craft reforms in order to feel ownership of them.

But researchers such as Mr. Slavin, an education professor at Johns Hopkins, question whether many schools have the capacity to create so much innovation from the ground up.

Mr. Slavin is the founder of Success For All, a relatively structured program for raising achievement in the elementary grades.

He argues that only a handful of schools—perhaps less than 5 percent of elementary or secondary schools in the entire country—have the capacity to translate reform guided by general principles into reality.

Kenneth G. Wilson, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist who wrote a 1994 book called *Re-designing Education*, compares the need to develop specific technologies for schools with recent advances made in science and technology.

"If you look at the Fortune 500 companies, in the 1980s they all developed their own software systems to support their companies," he said in an interview. "But now, they all buy it from outside.

"And the reason is that even the Fortune 500 companies couldn't afford the constant improvement that goes on with operating systems or with word-processing software," Wilson added.

But at least some experts suggest that schools need a larger vision to give meaning to the more structured, specific approaches.

"You need to have an underlying philosophy," said Michael Fullan, the dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Ontario in Canada. "But coupled with that you need to be much more specific about the nature of the work and about your own practices and be able to explain it to others.

"Schools don't have the luxury of poking around with some general guidelines," he said. Given the increased pressures on them to improve, "they have to be a lot more articulate about what they're doing." □



WHEN YOU WEIGH THE EVIDENCE...

Voucher Programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland

BY DAN MURPHY

VOUCHERS HAVE always been controversial. Ever since they were first proposed forty years ago, people have been arguing about the wisdom of using public money to send children to private schools. Because the vast majority of private schools in the United States are religiously affiliated, one of the most heated debates has always been over church-state issues. Should taxpayers be expected to pay for children being educated in religious schools? The courts are now beginning to rule on this question.

On June 10, 1998, the Wisconsin Supreme Court supported the right of religious schools to participate in Milwaukee's publicly funded voucher program. The Cleveland voucher program, which has permitted religious schools since its beginning in 1996, is also awaiting a state supreme court decision as to its constitutionality.

But both these decisions could soon be moot. The plaintiffs in the Milwaukee suit have petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court to hear their case. If the court agrees,* the question of whether vouchers violate the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution by breaching the wall of separation between church and state could be resolved (though it is more likely that any decision will be tested and modified by later court cases).

In the meantime, the merits of vouchers continue to be argued in the court of public opinion. There, the church-state issue has recently taken a back seat to a number of other questions—in particular, social justice, student achievement, and value for money.

In the past, arguments about vouchers had to be largely theoretical because the only voucher programs in this country were short-lived and inconclusive. This did not stop advocates from presenting vouchers as a panacea for whatever ails public education. Now, however, we are beginning to get evidence about whether vouchers live up to the claims made for them. The programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland allow us to put the slogans of voucher supporters side by side with what vouchers actually achieve.

*It may have done so by the time this magazine reaches readers.

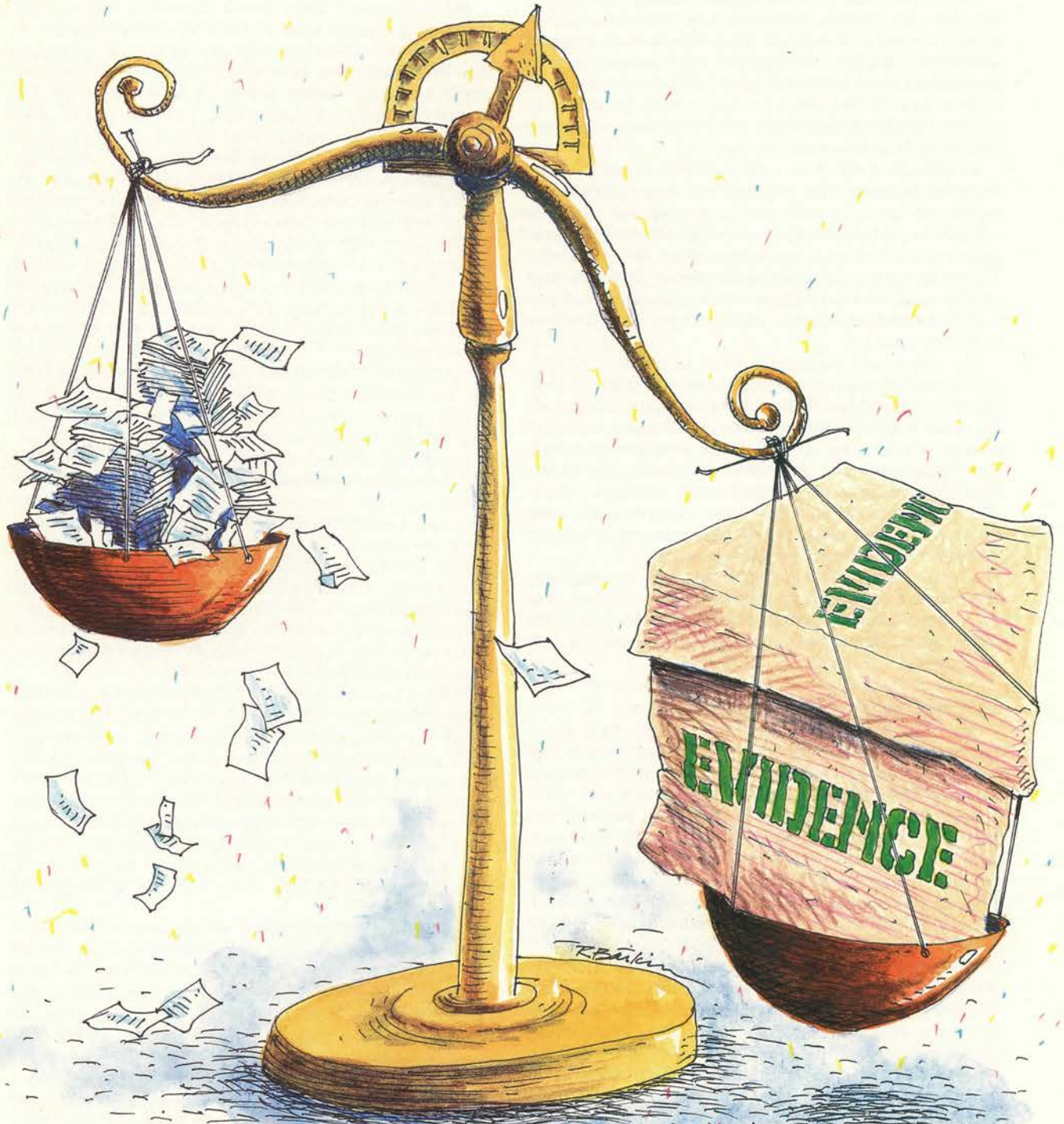
The New Battleground

The people who first proposed vouchers generally saw them as a statewide or even national program, open to all children, no matter what their parents' income. In recent years, however, voucher advocates have shifted their energies from statewide or national voucher proposals to small-scale programs limited to poor parents in inner cities. One reason for the change is the lack of public support for large-scale voucher programs. Taxpayers have not been enthusiastic about spending public money to send children to private schools. They have worried about the price tag (especially if current private school students are included) and about further dividing our society along racial, ethnic, and religious lines, with various groups going their own way in their own schools; and they've simply been unwilling to abandon—or even threaten—public education. For example, over the last 30 years, voters in more than 10 states have defeated voucher or voucher-like initiatives by an average 2-1 margin—the most prominent defeats taking place in Oregon (1990), Colorado (1992), California (1993), and Washington State (1996).¹

There is probably another reason for voucher advocates' new focus. The work of a number of respected researchers suggests that a voucher system open to all parents—and with no provisions to protect the interests of poorer families—would strongly favor the well-off at the expense of the not-so-well-off.² For example, Professor Henry Levin of Stanford University, who has studied school choice (as vouchers are rather misleadingly known) both here and abroad, contends that a wide-open choice system would most likely worsen the serious inequities in our current system. Evidence is consistent, he says, "that educational choice leads to greater socioeconomic and racial segregation" and "that inequalities in educational outcomes are likely to be exacerbated by vouchers."³

A conclusion like this puts those who push for vouchers in an unattractive position, making them

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look as though they are willing to subsidize the education of children from well-off families, many of whom already go to private schools, at the expense of poor children. Whether voucher supporters aim, by starting with the poor, to extend vouchers over time to higher-income brackets, this current focus on poor children does give them the best shot at achieving universal vouchers. It also allows them to stake a claim to the moral high ground—and to paint those who oppose vouchers as insensitive to the needs of poor children.

The Milwaukee and Cleveland voucher programs embody the kind of inner-city low-income voucher plans currently in fashion. The Milwaukee program started in 1990-91. Over the last eight years, the program allowed between 300 and 1,650 low-income students a year to receive vouchers worth as much as \$4,700.⁴ Students could use these vouchers to attend private nonreligious schools only.

As a result of the Wisconsin Supreme Court's recent decision, however, the program will look radically different this year. In addition to permitting religious schools to participate, the court also allowed the program to expand to a maximum of 15,000 students. This year, state officials expect between 6,000 and 10,000 students to attend more than one hundred private and religious schools with vouchers worth close to \$5,000 apiece.⁵

The Cleveland program, which began in 1996-97, has permitted religious schools from the start. In fact, last year, about 3,000 low-income students received vouchers worth about \$2,500 to attend more than fifty private schools, the overwhelming majority of which were religious.⁶ Like the Milwaukee plan, the Cleveland program has grown from its early days as a "small-scale" pilot program. Every year, the program adds about 1,000 new students, all of whom enter private school at the kindergarten level.

What are the main arguments that voucher supporters use to support their efforts to get voucher programs into cities all over the country? And how do their claims stack up with the emerging facts from Milwaukee and Cleveland?

The Social Justice Argument

Voucher supporters currently couch their arguments in terms of social justice. They say that if rich people, including the president of the United States, can send their children to elite private schools, poor people should be able to do that, too. Proponents often refer to the campaign for vouchers as the "next civil rights movement." Just as the marches and protests of the 1960s brought minorities closer to the full rights of citizenship, vouchers—advocates say—will secure a new "civil right" for poor people: a high-quality education for their children.

Given the dubious civil rights and social justice credentials of many people now making this argument for vouchers, one could question their sincerity. But looking at the voucher programs themselves rather than the people advocating them, how valid are these appeals to social justice? Will voucher plans really open elite private schools to poor children? Will they even significantly expand the educational choices available to disadvantaged families?

There are two major reasons why vouchers are unlikely to fulfill these promises: (1) By their nature, voucher programs, even those restricted to low-income families, tend to favor the most (not least) advantaged families. (2) Even if a voucher program starts out restricted to low-income families, pressure from middle-class families (who naturally want the same for their kids) will likely lead to an expansion of the program to higher-income families, undermining the program's potential benefits for poor kids.

Who chooses? Who loses? Research shows that voucher programs tend to favor better-off families at the expense of families who are worse off. One reason, Professor Levin says, is that better-off families, by virtue of having "better access to information, greater ability to afford transportation, [and] a higher penchant to exercise educational alternatives" are more likely to seek a voucher in the first place.⁷ Although this bias toward better-off families can be partially reduced by restricting vouchers to low-income families, there will still be "advantaged" families—ones in which parents are more educated or more involved in their children's education—and these families will be more likely to go after a voucher. Indeed, Levin writes, this bias, which is likely to leave behind the kids who need the most help, "may be endemic to educational choice systems."⁸

Furthermore, for all the hype about giving parents the freedom to choose their children's schools, ultimately, private schools, not parents, do the choosing. And private schools are more likely, as Levin puts it, "to seek and choose students from families of higher socioeconomic status and with higher previous educational accomplishments."⁹ To some extent, this problem can be addressed by requiring participating voucher schools to admit voucher applicants randomly. But the inevitable result of such a requirement is that many established, high-quality private schools won't participate at all—or if they do, they may make only a few spaces available for voucher students. Any way you look at it, private schools retain control over who is admitted and who is rejected.

Evidence so far from the Milwaukee and Cleveland programs illustrates the soundness of Levin's warnings about the unequal effects of vouchers. Even though both programs are restricted to low-income families and require partial random admission (both allow participating private schools to give admission preference to existing students and their siblings; applicants thereafter must be admitted randomly, if demand exceeds the number of available slots), both have favored more-advantaged families at the expense of less-advantaged families.

For example, five years of Milwaukee voucher program evaluations revealed that voucher parents, on average, were better educated, more involved in their children's education (including when their children attended public schools), and had higher expectations for their children than parents of children in the Milwaukee Public Schools.¹⁰

Cleveland shows a similar pattern. Touted as a plan that would "save" the most disadvantaged students from "failing public schools," the program has fallen far short of this pledge. State records show that of

the 3,000 students enrolled in the program last year, only 25 percent were attending a public school the year before they entered the program.¹¹ The rest were either in a private school already or starting kindergarten. (And most of these students would probably have gone to private school even without the money provided by a voucher.)

Moreover, the kids who did transfer from public school were not the most disadvantaged but some of the best and brightest. According to the official state evaluation of the program released last spring:

Scholarship students who accepted a scholarship to move from the Cleveland public schools to a private school were achieving at higher levels than their public school peers before they entered the program. Thus, it appears that the scholarship program *attracted better achieving students away from the Cleveland public schools*" [italics mine].¹²

As for the most disadvantaged students in Milwaukee and Cleveland, they continue to attend the public schools. But now, as a result of vouchers, the schools these kids attend have even fewer resources and fewer students who are likely to achieve at high levels—a dubious way indeed to “save” the children most in need of help.

Middle-class blues. Even assuming that the “ideal” low-income voucher program could be engineered—one that would make sure that only the most disadvantaged children received vouchers and then were able to use them at the best private schools—how long could such a program last? How long would working- and middle-class taxpayers be willing to foot the bill for vouchers while being denied the right to participate in the program—especially when some of them are already sending their kids to private or parochial schools at their own expense?

Not very long—if the Milwaukee voucher program is any indication. In the early days, the main force behind the Milwaukee voucher program was Annette “Polly” Williams, an African-American Democrat in the Wisconsin Assembly and author of the original 1990 bill. She envisioned vouchers as a way of helping poor kids while also empowering parents and bolstering secular African-American community schools.¹³

Williams realized that in order to get her program passed, she would need some help. Thus, she formed a coalition with some unlikely allies, including Republican Governor Tommy Thompson and other free-market enthusiasts. She knew that teaming up with such a crowd was a political gamble, but the risk seemed worth it, so long as the program remained limited to poor families in Milwaukee.

Soon, however, the balance of power began to shift, and Williams found herself increasingly estranged from the movement she had originated.¹⁴ First, religious schools were written into the law in 1995. Next, conservatives rebuffed several of Williams’ proposals to beef up monitoring of voucher schools—three of which had shut down mid-year. Finally, last June, Williams fired back. She accused conservatives of “hijacking” the program, with secret ambitions to give vouchers to higher-income families: “They got the door open, and that’s all they

needed.”¹⁵

A spokesperson for Governor Thompson’s office called this accusation “outrageous.”¹⁶ But just a little more than a month later, Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist issued a public statement vowing to raise or phase out the income cap on the program. Calling the cap unfair to middle-class families, Norquist warned that “As choice expands, the dissatisfaction with this income limit is going to become very acute.”¹⁷ Although state lawmakers say that the mayor’s proposal is a little premature, there is a growing sense that it will sooner or later have its day. “Republican legislators, in the future, will be willing to expand the choice program in Milwaukee,” Assembly Speaker Scott Jensen said.¹⁸

A disgusted Williams could only shake her head: “I knew it was coming. When we take the [income] cap off, we have lost the intent of that legislation. . . . There are people in that coalition who never intended to help low-income children.”¹⁹

Williams seems to be suggesting that voucher supporters’ real interest was in a universal voucher program, and they used her crusade for Milwaukee’s poor children to get a foot in the door. And it’s likely that when vouchers are expanded to include middle-class children, poor kids will suffer. The relatively scarce places in established private schools are likely to be snapped up by middle-class kids, leaving poor kids in schools that spring up to take advantage of the voucher money. (Some of them may be good; many will undoubtedly be very inadequate.)

Practically speaking, though, it doesn’t matter whether voucher advocates have been sincere in joining Williams’ crusade for poor children. Given the realities of our political system—where a broad middle class supplies most of the votes and pays most of the taxes—it is naïve to think that Williams’ story could have ended any other way.

The ‘Bigger-Bang-for-Your-Buck’ Argument

But even if current voucher programs are a mere prelude to a universal voucher scheme, one that includes all who care to participate, aren’t vouchers still a wonderful bargain? Advocates assure us that students who use vouchers to attend private schools will learn more and do it at almost half the cost of a public school education.

This argument is a real winner. Everyone wants American students to achieve at higher levels—after all, that is one chief complaint about public schools—and everyone likes a bargain. However, there is no proof that private schools, on average, produce higher student achievement than public schools, and there is no proof that private schools can provide the same education for less money.

The performance myth. A quick look at national test scores reveals that private school students do score slightly higher than public school students. But if you go beyond the raw data, it becomes clear that this is not because private schools provide a “better” education but because the students they

(Continued on page 40)

WORK

BY GEOFFREY CANADA

Editor's Note: Learning to work is a rite of passage into adulthood. In this excerpt from his book, Reaching Up for Manhood: Transforming the Lives of Boys in America, Geoffrey Canada remembers his own initiation. He talks about what it means for poor, inner-city kids, especially boys, when they fail to connect with the world of work and about what the organization of which he is president, the New York-based Rheedlen Centers for Children and Families, does to help.

IT WAS report card day, and the young people knew that their grades at school would have a direct bearing on whether or not they could continue to work at Rheedlen. We had become used to the necessity for vigilance on our part on report card day after one particularly creative incident. At first, Brian, who is my assistant at Rheedlen, was delighted when he made the announcement in my office. He was talking about a group of young people who work for us.

"Geoff, we finally did it."

"Did what?" I asked.

"We got them all to pass all of their classes this marking period. The turnaround is remarkable. Two of them went from failing one class and barely passing the others to good grades in all their classes. Can you believe it?"

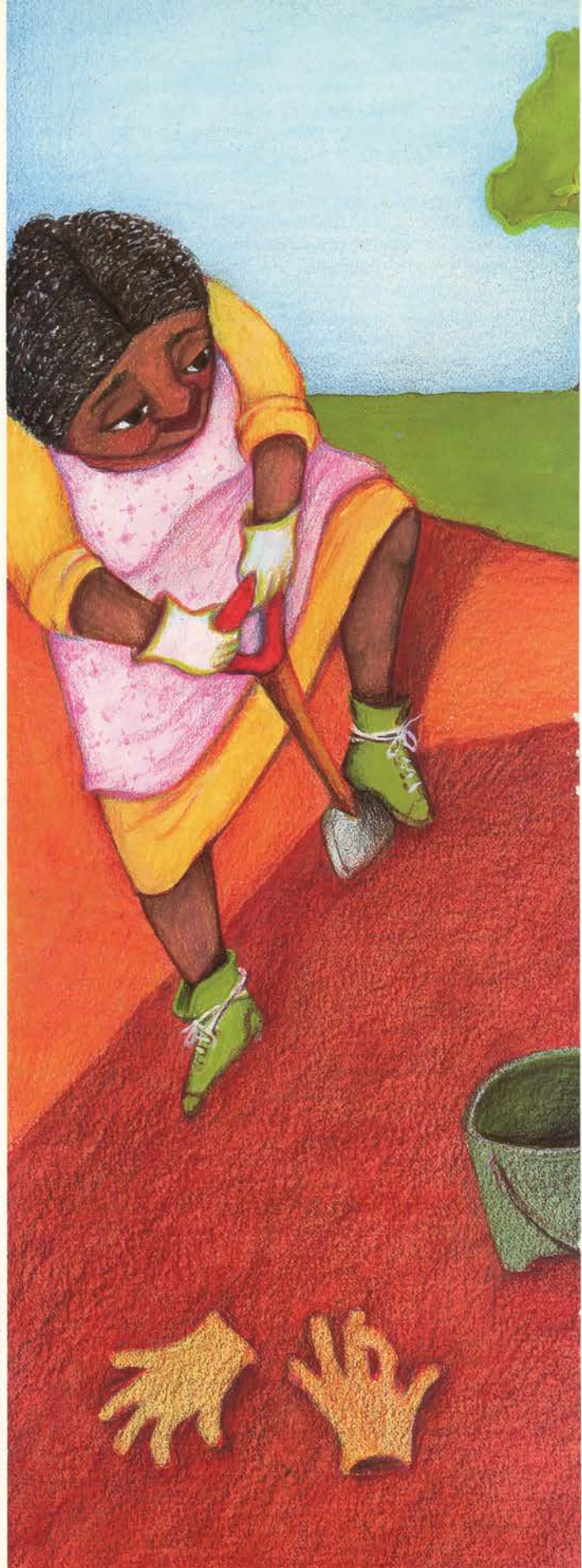
"Are you sure?" I asked.

"I checked all of the report cards myself. It's the first time everyone has passed everything."

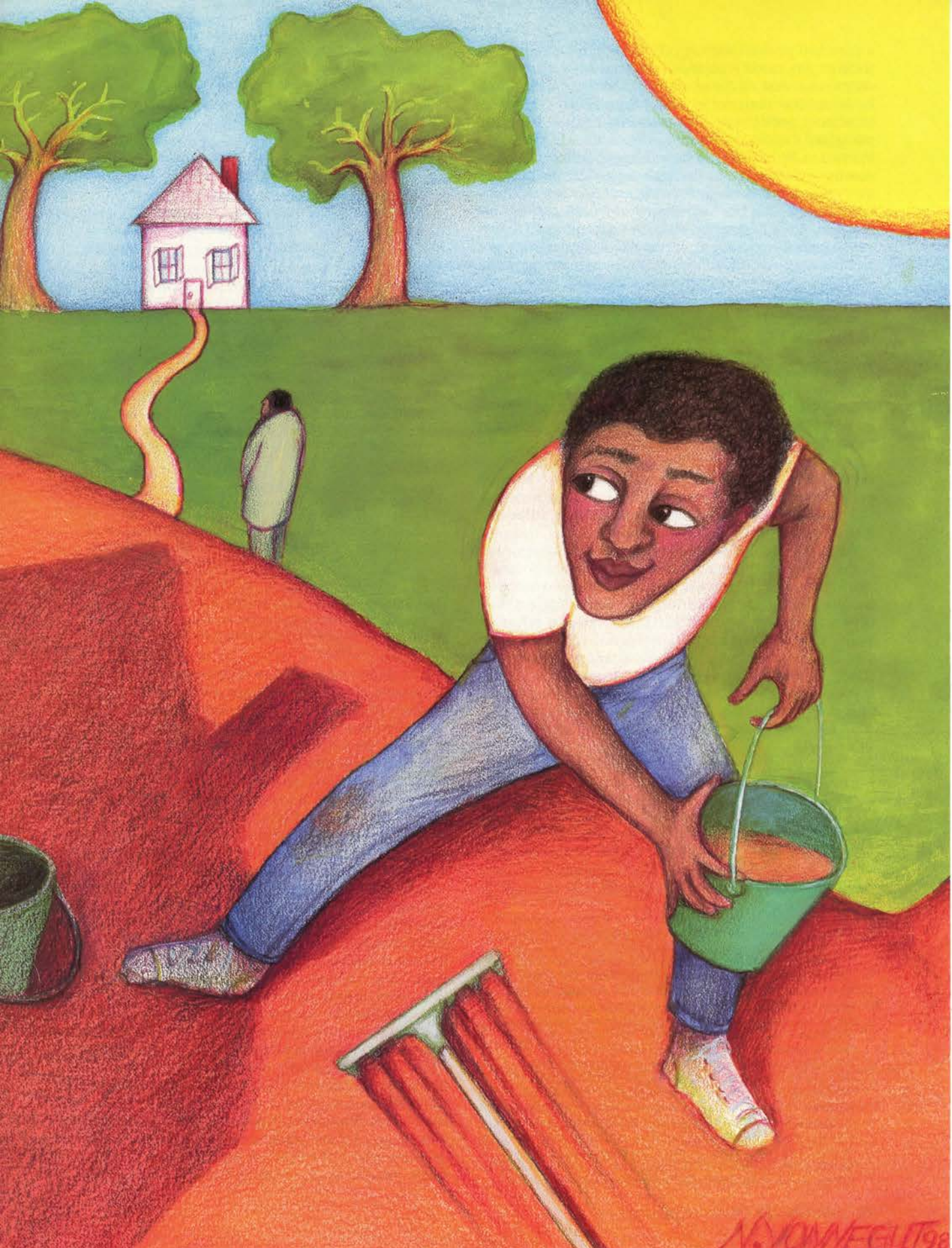
"Well, that's great," I said. "Let's make sure we let them know how proud we are of them."

We weren't proud for long. Brian's eye for detail found a coincidence too odd to be accepted at face value. It seemed that on three of the boys' report cards

Geoffrey Canada, a 1995 winner of the Heinz Human Condition award, is also the author of Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun: A Personal History of Violence in America (Beacon Press, 1995). This article is reprinted from Reaching Up for Manhood, copyright 1998 by Geoffrey Canada, by permission of Beacon Press, Boston.



ILLUSTRATED BY NANNY VONNEGUT



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a zero had printed slightly offline. When he compared their report cards with those of other high school students who worked for us and went to the same school, he found that their zeros were printed correctly. It was an almost perfect job. The boys had created the computerized report cards using the skills that they had learned at Rheedlen and had changed failing grades to passing ones. A call to the high school confirmed our suspicions; the boys had failed several classes. They were suspended but told that they could reapply for work at Rheedlen when they brought us real report cards with all passing grades. Next semester they got passing grades the old-fashioned way, by earning them. The three have passed all of their classes ever since, and all have completed their requirements for graduation.

The academic turnaround these boys accomplished in the end is not unusual. Many of the young people who work for Rheedlen graduate from high school and go on to college because of one thing—work. We have found work to be a very effective tool in keeping boys involved in school. For millions of teenagers growing up in America, school is something that they feel only marginally connected to. To them, schoolwork seems disconnected from their lives. They complain that it's boring and find it irrelevant. But they want to work. Tying the two together has pushed many a Rheedlen boy through high school and into college.

Learning how to work early on in life is important for all children, but it is critical for poor children, especially boys. Work provides a much-needed source of money to buy the necessities of life. It teaches children how to save and budget. It teaches real responsibility. Working as a child helps teach the values and ethics surrounding employment at an early age. And, finally, it connects poor boys to a world that is unknown to many of them, a world of working adults and the normative behaviors that are associated with working for a living. So work should be part of every poor child's life experience, but there is one huge problem: In many poor communities, jobs and job opportunities have all but disappeared. And the group that finds it hardest to get a job is boys.

SOCIOLOGIST AND author William Julius Wilson in his book *When Work Disappears* (1996) explains why in some communities, especially poor African-American communities, finding work has become all but impossible.

The disappearance of work in many inner-city neighborhoods is in part related to the nationwide decline in the fortunes of low-skilled workers. Fundamental structural changes in the new global economy, including changes in the distribution of jobs and in the level of education required to obtain employment, resulted in the simultaneous occurrence of increasing joblessness and declining real wages for low-skilled workers. The decline of the mass production system, the decreasing availability of lower-skilled blue-collar jobs, and the growing importance of training and education in the higher-growth industries adversely affected the employment rates and earnings of low-skilled black workers, many of whom are concentrated in inner-city ghettos. The growing suburbanization of jobs has aggravated the employment woes of poor inner-city workers. Most ghetto residents cannot afford an automobile and therefore have to rely on public transit systems that make the connection between inner-

city neighborhoods and suburban job locations difficult and time-consuming (p. 54).

And to make matters worse, many poor minority residents face a well-developed set of negative perceptions about their skills and abilities. This is particularly true for black males. Wilson cites the Urban Poverty and Family Life Study's survey of "a representative sample of Chicago-area employers," which indicates "that many consider inner-city workers—especially young black males—to be uneducated, unstable, uncooperative, and dishonest" (p. 111).

We have in our country a very large number of youth who are growing up in communities that have failing schools, high rates of crime, and myriad other social problems. We must find real solutions for those problems, but we must also understand that the absence of the opportunity for work creates another set of problems many of us have not considered. Wilson writes,

Neighborhoods that offer few legitimate employment opportunities, inadequate job information networks, and poor schools lead to the disappearance of work. That is, where jobs are scarce, where people rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to help their friends and neighbors find jobs, and where there is a disruptive or degraded school life purporting to prepare youngsters for eventual participation in the workforce, many people eventually lose their feeling of connectedness to work in the formal economy; they no longer expect work to be a regular, and regulating, force in their lives. In the case of young people, they may grow up in an environment that lacks the idea of work as a central experience of adult life—they have little or no labor-force attachment. These circumstances also increase the likelihood that the residents will rely on illegitimate sources of income, thereby further weakening their attachment to the legitimate labor market (pp. 52-53).

It is paramount that we reconnect young people to the world of work. There are great models of how to do this effectively, like Youth Build, a national program that combines real on-the-job work experience with academic support for young people. There is also the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), a government program designed to provide poor youth with opportunities for summer employment. Each year SYEP faces an uphill battle to keep its funding when we ought to be figuring out how to make the program a better one and expanding it to employ youth year 'round.

But simply providing young people with jobs is not the solution to ensuring that young people learn how to work. At Rheedlen, we find that we must train teenagers right from the beginning that a job carries with it a set of expectations that the young person might not understand or even agree with. There are the usual things that most employers expect from their employees—punctuality, good attendance, reliability. But then there are other things that we find we must instruct young people in—professional appearance, having a good attitude, respect for authority. Probably the most difficult thing our young people have to learn to cope with is how to do a good job even when you don't like doing something. It seems that many of them think they ought to like what they do for work all the time. If they don't, they often feel taken advantage of, or picked on by their supervisor,

It is paramount that we reconnect young people to the world of work.

and many times they feel perfectly justified in making sure their supervisor is acutely aware of their unhappiness.

THERE WAS one time when we had several prominent members of President Clinton's Cabinet coming to visit our Countee Cullen Beacon School. They were coming with David N. Dinkins, then mayor of New York. A host of news reporters were waiting and television cameras were everywhere. In the midst of making sure everything was prepared, we realized we needed someone to help set up the tables where a light snack would be served to the hundred or so dignitaries attending. I spotted two of our teen employees standing around and asked them to help carry the food and paper plates into the gymnasium where the event was being held.

"Excuse me, I want you two to help set up the snacks in the gym and then help serve our guests. Make sure you bring the paper plates and cups with you."

"We were told we were to do security," one answered.

"Well, that's okay because we have enough security. I need you to help with the food prep," I said.

"Nobody told us that we would be setting up and serving food. I'll be honest, I don't want to serve people food. That's not my job," said the other.

"Your job is to work for Rheedlen and do whatever we need you to do. Now I don't plan to have a big debate in the hallway. I have people who are grown men and women, who have degrees from college, helping with the food. You two help out like everybody else. That's the end of discussion," I replied.

As the president of Rheedlen, I am not used to having employees balk at lending a helping hand to aid the company. Everyone at Rheedlen knows that I will roll up my sleeves as quick as the next person when something needs to be done. My directors all sweep floors, move tables, or set up food when the need arises. I have a reputation for being fair with employees, but I demand that they work hard and give us a good day's work for their pay. And when it comes to work, I don't make exceptions for young people; they also must work hard. I assumed that after hearing the tone in my voice, the two teenagers would put their reservations aside and do what was asked of them.

The complaints came rapidly one after another. It was not only adult staff who came to me, the other young people who worked for us noticed as well. These two particular boys had a terrible attitude and

didn't care who knew it. I rushed into the gym. It was packed with some of the most influential people in New York City. People seemed excited about the visit and the question-and-answer session that was about to begin. Everyone seemed to be having a good time, everyone except two teenagers standing sullenly behind a table filled with juices, soft drinks, snacks, and paper products. When people asked for soda it was poured and handed to them with open hostility. I found two of my adult staff and quickly replaced the two teens.

The next day I brought the two into my office. I asked them why on such an important day they refused to be supportive. I reminded them that they knew Rheedlen well and knew we had high standards for all our employees. Why, I asked, when they were asked to do something, even if they didn't like it, had they responded in such an angry way? Their answer: They didn't know how other people felt about serving people, but they didn't like it. I realized that they thought they were too good to be serving people cups of juice. Now these were not teens who had money or who came from homes that had money. They had no high school or college degrees, no professional training that would ensure that they could support themselves. Yet they were so proud that they felt serving juice was beneath them. They were unrepentant. They were fired.

THE THING that struck me about this incident when it happened was that these two boys knew they were risking their jobs by their behavior. (After several months they came back to us with a new attitude toward work and have been excellent employees ever since.) They felt they were standing up for some principle that had to do with their being exploited. They were proud that, unlike the other teens, they had stood up for themselves. They were not the first teens that Rheedlen has fired because they refused to do hard work or did it with such anger that the children or adults they were working with felt unwelcome.

I have talked with many young people who have gotten fired from their jobs, and when I've questioned why they were fired they say, "They didn't like me because I'm black," or Latino, or whatever. Or they say, "They were prejudiced there. They gave me all the dirty jobs, and the other people had the easy jobs." Boys with no previous work experience seem to find it hardest to adjust to the world of employment. Boys often confuse their status as males with how they are treated on the job. They often feel disrespected and humiliated when a supervisor chastises them or orders them around. I'm not trying to suggest for a second that many teens don't face discrimination and racism, but they also fall victim to their own unrealistic expectations about work. They don't know that everybody starts at the bottom, that the lower the level of the skills that are needed to perform your job, the more likely you are to have to take orders, to be bossed, to do the dirty work.

I have found that many boys come to their first job with no real understanding of what hard work means. This is a tremendous handicap. Girls are often expected to take responsibility around the house, cooking, or cleaning, or doing the laundry. There is often a

set of responsibilities and expectations placed on girls at home that helps prepare them for other work experiences. But much too often nothing of the sort is expected of boys. We know that much of being able to understand and excel in the workplace has to do with the attitudes, habits, and experiences we have had before we ever arrive at that first paying job. Many boys face real hard work for the first time when they get their first job—and they are totally unprepared for this new experience. And that is our fault. Parents and other adults don't begin preparing children early enough for the real world of work. When once children played an important part in the economy of many families, working in the fields or factories next to their parents, today many adults do everything possible to make sure their children don't have to do hard work. This, in my opinion, is a mistake. I learned how to work hard before I ever earned a penny for it. Again, it was a lesson learned from my grandmother.

MY GRANDPARENTS' house in Wyandanch was set on about three-quarters of an acre of land. When they moved in, the house was completed, but the yard had to be landscaped by us. We had no money to hire a professional landscaper. The front yard was a mess. It had been graded only slightly after the workers finished the house, and grass and weeds sprouted willy-nilly. Grandma explained what we had to do to the yard before we could plant grass.

"First we have to pull up all the grass and weeds, then pick up all the big pieces of wood and rocks and stuff like that. Then, when we finish that, we have to rake the ground even and pick up the smaller pieces of debris that we find."

I couldn't wait to get started. The quicker we began, the quicker we could plant the grass, and then I would have my own lush lawn to play on. Grandma gave me a pair of work gloves, and I felt like a real grownup. I attacked the yard with gusto. Grandma warned me to slow down because the day was young yet. I looked at my grandmother and realized for the first time that she was getting old. She had forgotten how young people had a lot of energy and could outwork older people. At thirteen I was already feeling the coming of manhood. I even had the proof—three whiskers protruding from my chin, which I took to stroking when I was deep in thought. I surveyed the yard and thought that maybe it might take a couple of hours of hard work to complete it. I figured we would be done before lunchtime.

With Grandma working next to me, I attacked the dirt with vigor and determination.

"Whoa, slow down there, Geoffrey. You won't last at that rate."

"It's okay, Grandma. I'm all right. It won't take me long. Watch."

In no time I was tired, sweating and grunting, as I fought the rake through the soil. I looked at Grandma. She looked as cool and refreshed as when she'd first come outside. She had raked a slightly smaller section than I, but it seemed as if she could rake all day.

"Ready to take a break?" she asked when she saw me looking at her.

She could tell I was exhausted. I'm sure she smiled

I couldn't wait to get started. The quicker we began, the quicker we could plant the grass.

inwardly at my feigning otherwise. I dropped the rake and stumbled to the back of the house, afraid my arms would never stop hurting. My grandmother brought me a glass of lemonade and words of wisdom at the same time.

"Geoffrey, you know work is a very important thing. And I know a lot of people who don't know how to pace themselves. So they start out real good. I mean they just are going and going. But after a while they start to peter out. And in the end you find out that they wasn't worth two hoots. You have to learn how to size up a job. Remember each job has a beginning, a middle, and an end. You keep worrying about the end. You're trying to get to the end so quick you think you can skip the beginning and the middle—you understand what I'm trying to tell you?"

"Yes, Grandma," I said. But that wasn't exactly the truth. I didn't really understand.

"Let me tell you about work. The first thing you have to do is to size up the job. How long will it take? Then, in the beginning, try to figure out the easiest way to get the job done as quickly as possible. You spend five minutes pulling on an old root when if you chopped it with the hoe you'd be done in five seconds. You see?"

"Yes, Grandma, I see that."

"Good. In the beginning ask yourself, 'How can I do it quicker using less energy?' You experiment a lot until you come up with a system. Then in the middle, which is usually the longest part of the job, you learn to enjoy it. You set a pace and a rhythm and you set your mind to work. Did you know that you can enjoy even hard labor?"

"No, Grandma, I didn't. I don't think I could ever enjoy raking. It's so hard and boring."

"Raking is hard, but sometimes you make a job harder than it is by hating it or fighting it. Work is work. Sometimes it's hard, sometimes it's easy. Let me tell you a secret. When you're doing hard work like this with your body, you can be doing other wonderful things with your mind. That's how you make the pain and boredom go away."

"Grandma, what about the end of the job? You haven't talked about that."

"You have to finish a job with enough energy to make sure the end is done just as well as the beginning. People are often exhausted by the time they reach the end of the job. They start taking short cuts, and they can sometimes ruin the whole thing just be-

cause they didn't know that the end is as crucial as the beginning. When you take pride in your work, once you've finished a job you can look back at it and know that you've done the best you could. And when that's the case, sometimes you can come back years, even decades later and see that your work has remained intact because you did it right from beginning to end."

Raking the yard and removing the debris was only the beginning. Our next task was even more grueling. We had to even out the side of the property line that sloped downward. And with that effort I began to learn my second lesson about working that summer.

The task was simple but would demand great effort. We had to carry dirt from the back of the property to the front and build up the boundary line between my grandparents' land and the adjacent lot. The problem was that the ground was too soft for the wheelbarrow when it was loaded with dirt. So we resorted to carrying the dirt in buckets. We formed a simple assembly line. My grandmother shoveled the dirt with one of my brothers, the others of us carried the dirt in the buckets. I tried to remember what grandma had told me about working because it became apparent real fast that this was not going to be a quick job. Each time we emptied a bucket of dirt we looked to see if we could see any difference in the front yard. We couldn't. In fact, after a whole day of moving dirt, outside of some aching arms and shoulders, some calluses on the hands, we could see no signs of our work at all.

That night we all ate a nice big dinner, and I wondered how long it would take to finish the yard. I was more tired physically than I had ever been before, but sitting at the table with my brothers and grandparents talking about the work we had done, and the work we still had to do, made me feel proud. I had never been treated as an equal by adults. I felt now that I was really contributing something. More important, my grandparents treated me as if I had earned their respect. It wasn't anything big, it was the little things they said that made me feel as if I had just gone through a rite of passage.

"Now, Geoffrey, have some more cornbread. You know you have to replace all that energy you used up today," Grandma said.

"Thanks, Grandma. Don't mind if I do."

"Let me look at those hands. Didn't you say your hands were hurting?" Grandpa asked.

"Yes, Grandpa. Right here," I said, showing him my hands palms up.

"Well now, let me see. You know, it looks like you just growing a few calluses on those hands. That's what hard work will do for a man. They might be sore for a couple of days. It happens to all men who work hard like we do. How do they feel now?" Grandpa asked.

"They don't feel so bad. It's nothing really," I said, feeling that I'd earned the pain that flashed through my sore hands whenever I closed them. I was proud of that pain because I was a working man now.

My brothers and I carried pails of dirt for weeks. It was hard, hot, back-breaking work. We thought we would never finish, but we did. We had a celebration to signal the end—Grandpa cut a watermelon and we took big slices and walked the front yard admiring our

work. The ground was now smooth and even all the way to the end of the property line. I wasn't all that happy to see the end of the job. We had become quite a team. Grandma was right. Hard work could be fun if you had the right attitude. I was disappointed to know we couldn't plant grass that summer; it was too late. But the next spring we seeded and watched as a lush, green, even lawn sprouted up.

I HAVE HAD many jobs, many of them menial, since my grandparents taught me how to work. None of those jobs was ever as hard as the work I did for free with my grandparents. This is not the case for too many children today. Boys who think that they are ready for the world, ready to drop out of school at fifteen or sixteen, or at least get it over with, need to learn first about hard work. They need to understand that unless they excel in school, their options will be very limited. They will face fierce competition for the relatively few unskilled jobs that still exist. And many of them will not be properly prepared even for those. They don't have experience with the world of work. They haven't developed good work habits, a positive attitude, or an understanding of what will realistically be required of them.

While we must have high standards when it comes to young people working, we must in the first place create opportunities for them. Simply complaining about youth crime and people on welfare will not solve the problem of how we produce employable adults. Many young people are totally alienated from the world of work because of where they live or because of the color of their skin. We must level the playing field when it comes to opportunity in this country by making sure that we remove the barriers that so many of our youth face in finding and keeping jobs.

To begin with, it is imperative that we increase the number of jobs available for our youth. And in particular we must focus on creating jobs for the young people who are the most discriminated against—black boys. This responsibility must be borne not only by government, by increasing the job programs that already exist, but also by the corporate, not-for-profit, and small business sectors in America as well. We must find creative ways to draw huge numbers of boys who presently can't find jobs into the world of work. We might try a tax credit for businesses that hire young people from poor communities or asking corporations to partner with certain communities in this effort.

Our strategies with young people at Rheedlen are based on the simple idea that work is a key ingredient in keeping young people engaged in school and community. We always have a group of young people around who are employed by us to deliver messages, do maintenance work, and answer the phones. All of the teenagers who work for us have to be enrolled in school and passing their classes, as I said earlier. Failure to do so means a warning first, then termination from the Rheedlen job. We have found this to be a very effective mechanism for making sure young people graduate from high school and develop job skills or go on to college. Many of our young people don't have clear career goals as teenagers, but then again,

(Continued on page 44)

LOOKING AT THE SCHOOLS

Public Agenda Asks African-American and White Parents About Their Aspirations and Their Fears

BY STEVE FARKAS AND JEAN JOHNSON

Editor's Note: Does a chasm separate African-American and white parents when they talk about what they want from the public schools? That's not the finding of the latest Public Agenda report, entitled Time To Move On. The report, on which the following article is based, reveals some divisions, but it also finds that African-American and white parents are in solid agreement on what constitutes a good K-12 education and on the steps schools must take to provide it.

Ordering information for the full report can be found on page 39.

MOST AMERICANS seem to believe in the concept of equal education for every child, regardless of race or ethnicity. Surveys tell us that only a handful question the goals of the civil rights movement, and only fringe elements say they would like to return to the days of segregated schools and separate lunch counters. Most Americans also say they believe that the dream envisioned by the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. has yet to be fully achieved.

When we move from the theoretical to the practical, however, the apparent consensus dissolves. Policies designed to promote integration and improve public education for minority youngsters often breed bitter controversy. As a nation, we seem to agree on what should be, but not on how we can get there. Indeed, some observers believe that the nation is now in "pause" mode when it comes to issues of school inte-

Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson are senior vice presidents of Public Agenda, a nonpartisan organization that does in-depth research on how the public views critical policy issues. Portions of First Things First, an earlier report on public education, appeared in the Winter 1994-95 issue of American Educator.

gration and equal educational opportunity.

Against this backdrop, Public Agenda and the Public Education Network (PEN) joined together to take a fresh look at how parents—black and white—see this often vexing complex of issues. The result, *Time To Move On: African-American and White Parents Set an Agenda for Public Schools*, expresses the aspirations and concerns of African-American and white parents, who want to secure a good education for their children in today's schools. It reports the results of in-depth telephone surveys of eight hundred African-American and eight hundred white parents, as well as findings from focus groups and individual interviews with parents and public education professionals.

Why didn't we also include Hispanic and Asian parents in this study? Partly because of limited funding and the high cost of research comparing the views of multiple subgroups of the general population. But this limitation also reflects Public Agenda's decision that if the study is to be helpful, it must focus sharply on very specific questions about race.

What follows is a summary of the key findings from *Time To Move On*.

The order in which we present these findings is perhaps unusual: The perspective of African-American parents comes first, followed by that of white parents, and we conclude with areas of common ground. But we hope this order will allow readers to absorb each group's thinking in context.

As researchers, we attempted to capture the views we heard as accurately and honestly as possible. We hope that in so doing, we can launch a renewed discussion of these difficult issues—one less encumbered by the weight of miscues and faulty assumptions. In the coming months, we will use this research as the context for community discussions on these issues to be sponsored by PEN and its network of Local Education Funds.



Finding One

The Message from Black Parents: Academics First and Foremost

For African-American parents, the most important goal for public schools—the prize they seek with single-minded resolve—is academic achievement for their children. These parents believe in integration and want to pursue it, but their overriding concern is getting a solid education for their kids. Many spoke about jarring experiences with racism over the years, but despite these experiences, their focus is resolutely on the here and now. They want to move beyond the past and prepare their children for the future.

- By an 8-to-1 margin, African-American parents say raising academic standards and achievement in the nation's schools is a higher priority than achieving more diversity and integration.
- In their own children's schools, by an overwhelming 82 percent to 8 percent, black parents want the schools to make raising academic standards and achievement the foremost priority.
- While 41 percent of black parents agree that kids get a better education in a racially integrated school, 51 percent say school integration makes little difference, and 5 percent say it makes for a worse education.
- Sixty-three percent of African-American parents say the statement, "Too much is made of the differences between blacks and whites and not enough of what they have in common" comes *very* close to how they feel.
- Only 41 percent of black and 34 percent of white parents say it is *excellent* or *good* to take black kids out of failing schools and send them to schools that are successful but mostly white.

Finding Two

The Current Political Agenda: Time-Honored or Timeworn?

African-American parents are firmly committed to promoting diversity in the schools, but they express serious doubts about some of the most frequently debated policies. As they see it, approaches such as affirmative action in school hiring are double-edged swords: They accomplish some goals, but they can have negative consequences and can distract schools from their main task. In fact, black parents are decisive in opting for quality, regardless of race, in hiring teachers and school superintendents. Given the heated controversies surrounding standardized tests, one might also expect black parents to distrust them. However, most accept standardized tests as valid measures of student achievement, and most say that community discussions about education might be improved by less emphasis on race.

- Ninety-seven percent of black and white parents agree that "our country is very diverse, and kids need to learn to get along with people from different

cultures and ethnic backgrounds."

- Seventy-five percent of African-American parents and 59 percent of white parents believe it is absolutely essential for schools to teach about the contributions blacks and other minorities have made to American history.
- Three-quarters of African-American (73 percent) and white (77 percent) parents say, "Too often, the schools work so hard to achieve integration that they end up neglecting their most important goal—teaching kids."
- Three-quarters of African-American parents say race should not be a factor when choosing a teacher or superintendent for a predominantly black school district.
- But sixty-eight percent of black parents express concern that because of cultural differences, white teachers are not likely to understand how to deal with African-American students. Nearly seven in ten also think teachers and principals have lower expectations for black students due to racial stereotypes.
- Forty-four percent of African-American parents say standardized tests measure "real differences in educational achievement," while another 18 percent say whites tend to do better because black students have low expectations of themselves. Only 28 percent think "the tests are culturally biased against black students." Nearly eight in ten black parents want differences in black and white achievement test scores publicized, since this may help to set reforms in motion to solve the problem.
- Seven in 10 black parents say good discussions about schools "should be about what's good for students—there's no need to bring up race."

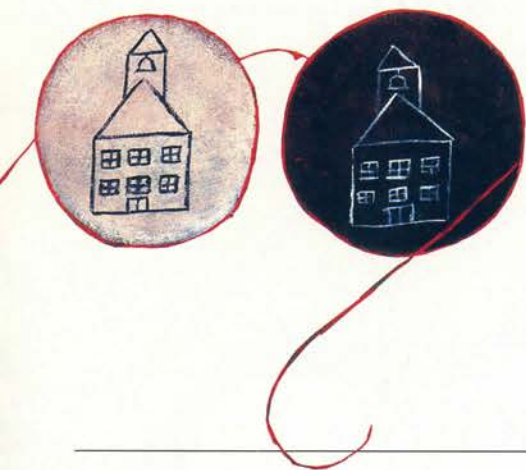
Finding Three

Black Student Achievement: An Educational Crisis

African-American parents' laser-like focus on academic achievement reflects a deep anxiety about how their children fare in the nation's schools. They believe that far too many black children are not learning enough, and far too many of the schools they attend are unacceptably deficient. As one parent put it: "It's not just psychological, it's a fact. The mostly white schools have more resources, strong parents, computers. They're able to put money into those schools, and parent interest is there. They can't hire just any teacher." African-American parents believe that the problem of inadequate schools for their children is at a crisis point. White parents also believe African-American youngsters attend poorer schools and are less likely to do well academically. They see the problem as limited to poor, urban areas, however, and they do not call the situation a *crisis*.

- The majority of black (56 percent) and white (54 percent) parents think *less than* half of black students are in good schools with good teachers. By contrast, 74 percent of black and 63 percent of

African-American parents' laser-like focus on academic achievement reflects a deep anxiety about how their children fare in the nation's schools.



white parents say *more than* half of white students are in good schools with good teachers. While only one in five says most white students are doing poorly in school, almost half say most blacks are doing poorly.

- Six in ten African-American parents do not think underachievement among black students is confined to inner cities, whereas 56 percent of white parents do. Half of black parents say the problem affects students regardless of family income, but 64 percent of white parents believe it is mainly focused on low-income families.
- More than half of African-American parents say the failure of black students to do well in schools is "a crisis and must be addressed quickly," but just over three in ten white parents say the same, although many say it's a serious problem. Few African-American and white parents say, "The problem is exaggerated."
- Sixty percent of black parents would switch their kids to a private school if they could afford to do so.

Finding Four White Parents: Will My Children Have To Pay the Price?

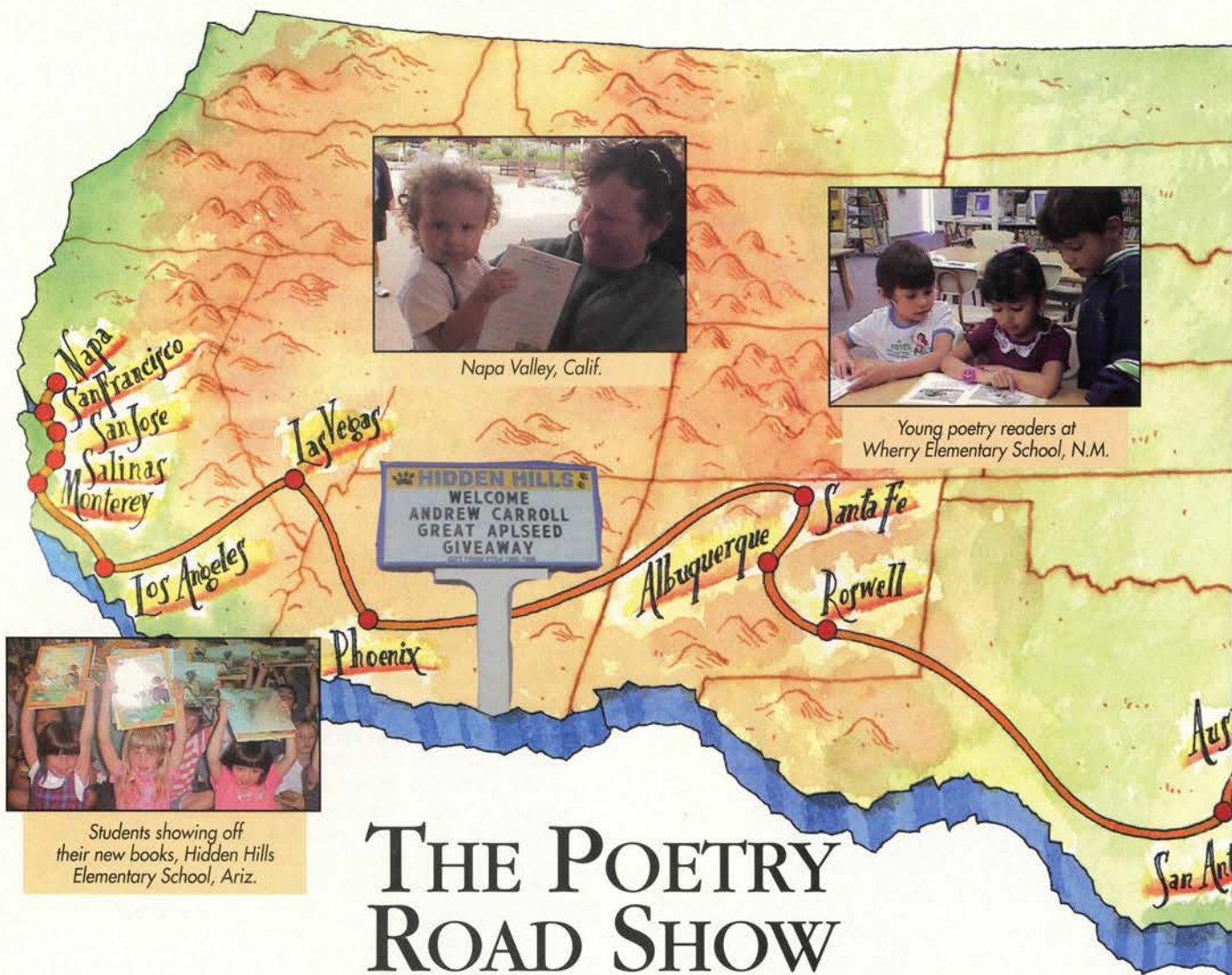
The views of white parents on race and the public schools are complex and often ambivalent. They want African-American children to receive a good education that will allow them to succeed, and they firmly believe that good schools are something any child deserves. They take pride in refusing to judge people on the color of their skin and in being more tolerant than earlier generations of white Americans. But they also have anxieties: They describe a struggle to find good schools, and they are nervous about any changes that they believe could endanger their quality. Many white parents fear that an influx of African-American students into a school would bring social and academic problems. Most say it is not the students' race but the socioeconomic status of their families that concerns them. They are deeply uncomfortable about admitting what troubles them, however, because they fear if they voice their concerns they will be labeled racists.

- Sixty-one percent of white parents say, "One of the main reasons I live in this neighborhood is the quality of its schools," and slightly more than eight in ten agree that "since parents often pick a neighborhood for its schools, it's wrong to force them to send their kids elsewhere to achieve racial integration."
- Sixty-one percent of white parents say if a large number of black students started attending a mostly white public school there might be discipline and safety problems, lower reading levels, or more social problems. But 71 percent say a school can prevent problems. Fifty-two percent say a private school would do a better job of maintaining discipline and order in a similar situation.
- Eighty-two percent of white parents say they don't care about the race of the children in their schools so long as they come from good, hard-working families.
- Nearly nine in ten black and white parents (86 percent) say, "It is society's responsibility to make sure black students have teachers and schools that are just as good as those of white students."
- Seven in ten white parents and eight in ten black parents feel failing inner-city schools can overcome their problems with better resources, programs, and teachers.
- Nearly three-quarters of African-American and white parents say, "It is hard for whites to talk honestly about problems in the African-American community because they are afraid someone will accuse them of being racist."

Finding Five Integration: It's All in the Details

Both black and white parents say integration is valuable, but on closer examination, white—and to some

(Continued on page 38)



Napa Valley, Calif.

Young poetry readers at Wherry Elementary School, N.M.

Students showing off their new books, Hidden Hills Elementary School, Ariz.

THE POETRY ROAD SHOW

BY JULIE A. MILLER

IF YOU happened to be waiting for a train in Los Angeles's Union Station on April 27 of this year or shopping for groceries at the Kroger Supermarket on Monroe Street in Toledo on April 8, you may have noticed a rangy, bespectacled guy with the earnest, clean-cut look of an aging Boy Scout handing books of poetry to surprised passersby.

Andrew Carroll has distributed Walt Whitman to motorists paying tolls at New Jersey's Walt Whitman bridge and African-American poetry to prisoners in Louisiana. He's also played Santa Claus in more likely places—such as schools. And he's managed to sneak poetry into telephone directories and hotel rooms, right next to that ubiquitous Bible.

The twenty-eight-year-old Carroll plans to get a real job someday, as a secondary school English teacher.

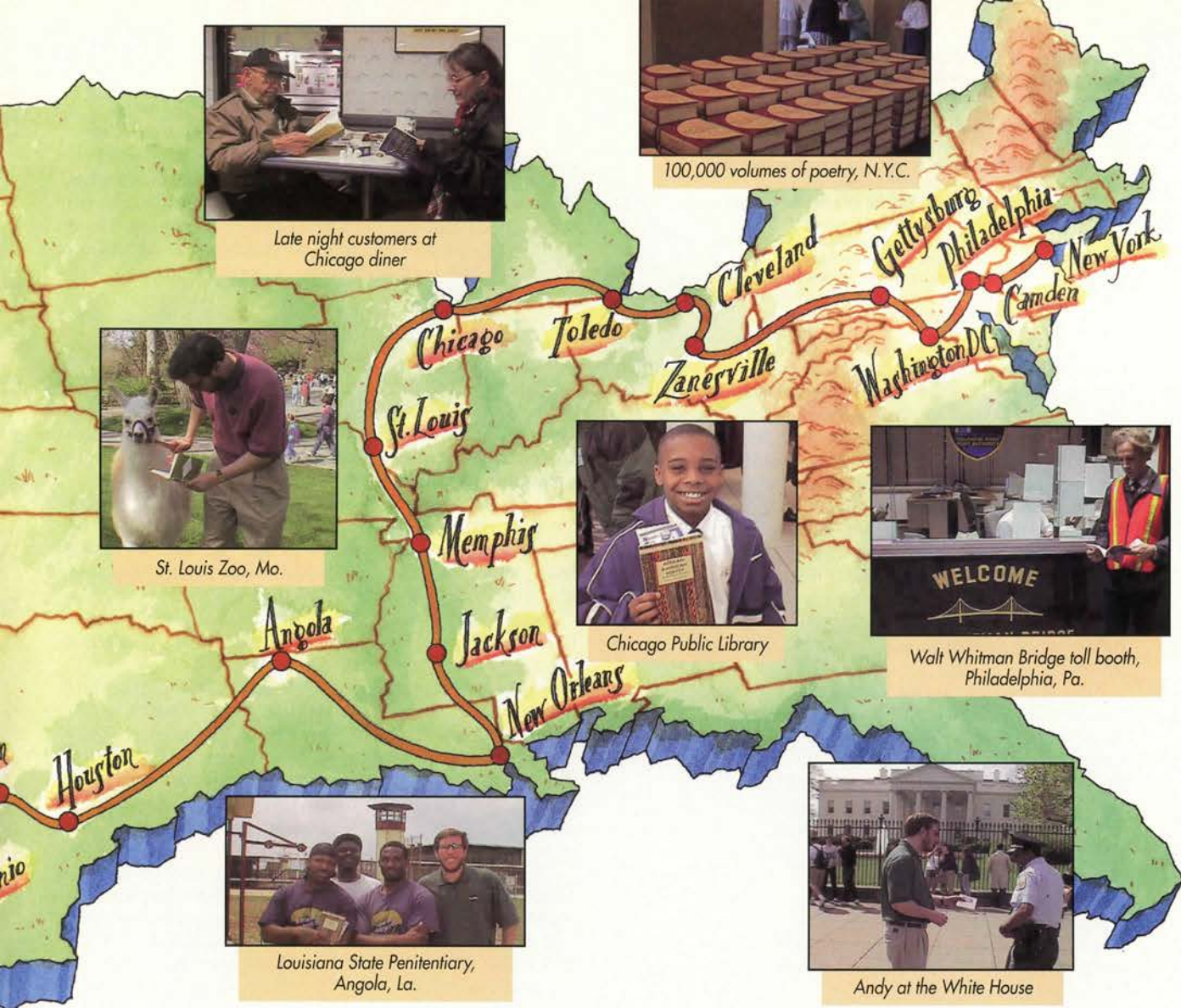
Julie A. Miller, a former associate editor at Education Week, is a freelance writer who lives in Alexandria, Virginia.

But for now, this is what he does. As the executive director of the American Poetry and Literacy Project—its only full-time employee, really—he distributes books of poems and promotes poetry, mainly among mainstream Americans who would otherwise be unlikely to ponder Poe on the subway or peruse "The Wasteland" on a stairclimber.

"The point is to fight the idea that poetry is difficult, that it's an elitist thing for students and intellectuals," Carroll says.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
(Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken*)

Carroll, who lives in Washington, D.C., found his way to the media's radar screen last April, when he celebrated National Poetry Month by crossing the country in a Ryder truck (rental donated), handing out more than one hundred thousand volumes of poetry



Late night customers at Chicago diner



100,000 volumes of poetry, N.Y.C.



St. Louis Zoo, Mo.



Chicago Public Library



Walt Whitman Bridge toll booth, Philadelphia, Pa.



Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola, La.



Andy at the White House

and other literature. He called it the “Great APLseed Giveaway,” a play on his organization’s name and the legend of Johnny Appleseed, who supposedly scattered apple seeds the way Carroll passes out books. It also helped get him a sponsor; the Washington State Apple Growers was one of the primary backers of his road trip.

Carroll stopped in train stations, turnpike toll plazas, hotels, supermarkets, a juvenile detention center, churches, courthouses, lots of libraries, and several schools.

“The kids were in awe. We were in awe. We couldn’t believe somebody was giving 125 kids free books [each], the most beautiful bound books you ever saw,” says Vicki Fisher, a Phoenix teacher whose third-grade class at Hidden Hills Elementary School was one of several Carroll interacted with on April 22.

“He sat and read with them, he talked to them about what they’re doing,” Fisher says. “He’s great with kids, gets right down on the floor with them,

answers a million questions, lets them crawl all over him. You could tell he cares about kids and good books.”

Carroll claims that this positive reception is typical. When he asks kids how many of them hate poetry, he always gets at least some raised hands. When he asks the same question at the end of the session, there are always fewer of them. “If you can convince a sixth-grader that maybe poetry isn’t so horrible, that’s a day well spent,” he says.

As for adults, “There are definitely some people who say, ‘No, thank you, I’m not interested.’ But they’re few and far between—fewer than I expected,” Carroll says.

In 1996, the *Washington Post* described Carroll’s Halloween visit to an auto inspection station, where he handed out a collection of poems by Edgar Allan Poe:

Out in public, in the middle of a workday, people don’t expect poetry to get in their faces. Especially people spending their lunchtime idling in line at a vehicle inspection station. . . . Some refused the poetry. But most gladly

accepted. It was an odd sight to see dozens of D.C. drivers, heads bent forward, books resting on steering wheels, reading Poe's dark verse.

"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!"

I shrieked, upstarting—

"Get thee back into the tempest and the
Night's Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie
thy soul hath spoken!"

Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the
bust above my door!

Take thy beak from out my heart, and
take thy form from off my door!"

Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

(Edgar Allan Poe, *The Raven*)

Carroll's crusade was launched by a poet's speech about the civic value of literary art that profoundly moved him when he was a twenty-two-year-old English major at Columbia University. Joseph Brodsky, an exile from what was then the Soviet Union, was the U.S. poet laureate when he delivered the speech at the Library of Congress in 1991. It was later published by the *New Republic*. Brodsky argued that a nation bereft of literature was "on the verge of a tremendous cultural backslide" leading to the degradation of both language and democracy and was replacing "literacy with videocy." He advocated the distribution of poetry in supermarkets, gas stations, and motel rooms.

"The blue-collar is not supposed to read Horace, nor the farmer in his overalls, Montale or Marvell," Brodsky said. "Nor, for that matter, is the politician expected to know by heart Gerard Manley Hopkins or Elizabeth Bishop. This is dumb as well as dangerous."

When a friend handed a copy of the speech to Carroll, he said, "Brodsky, is he a cosmonaut?" But he was impressed enough with the poet's ideas to underline passages. And he wrote to Brodsky, asking if he could help realize the vision. Carroll was surprised to get a reply, much less an invitation to meet the poet, who also lived in New York. They hatched the idea for the American Poetry and Literacy Project in Greenwich Village cafes.

Carroll started with the hotel room idea, and Doubletree Hotels eventually agreed to place books in their rooms. It's an idea he still pushes, and he's hoping to get poetry into every hotel room in Salt Lake City for the 2002 Winter Olympics.

He has also persuaded publishers of telephone directories to plug poems into some spots where you'd usually see advertising. In some Florida directories, for example, a reader looking for travel agents will also find "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost. More than 12 million copies of poetry-enhanced directories have been published in every region of the U.S.

One letter Carroll treasures is from a woman who found one of those verses in the Waycross, Georgia, Yellow Pages.

"My husband was sentenced to six months [in jail] last week, leaving me to handle the business, the farm, the animals, and the pain of our separation," she wrote. "I was looking up newspaper numbers and saw the poem entitled 'Hope' by Emily Dickinson. I instantly had a smile on my face, the encouragement I needed, and the strength to keep trying."

Hope is the thing with feathers—
That perches in the soul—
And sings the tune without the words—
And never stops—at all—...

(Emily Dickinson, *Hope is the thing with feathers*)

Carroll spent his childhood in the Boston suburbs, then went to Sidwell Friends School, the upscale private school that counts Chelsea Clinton among recent graduates. His parents, who adopted him as a baby, are divorced, and his father owns a book publishing company in Washington.

Carroll says he has "real sympathy for people who say they don't like poetry, because I didn't like the stuff much myself until recently." Neal Tonken, a teacher at Sidwell Friends, helped launch Carroll's love of literature, but he credits Columbia University professor Kenneth Koch, who has written books on how to teach poetry to children and adults, with "really changing my thinking on poetry."

Koch says Carroll was a good student and clearly liked poetry, but the professor was "surprised by his fervor when he came back to see me and was even more surprised he found a way to do something with it.

"Somebody once told me that writing poetry was like dropping leaves down a big well, and I think promoting it is like that, too," Koch says.

By some accounts, poetry is making something of a comeback. When the *Village Voice* looked at the topic in April, poets, editors, and publishers suggested that the notion of poetry as difficult, fostered by critics who reserve their praise for work that is, has begun to dissipate, with an assist from popular culture outlets like "A Prairie Home Companion."

"I've been involved in marketing poetry for ten years," says Houghton Mifflin marketing director Clay Harper, "and we used to just get the word out to other poets and hope they'd support their colleagues in the trenches. But then when things like the movie 'Il Postino' hit, we saw this expanded audience for Pablo Neruda."

Of course, some argue that a focus on popularization cheapens poetry. "National Poetry Month is a distraction; its success is irrelevant to real poetry," Charles Bernstein, a poet and a professor at the University of Buffalo, told the *Village Voice*. "Poetry at its heart should be an alternative to mass culture, not something that benefits from being on NPR and in the *New York Times*."

Koch thinks that promoting poetry to the public "is like chicken soup; it can't hurt." But he believes that while it could be more popular than it is now, the audience for poetry, especially good poetry, will always be limited. "Notice how it's always bad poetry that's making a comeback?" he says. "Is Shelley making a comeback? I think the truth is that poetry just goes on, with more or less of an audience."

His former student disagrees.

"People just need a push to pick up that first book and they're into it," Carroll says. "I get letters from truck drivers, people from all walks of life."

He agrees with the notion that poetry is growing in popularity. "There are more events; book sales are way

up. There is undeniably a poetry renaissance going on," Carroll says.

He speculates that the increasingly fast pace of modern life and its ever-increasing dependence on technology have "made life so automated that people have a sense of being disconnected. Everything's formulaic, anything that requires investing time and energy is at a premium.

"People are working harder and faster, and there's no time to reflect," Carroll says. "I think poetry helps us to slow down and focus on what's important."

Whatever the reason, Carroll's project has taken off in the past couple of years.

A year ago, he obtained a grant that allowed him to work on it full-time, rather than as a nights-and-weekends volunteer. But it's still a low-key affair, consisting of an unpaid board of directors, a fundraising consultant whose time is paid for by a foundation, and Carroll. He now has a donated storage space for the books, but he runs the operation from his apartment near Washington's Dupont Circle neighborhood.

The living room that serves as command central is the comfortable lair of someone who cares more for books—there are the expected many shelves—than for more worldly possessions. The wall above and around Carroll's desk is plastered with clippings and other found objects, ranging from pictures of John Steinbeck and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. to a poster announcing an event in which the Rev. Sun Myung Moon presided over a football stadium full of people marrying fellow devotees they didn't know. "That's irony," Carroll assured me when he saw my eyes wander in that direction.

He still calls hotels and makes personal appearances in the Washington area, but Carroll spends more and more time sending books to people who request them and fielding inquiries from teachers. Sometimes potential donors want to send books to a particular school or hospital; when he has a choice, Carroll favors "non-profit, public institutions that might not be able to afford books."

He's branched out into publishing, as well. The book that Carroll mostly handed out at the beginning of his crusade, *Ten Best-Loved Poems*, was a little too safe for his taste, and he wanted something with "a little more diversity." For example, he says, there was nothing by Langston Hughes. So Carroll collaborated on editing a new anthology, called *101 Great American Poems*, which was the book he handed out most on his journey.

Carroll also found time to edit *Letters of a Nation*, a collection of correspondence noteworthy for historic or literary reasons that sold well in 1997. Sales helped finance April's road trip, which will become an annual event. A new anthology is in the works; in 1999, Carroll says, he will give away poetry that is about "the lure of the open road."

Carroll's happiness at the positive reception the project has received is tempered by the fact that his mentor, Brodsky, didn't live to see it. He died of a heart attack in 1996 at the age of fifty-five.

"The whole time I was out on the road," Carroll says, "I kept thinking of how Joseph would have approved."

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

(Dylan Thomas, *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night*)

Carroll says his next publishing venture will probably involve teacher's guides and reader's guides that he can hand out along with poetry, an idea that was inspired by Koch's books on teaching poetry.

For now, Carroll refers teachers to the Teachers and Writers Collaborative, a New York-based organization that disseminates books on the teaching of writing and literature, including poetry. The group also arranges writer-in-residence programs in schools and professional development programs for teachers.

Carroll was interested in teaching before he launched the poetry project but says that talking to students about poetry has solidified that ambition. "I love talking to kids about poetry," he says. "You can use it to talk about different ways to interpret things and different ways to say things."

One poem he often discusses in schools, especially with middle-school students, is "O Captain! My Captain!" by Walt Whitman. "It has got a strong rhyme, and they think the blood is cool," Carroll says. More important, they usually don't know the poem is about the murder of Abraham Lincoln, and learning this puts a whole new perspective on what they've read: "You can talk about how Whitman doesn't use Lincoln's name in the whole poem, about how the best way to hit a target is sometimes at a slant.

Carroll's advice to teachers is to avoid making poetry a chore by requiring memorization or giving tests about the "right" interpretation of poems. Instead, he says, "talk about how the poem made them feel, open up an internal dialogue. Allow there to be more than one answer."

"Whitman said that 'O Captain! My Captain!' is about Lincoln, but there's still a lot of room for interpreting the details."

O Captain! My Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:

But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.
(Walt Whitman, *O Captain! My Captain!*)

□

Information about the American Poetry and Literacy Project and the Great APLSeed Giveaway can be found on the internet (www.poets.org/apl/aplp.htm). Or write to Andrew Carroll, The American Poetry & Literacy Project, 1058 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20007.

Teachers and Writers Collaborative can be reached at 5 Union Square West, New York, NY 10003-3306 (telephone 888-BOOKS-TW or 212-691-6590; Fax 212-675-0171; e-mail info@twc.org; their web site is at www.twc.org).

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LOOKING AT THE SCHOOLS

(Continued from page 33)

extent, black—fears emerge. Both groups believe integrated schools improve race relations and enhance their children's ability to thrive in a diverse world. But they are also wary of associated costs: that schools will be distracted from academics; that bitter disputes will emerge; that their own children will end up paying the price. Whites are fearful that integration will bring troubled children into local schools; blacks fear their children will be thrown into hostile and contentious school environments. Most parents want integration to occur naturally and are optimistic that things can improve. Ironically, relatively few have direct experience with efforts to achieve school integration.

- Nearly eight in ten African-American parents and close to seven in ten white parents say it is important that their own children's schools be racially integrated.
- About six in ten black and white parents favor achieving integration through magnet schools, and 69 percent of black and 60 percent of white parents favor "redrawing district lines to combine mostly black and mostly white districts into one district."
- Most black (73 percent) and white (65 percent) parents say black kids are usually the ones to bear the burden of integration.
- Sixty-nine percent of African-American parents and 62 percent of white parents say, "Efforts to integrate often backfire because white people end up leaving the schools or the communities that try to integrate."
- Sixty-nine percent of black and 81 percent of white parents say, "Given time, neighborhoods and schools will become more integrated on their own—you really can't force them."
- About seven in ten African-American (66 percent) and white (74 percent) parents consider themselves better than their parents at dealing with people of different races. And about half of parents in both groups think their kids do a better job than they do.

Finding Six Of Like Minds: African-American and White Parents Set an Agenda for Public Schools

Despite many differences in their experiences and concerns, white and African-American parents have strikingly similar visions of what it takes to educate kids: involved parents, top-notch staff, and schools that guarantee the basics, high academic expectations, standards, safety, and order. White and black parents also share considerable common ground over how to help black children and failing schools improve.

- Black and white parents come within five percentage points of each other on nine of twelve questions dealing with the absolutely essential characteristics of good schools, such as teaching good work habits,

teaching standard English, and guaranteeing safety and order.

- About nine in ten African-American (88 percent) and white (92 percent) parents say, "Kids learn best when their families stress the importance of education; respect for the value of school begins at home."
- Sixty-three percent of black and 76 percent of white parents think a student from a supportive family who attends a poor school is more likely to succeed than a student from a troubled family who goes to a poor school.
- Eighty-three percent of black and 67 percent of white parents say they need to keep a close eye on teachers and schools to make sure their kids are treated well.
- African-American parents are more likely than white parents to think it's absolutely essential for schools to expect all kids to go on to college (51 percent to 31 percent).
- Fifty-five percent of black and 52 percent of white parents say it is the responsibility of the family, not the school or society, to address the problem when black students underachieve.

When asked about ways to fix failing schools and help African-American students who are doing poorly in school, there is a great degree of consensus among African-American and white parents. Solutions—such as expanding preschool programs to help prepare low-income black children for school, requiring parents of failing students to attend programs to teach them how to help their children learn, and having tough repercussions for students in possession of drugs or weapons or who are persistent troublemakers—receive high levels of support from both groups of parents. Solutions that would give families financial aid so they could move their children from failing public schools to private schools and charter schools attract somewhat less support.

Final Thoughts

Quotes, soundbites, and news headlines related to race and education debates can lead those following the issue to sense a great divide between the hopes of African-American and white parents for our nation's schools. While *Time To Move On* outlines some important areas of difference, it also identifies the many areas in which black and white parents are in close agreement. Their agendas are clear: African-American and white parents want safe and orderly schools to provide a solid background in the basics, have higher academic standards overall, and strong teaching staffs; and they want parents to get involved. □

Copies of the study, which was carried out with funding from the W.K. Kellogg, Charles Stewart Mott, Rockefeller, and Surdna Foundations, are available from Public Agenda for \$12.50 (including shipping and handling). Complete questionnaire results may also be obtained from Public Agenda for \$42.50. For questions, contact Public Agenda (212/686-6610 or www.publicagenda.org).



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WEIGHING THE EVIDENCE

(Continued from page 23)

select are more likely to be high achievers in the first place.

We all know that private schools enjoy a luxury public schools don't: They can pick and choose their students, and they can get rid of students who are not working out. At the same time, almost every researcher agrees that a student's family background and prior academic achievement are two of the biggest predictors of success. On average, the higher parents' income and more advanced their education, the better their child will do in school. Similarly, the better a student has done in the past, the better that student will do in the future.

So it is hardly a surprise that researchers have found that once you account for these student background differences, the private/public achievement gap virtually disappears.²⁰ It's true there are private schools where students achieve at very high levels; on the other hand, there are also private schools where student achievement is poor. The same goes for public schools. But neither type of school, on average, produces higher student achievement than the other. These results simply compare public and private schools, independent of vouchers, but one would expect them to hold for a public school/voucher school comparison. So far, they do.

Evidence from the field. Achievement results from both the Milwaukee and Cleveland voucher programs have stirred heated debates, in part because the results are viewed as very important by voucher supporters and voucher skeptics alike. But overall, research to date strongly supports the view that voucher students attending private schools do not achieve better than comparable students in public schools.

In 1990, the state of Wisconsin commissioned Professor John Witte at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to conduct annual evaluations of the Milwaukee voucher program. After five years, Witte concluded that there were no achievement differences between voucher and comparable public school students.²¹

In August 1997, however, a Harvard professor and voucher advocate by the name of Paul Peterson attacked Witte and his work in the *Wall Street Journal* and elsewhere. Peterson called Witte's conclusions "worthless" and "harmful to ... children,"²² and he offered his own re-analysis of the Milwaukee data, which was highly favorable to vouchers.²³ Most researchers have since come to view Peterson's study as seriously flawed.²⁴ (Adding to suspicions was the revelation that Peterson's work was paid for by a pro-voucher foundation.²⁵) Unfortunately, the media's focus on the spectacle of the two battling professors has proved to be a distraction from the real issue of student achievement, with the result that Peterson probably retains more credibility—as one of the combatants in a novel battle—than he deserves.

There has also been another analysis of the Milwaukee data, this one conducted by Professor Cecilia Rouse of Princeton University.²⁶ Rouse's study has not gotten as much media attention as the Witte/Peterson feud, but her results and conclusions are important.

Rouse, who is neutral on vouchers, found that voucher students performed no better than Milwaukee public school students in reading, though they may have performed slightly better in math. However, when Rouse compared public school students in small classes to regular public school students and voucher students, she discovered that the public school students in small classes outperformed everyone. Rouse ends her discussion by warning that we have no reason to assume that vouchers are a panacea:

If we really want to "fix" our educational system, we need a better understanding of what makes a school successful, and not simply assume that market forces explain [student achievement] differences and are therefore the magic solution for public education.²⁷

Early evidence from the Cleveland voucher program also supports the view that vouchers are no magic bullet for raising student achievement. According to the evaluation conducted for the state by researchers at Indiana University (IU) and released last March, voucher students performed no better than comparable public school students during the first year of the program.²⁸ The second-year report is expected to be released sometime this fall.

Not surprisingly, Professor Peterson was also highly critical of IU's findings, firing off op-eds to the *Washington Post* and local Cleveland papers.²⁹ But forewarned is forearmed, and this time, policymakers and academics took steps to head off another Milwaukee-style debate. In July, the director of the state legislative committee overseeing the voucher evaluation advised other committee members to disregard Peterson's criticisms:

When reviewed by those familiar with statistical methods, Dr. Peterson's criticisms [of the IU study] were seen as unfounded and as serving only to discredit the independent evaluation team because he did not like its findings. The methods used by Indiana University evaluators are viewed as appropriate and credible by disinterested scholars.³⁰

Dr. Kim Metcalf, the lead researcher of the IU team, also issued a swift rebuttal.³¹ Noting that "much of [Peterson's] earlier work on the voucher issue has been debunked by the research community," he raised the possibility that Peterson and his colleagues are "engaged in a deliberate effort to misrepresent the Cleveland data in order to influence educational policy." And Metcalf made a plea for "unbiased, objective" research on vouchers, not "advocacy in the guise of science." So far, there is no "unbiased, objective" research proving that vouchers help students learn better.

No bargain. Some argue that even if voucher students are doing about the same as public school students, vouchers will save taxpayers a lot of money because private schools educate children for considerably less money than public schools. One problem with this argument is it ignores the fact that the public already foots part of the bill for educating children in private schools.

For years, private schools nationwide have benefited from tax-funded state and federal education programs (e.g., Title I), as well as tax-deductible contributions

from outside sources (which means less money for the public treasury). When calculating the full cost of vouchers to the public, these government subsidies must be added to the cost of the vouchers themselves.

Furthermore, private schools provide a different mix of student services than public schools. Whereas most public school districts are required to provide important and costly services such as special education, vocational education, transportation, and food and health programs, most private schools are not and do not.

How do voucher schools stack up against public schools cost-wise when these factors are taken into account? Professor Levin conducted such an analysis for Milwaukee and concluded that, once you compare expenditures and services in public and private schools, a voucher costs taxpayers about as much as educating children in the public schools, and perhaps a little more: "Voucher schools in Milwaukee are receiving at least comparable allocations per student to those of the Milwaukee public schools, once the service mix is accounted for."³²

Finally, such a private-public cost analysis says nothing about the potentially exorbitant costs of properly administering a voucher program. Voucher supporters often like to say that vouchers will get rid of the expensive bureaucracy that afflicts public schools. But Levin estimates that, on top of the costs of the vouchers themselves, it would cost at least \$48 billion to put in place a national voucher system with adequate procedures and mechanisms, including those for record keeping and monitoring, information dissemination, transportation, and a means of adjudicating disputes.³³ (And if students who now go to private school are allowed to receive vouchers, Levin says we should be prepared to tack on another \$25 billion to overall costs.)

Administrators of the Cleveland voucher program have learned the hard way about the importance of having good procedures. In 1997-98, the two-year-old program went 41 percent over budget, forcing the state to take \$2.9 million from the money allocated to support public schools.³⁴ Overruns are expected this year, too. What's wrong? In addition to using poor budget estimates, an independent audit reported that during the first year of the program, the program may have misspent \$1.9 million in state tax dollars. Many of these questionable costs came from using taxis instead of buses to get voucher recipients to school; and as a result of poor record keeping, some vouchers went to children who were not eligible.³⁵

The moral of the story: If you don't spend money up front to create and carry out sound administrative procedures, you're likely to pay the price down the road on things like unnecessary taxi rides. Either way, even a small voucher program can't be run on the cheap. And if voucher supporters plan to extend vouchers to any who care to participate, the costs would be staggering.

The Accountability Argument

A final argument commonly voiced by voucher advocates is that the public school monopoly, as they often call it, is shockingly unresponsive to taxpayers.

Only a free-market system involving some form of vouchers, they say, can break up this monopoly and make schools more accountable to the public.

This argument ignores some obvious facts about school accountability. We may argue over whether public schools are held accountable enough, but one fact is indisputable: At least they *can* be held accountable. Public schools must follow regulations about curriculum and teacher credentials, and they are required to publish information about student performance, good or bad. Moreover, public schools are run by democratically elected officials. If voters don't think public schools are making the grade, they can and should boot out their elected representatives and replace them with folks better suited to get the job done.

In contrast, most private school voucher plans would make it impossible for taxpayers to judge whether they're getting their money's worth. That's because the business of private schools, by definition, is none of our business. Unless, of course, private and religious schools are willing to become something other than private and independent—an unlikely scenario.

What the public wants vs. what private schools want. One of the biggest misconceptions about private schools is that they are already required to meet strict academic and financial standards. In truth, private schools have almost complete autonomy with regard to student admissions, teacher hiring and firing, what they teach, and how they measure student achievement (if at all). Moreover, they do not have to make public any information on student test scores, school governance, or finances.³⁶

As private schools, they have a right to this freedom. But if these schools decide to accept public dollars under a voucher system, should they still be allowed to operate without any public scrutiny?

The public, at least, has already made up its mind on this question: If private schools accept public dollars, they must be held accountable for the use of these dollars, just as public schools are. One of the main reasons Proposition 174, the California voucher initiative, failed in 1993 was voters' uneasiness about spending public money in schools where there was no oversight and no accountability.

Several recent polls also reveal strong support for accountability. For example, *Phi Delta Kappan's* 1998 education poll found growing public support (44 percent) for "allowing students and parents to choose a private school...at public expense." However, it also found that 75 percent of the public believes that "private or church-related schools that accept government tuition payments should be accountable to the state in the way public schools are accountable."³⁷

A 1998 poll by Peter Hart Associates, commissioned by the AFT, invited respondents to be more specific about the level of accountability they wanted from voucher schools. It found that more than 80 percent believed it was "essential" or "important" that private voucher schools "meet state curriculum standards"; "employ only certified teachers"; "administer the same standardized tests" as public schools; "disclose their budget"; and serve special education students.³⁸ And a

1998 survey limited to Wisconsin and Ohio conducted by the Public Policy Forum found that taxpayers in these states also expect voucher schools to admit students randomly, not selectively.³⁹

However, despite the public's documented demand for accountability, many voucher advocates insist that the very idea of oversight is contrary to the free-market principles that should govern voucher schools. These schools, they say, must be unrestricted and unregulated—free to stand or fall according to whether or not they get customers. And established private schools, accustomed to their autonomy, are equally unwilling to surrender any of it.

Warning: Danger ahead. The past experiences and future course of the Milwaukee voucher program shed some light on the accountability dilemma and its real-world costs for children and taxpayers. From the start, voucher schools in Milwaukee have been subject to very few accountability standards. The results have been what you might expect. Over the first eight years of the program, five voucher schools shut down, three in the middle of the school year, amid charges of fraud and mismanagement. Although parents, by and large, indicated that they were pleased with the voucher schools, student attrition rates were very high: Nearly one-third of the voucher students, on average, dropped out of the program each year.⁴⁰

This instability prompted some parents and community leaders, led by Polly Williams, to call for more accountability. "If you want to get public tax dollars, you have to be open to public scrutiny. You can't just give out public dollars with no oversight," Williams argued.⁴¹ As we've already seen, however, this call for accountability fell on deaf ears.

Recently upheld amendments to the Wisconsin voucher legislation strengthen accountability in the voucher schools—but not much. Under the new law, these schools must: (1) Admit students randomly, if demand exceeds available slots (with exceptions for existing students and their siblings); (2) Submit an independent financial audit each year; and (3) In the case of religious schools, allow students, at their parents' request, to "opt out" of religious instruction and activities.

Significantly, voucher schools continue to face *no* requirements regarding student performance, curriculum, or teacher certification. And although regulations say that voucher schools, by law, can't discriminate in admissions on the basis of disability, they are not required to provide special education services—the effect being that parents with special needs children steer clear of, or are steered away from, voucher schools. Finally, the new law eliminated annual performance evaluations of the program, so the public—which is, after all, paying the bill—will have no way of knowing how voucher students as a whole are doing compared to public school students.

At the same time, the new law dramatically expanded the program, allowing as many as 15,000 students (up from a maximum of 1,500) to participate. State officials report that there are not nearly enough empty spaces in existing private schools to accommo-

date 15,000 students (even with the addition of religious schools).⁴² Therefore, in order for the program to achieve maximum enrollment, brand new private schools—i.e., schools with no educational or financial track record—will have to spring up to fill the void. Given the program's history so far, it's likely that a substantial portion of these start-up private schools will fail unless the Wisconsin Legislature takes swift action to bolster accountability provisions.

But will policy makers act? It seems unlikely, given a recent duel between private schools and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), which is in charge of running the voucher program. Responding to a court order, DPI attempted last July to require that voucher schools comply with basic federal and state laws that guarantee students' rights—including those prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and religion, and guaranteeing due process in the case of expulsion.⁴³

But private schools balked at being bound by such laws, and voucher advocates complained. "The purpose of the choice program was not to make the private schools public schools," Howard Fuller, a leading Milwaukee voucher advocate, protested.⁴⁴

Eventually, DPI conceded and struck a deal: The department would send voucher schools a letter advising them that these student rights apply, but it would not require them to comply with the laws.⁴⁵ Of course, such a solution does nothing to protect students' rights or to head off expensive and divisive lawsuits down the road.

In sum, advocates claim that vouchers will strengthen accountability. But the better question is not whether a voucher system will bring more accountability, but whether it will provide *any* at all. On the one hand, the public realizes and past experience suggests that in order for voucher systems to be accountable, private schools that accept public dollars must be required to meet certain financial and academic standards. On the other hand, private schools and free-market enthusiasts have successfully resisted even the most basic standards, making the prospects of accountability appear dim. As this tug of war continues, children and taxpayers will be the big losers.

The Court of Public Opinion

The court cases dealing with the Milwaukee and Cleveland voucher programs could be decided either for or against vouchers and so could a Supreme Court case. But even if the nation's high court upholds religious school vouchers in the Milwaukee case, such a decision would only mean that vouchers are a *legal* idea, not a good idea. Similarly, even if the court strikes down the Milwaukee law, vouchers to private nonreligious schools could still continue. Moreover, unless the decision is very broad, which is probably doubtful, the issue will certainly come up again in one or more future cases.

The fate of vouchers rests not so much in a court of law as it does in the court of public opinion. Both the Milwaukee and Cleveland "experiments" are growing quickly, and proposals to extend vouchers to other cities abound. Does the evidence justify the expan-

sion—or even continued existence—of vouchers?

So far, we know that both the Milwaukee and Cleveland programs have favored relatively advantaged students, leaving the most disadvantaged students in public schools with even fewer resources. At the same time, both programs have failed to boost the achievement of the students they have reached, while costing taxpayers millions of dollars. Finally, both programs have caused lots of community strife over such wrenching issues as who gets vouchers; how publicly funded voucher schools should be held accountable; and whether taxpayers should be forced to pay for the teaching of religious doctrines with which they may disagree (the crux of the legal argument over religious school vouchers).

In light of what we know so far, it seems that the best—if not only—defense of the Cleveland and Milwaukee voucher programs boils down to the old stand by: “It’s still too early. We need more time to see if vouchers work” (an argument seemingly at odds with the Wisconsin Legislature’s decision to eliminate performance evaluations of the Milwaukee program).

Perhaps this argument could stand if vouchers were the only option we had for improving the achievement of America’s children, particularly poor children. But they clearly are not. Many other approaches to boosting academic achievement, including full-day preschool and kindergarten, smaller class size, and academic programs like Success for All, have already demonstrated a multi-year track record of success. In this era of scarce resources, we have to make tough choices: Every dollar that goes to “test” an unproven voucher program is one less dollar that could have been used to implement a proven reform in the public schools. (For example, the \$10 million spent on Cleveland vouchers last year could have been used to implement Success for All in each of Cleveland’s 80 public elementary schools, with about \$6 million left over to reduce class size.)⁴⁶

Limited voucher programs that involve only a fraction of the students in a school district—the kind we’ve seen in Cleveland and Milwaukee—don’t raise some of the larger questions about vouchers that would come into play with a nationwide, universal system. Questions like: Could the country afford vouchers? Would they impoverish and fatally cripple the public schools? Would they widen the divisions in our society by inviting each group to educate its own children in its own schools and thus contribute to unraveling our pluralistic society?

But what we can plainly see, if we examine the evidence from Cleveland and Milwaukee, is that these programs do not produce what they promise. They do not work on their own terms. In the scientific community, when an experiment fails, responsible scientists cut their losses before wasting any more time, energy, or money. In the education community, where the stakes are so high, and where other, proven reforms have already achieved what vouchers only promise, we have to hope that a careful review of the evidence will lead the public and policymakers to render a similar verdict: It’s time to pull the plug on vouchers. □

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WORK

(Continued from page 29)

neither did many of my friends who went on to live productive, successful lives as adults simply because it was expected of us. At Rheedlen we have tried to create an environment that puts the same positive pressure on young people that many of us felt at home as children.

We have tried to make the connection between work and school real for young people at an early age. While teenagers might not have figured out what passing tenth-grade English has to do with being employable later on in life, they know that passing that class has everything to do with keeping a job today. And we have found that the best way to get our young people to go on to college is for everybody to simply expect him or her to do so. So starting in their junior year at high school, they begin to field questions from the professional staff at Rheedlen about their plans after graduation. By their senior year, everyone at Rheedlen, including the secretarial staff, begins to ask about young peoples' plans for college. They are harangued about taking the SATs and filling out financial aid forms. When all of the adults around you believe you can do something, like going to college, pretty soon you begin to believe it also. So most of our young people, with help from us, go through the process of applying to college, filling out forms, writing personal statements—and lo and behold, most are accepted somewhere. (If they are accepted to a college in New York City, they usually end up keeping their jobs with Rheedlen, but the same rules applies—they do so only if they are in school.)

My grandfather and grandmother passed away years ago, and the house they built was sold. Every now and then I drive out to Wyandanch, past the house, just to look at it. The maple trees we planted thirty years ago as saplings are now huge trees. The house shows some signs of wear and tear, but the lawn is even. And each time I drive by I remember that the lessons I learned from my grandmother about work were good, honest, universal lessons that all of us need to learn. We should view work, hard work, as a necessary rite of passage for boys early in their lives. We must teach them that there is nothing demeaning in working hard, whether it's for money or not.

And we must rethink our roles in providing jobs for young people. Schools, businesses, government, and private citizens must participate in new ways to provide training, work opportunities, and job mentoring. We know that increasingly in our country jobs require more training and educational experience, higher standards of performance, and the ability to adapt to changing global forces in the labor market. Preparing poor boys in particular to compete in this environment will not be easy. It will call for new strategies and investments of money and our own energy. It will take time. If we are committed and thoughtful—if, like my grandmother taught, we do the best we can from beginning to middle to end—we can make the choices today that will mean that for all boys the lawn will still be even thirty years from now. And we can take pride in a job well done. □

FAR AND WIDE

(Continued from page 11)

As more programs are developed in response to the demand, developers are likely to find that, if they can establish their programs' effectiveness, they will be more competitive. If that happens, schools will have what is now seldom available to them: rigorous program evaluations that compare the achievement gains of schools using a particular design with matched control schools. This, in turn, will provide an impetus for independent evaluations, including studies carried out by states and large districts. If this supply-and-demand process works as it should, the result will be better and better programs that have to meet ever-higher standards of effectiveness and replicability.

It is not certain, of course, that CSRSD will succeed. Without careful attention to the quality of implementation of the programs adopted and without a toughening over time of the standards used to determine that programs are instructionally effective, CSRSD could become just one more federal program shoveling money into the schools with little result. Lawmakers should be eager, long before that happens, to insist on more rigorous standards. Indeed, if the process of toughening standards takes too long, the program could also be dangerously weakened. Yet there is an exciting potential for fundamental change if states, districts, and schools understand the need for demanding proven programs—and the danger of taking promotional brochures at face value—and if they use the CSRSD process as a means of setting high standards for educational innovation.

If the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program does succeed, it could be the model for even more far-reaching change. In 1999, Title I will be up for reauthorization. At \$8 billion, Title I is by far the largest resource for change in high-poverty schools. Historically, Title I was used for remedial services, but increasingly it has been used to enable schools to adopt programs that affect the entire school. Again, if CSRSD develops the rigorous standards for program adoption that it needs, the effect on achievement in Title I schools could be momentous.

The Memphis City school system is likely to be a test ground for whole-school reform. Beginning in 1995, Memphis implemented a variety of New American Schools programs, plus two others. Additional schools will participate each year until all the schools have chosen a new program. An independent evaluation of achievement outcomes on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) found that, across the board, elementary schools in Memphis implementing comprehensive designs experienced substantially greater gains than a matched control group, than other Memphis schools, and than Tennessee schools generally.⁵ We will have to await further evaluations to assess the relative success and lasting impact of the various models. However, the results of dozens of studies of individual programs that we already have give us a picture of what the Memphis results are likely to be. These studies demonstrate the potential of comprehensive reform designs that have a solid research base to substantially improve student achievement. In general, the programs that produce the largest and

most consistent learning gains are those that are most completely worked out.⁶ These are programs that are more than just good ideas. Instead, they incorporate materials, assessments, teaching manuals, training procedures, and other resources and supports to facilitate high-quality implementation.

Bringing Education into the Twentieth Century

At the dawn of the 21st century, it's time that education reform enters the 20th. In technology, medicine, agriculture, engineering, and other fields, a process of development, evaluation, and dissemination continually improves products and techniques. Professionals make choices among a variety of proven, effective materials and strategies, and then apply them as appropriate to various situations. In contrast, education reform goes from fad to fad, with little attention to rigorous evidence. This must change if education reform is to make substantial progress over time. The development and dissemination of whole-school reform programs, the passage of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration, and other developments bring us an important step closer to reform based on evidence rather than fashion. We're moving beyond islands of excellence and beginning to learn how to make what is now extraordinary the norm. Our children deserve no less.

The message of this article is one of hope and urgency. Schools can do a much better job of educating all students, especially low-income and minority students, using methods and materials that are readily available. There are approaches that are effective and appropriate for a wide variety of objectives. The existence of these approaches demonstrates that the low achievement of so many students placed at risk is not inevitable. We need not wait for social or political transformation to dramatically improve educational outcomes for students at risk of school failure. If we were to use what we know now about programs that work, we could make an enormous difference in the lives of all our children. □

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⁶Bodilly (1998); Slavin and Fashola (1998).



CHOOSING SUCCESS

(Continued from page 17)

haul as a benefit rather than a cost.)

■ Adequate technical assistance. What kind of help can you expect from the group providing the program? Will there be enough technical assistance so the people in your school will understand the program's broad design and get the specific skills they need to make it work? Some programs do not offer any help at all. If you are interested in such a program, ask yourself if it is likely to take hold in your school without outside support. You should know, too, that some programs are growing so rapidly that they are hard-pressed to give the kind of help a school may need. Other programs' offerings, however excellent, are expensive, although they may offer special considerations to districts that involve several schools simultaneously.

■ Missed opportunities. An important intangible is the other opportunities you may be giving up in order to implement this program. Are there equally defensible uses of the school's time? Better ones? If yes, what is the justification for embarking on a project that will consume time, money, and energy?

Finally, most reforms involve some kind of tradeoff. Here are some you should be aware of as you consider a program for your school:

■ Organizational reforms vs. curriculum reforms. If a reform changes school organization—substituting, for example, a traditional organization in which the principal makes all the important school decisions with a school council organization where power is shared with teachers and perhaps parents—this is likely to involve human costs, but it rarely adds financial burdens to a school. Changing curricula is almost always expensive, both in terms of new materials needed and the professional development needed to prepare the teachers to teach the new program.

■ Reforms that involve the entire faculty vs. those that don't. If a reform involves only part of the faculty, training costs less and the people who don't care to participate simply don't—that is the up side. On the down side, such reforms often lead to charges of special treatment and them vs. us attitudes. Also, it is worth remembering that students experience the whole school, not a part. The Obey-Porter amendments, described in the previous article, clearly favor whole-school and presumably, whole-faculty designs.

■ Specified vs. "constructivist" reforms: Reforms that are highly specified—that is, they spell out the curriculum and materials to be used and even teaching strategies in considerable detail—are often perceived as requiring more work and more change. If implemented in any credible fashion, however, a constructivist approach is usually much more work. It often requires the people involved to both create a curriculum and then figure out how to put it into practice. Human and financial costs of a specified approach are typically front-loaded (that is, they are relatively obvious, and many of them come with an up-front price tag).

By contrast, costs of a constructivist approach are typically back-loaded (e.g., their

human and fiscal costs, which may not be apparent at the beginning, become obvious over time).

Every month, a half-dozen different magazines trumpet the joys and advantages of new reforms. The quotations from enthusiastic teachers and photographs of engaged students can be very seductive. So can the promotional materials from the developers of these programs. But even after you've discounted the hype, sifted the wheat from the chaff, and found a program that seems well suited to your school and its resources, you need to think hard about whether the people whose effort will make the program work have the will to commit and stay committed to a particular design for at least three to five years. If not, I advise against starting. Reform is hard, slow work. There's no gain to be had, and substantial loss of faculty morale, when you change reforms every few years. The will to stay the course is itself a scarce resource that needs to be carefully allocated.

As the above pages make soberingly clear, the efforts required to choose, implement, and institutionalize a school restructuring design are substantial. The benefits to students and professionals, however, can be equally great. In every profession and every industry, the press in the 1990s is for "continuous improvement." Schools need to be in the forefront of this movement instead of lagging far behind.

Examine your options aggressively. If you choose a reform program, implement your choice relentlessly. And as the old cowboys used to say, "When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on!" Education reform makes for a very educational, but sometimes very bumpy, ride. □

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LETTERS

(Continued from page 3)

I am a first-grade teacher at Mary Innes Primary School in Dillon, Montana. A copy of your informative magazine was given to me by a friend for review. I found the articles to be very applicable to my current needs as a reading teacher. It was especially rewarding to read about the need for decoding skills and phonics in the early grades. During my twenty-five years of teaching I have witnessed these ideas being sent to the back burner. Thank goodness they are being stressed again.

We will use your magazine as a resource in our Dillon primary grades, Title I program, and resource classes. Our school has twenty-four teachers and principals who are interested in reading and using the information in your magazine. I feel that parents will also benefit from its ideas and current research. I can assure you that many healthy discussions will come from the use of your magazine in the Dillon Public Schools and that it will

greatly enhance our reading curriculum.

—MARY ROUSE
Dillon, MT

Praise and laurels to you for your latest issue on reading. It is complete, insightful, and very comprehensible. As soon as I received it, I knew it was *exactly* what I needed for the literacy trainings we would offer our district's ESL teachers this school year. I must tell you I've already made notes as to which quotes I'd use as transparencies, which articles would serve as readings for workshops. It has been an invaluable resource to me.

Let me say a word about the photographs—they cover the ages and pull up all the feelings we have as readers: confidence and engagement, pleasure and relaxation, sharing with our children and the children of others, and isolated retreats into ourselves.

—JEAN A. ANDERSON
Fort Lauderdale, FL

What an excellent issue on reading! The Albuquerque public schools'

long-range focus is on literacy. We would like to have individual copies for each of the teachers in the Strategic Professional Development Department; Curriculum Department; and Research, Development and Accountability Department, as these three departments work together to support our schools in the development and implementation of their schoolwide literacy plans. Would it be possible to send one hundred complimentary copies to our district? Thank you for considering this request.

—PAT DEAN
ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Albuquerque, NM

This letter is to confirm our telephone discussion today in which I requested one hundred copies of *American Educator*. I intend to share this excellent issue with a number of individuals statewide who work with the efforts of the Governor's Business Council and the Governor's Focus on Reading Task Force. In fact, you will find it interesting that after I spoke with you, I went to a lunch at which two individuals had brought copies of the magazine for me to see and they, too, wanted more copies. When I got back to the office, I had a fax on my machine with the editorial introduction from your magazine. Obviously, you have generated much interest in Texas. If you could see your way clear to send more than one hundred copies I would sincerely appreciate it. They would be put to good use. Thanks again for your help.

—BETH ANN BRYAN
Advisor to the Governor's Business Council
Houston, TX

Please send me a copy of the Spring/Summer issue of *American Educator*. I received mine, took it with me on vacation, and it got soaked on the beach. The tide came in while I was sleeping. The magazine got wet, and even after it dried out I wasn't able to separate the pages. I had read some of the article "Catch Them before They Fall" and it was excellent. The whole issue looked exceptional.

If you could send two copies, I'll pass one on to my nephew who will begin his teaching career this month. He is so excited!

—MARY DWIGHT
Euclid, OH

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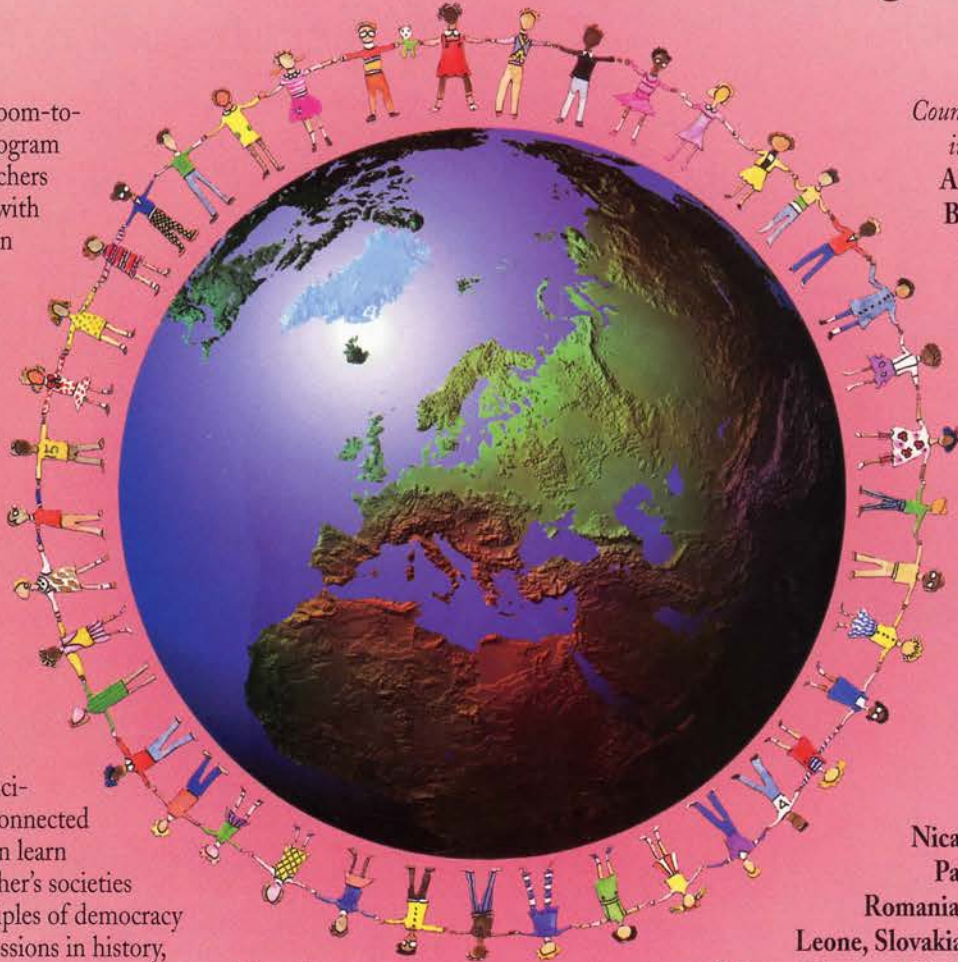
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