

AMERICAN Educator

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
SPRING 2007

Real Support for Really Struggling Schools



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when boys grow up too soon

WHAT EDUCATORS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PRECOCIOUS PUBERTY IN BOYS



Does one of your students appear to be reaching puberty too quickly— perhaps far sooner than children his own age? This may be the result of a rare medical condition known as precocious puberty.

Is he acting aggressively or inappropriately?

Is he showing signs of early physical development such as facial and underarm hair?

Is he unusually tall for his age?

Does he have acne?

Is his voice deepening?

Does he get into fights or not listen to instructions?

A rare medical condition known as precocious puberty may lead to aggressive behavior, facial hair, and acne. Maturing early might not sound like a big concern. But precocious puberty may cause serious difficulties for boys.

Difficulties in school

Boys with precocious puberty are often overly aggressive, which can lead to problems in school. Some parents and teachers mistake this condition for ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).

Threats to self-esteem

All children want to fit in—to look and feel like others their age. Early puberty can make boys feel embarrassed as they outgrow their friends and show signs of sexual maturity at an early age.

What is early puberty?

Hormones control many of the body's functions including the physical changes that happen in the preteen and teen years. These include rapid growth in height, development of the sexual organs, appearance of body hair and acne, development of muscles, and deepening of the voice. When the body starts producing certain hormones too early in life, these physical changes can occur well before they are supposed to occur. This condition is known as precocious puberty, and the medical term for it is "testotoxicosis." In boys with this condition, these changes can sometimes begin as early as age 2.

A clinical study is available

AstraZeneca is conducting a clinical research study for testotoxicosis, a form of precocious puberty. Boys with this condition may be eligible for enrollment in the trial if they are at least 2 years of age and meet certain medical requirements.

Patients who are accepted into the study will receive the study drugs free of cost. They will also receive free, annual study-related follow-up visits until they achieve their final adult height.

If you believe a student may have precocious puberty, please contact the AstraZeneca Information Center at **800-236-9933** for more information suitable for sharing with parents.

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Diane Ravitch Hits a Nerve

I am writing in
response to the quote from
Diane Ravitch on the cover of your
Winter 2006-2007 magazine. As an
educator for several years in the North
Florida inner-city schools, I can tell
you with all sincerity, low scores *are*
due to a weak curriculum, too much
paper work, too many extra meet-
ings and workshops, and too many
special-needs students who do not
receive adequate help in regular edu-
cation classrooms.

In my school district, the educa-
tional leaders are steadily requiring
teachers to attend repeated, unneces-
sary workshops, which take us away
from quality class time with our stu-
dents. Most of the students from the
inner-city do not have the same sup-
port system at home as the middle-
and upper-class students. This puts
an extra burden on teachers who have
to spend longer hours preparing for
these students, and extra time helping
to build these students' background
knowledge. I am not saying these stu-
dents are not capable of learning. But,
they are so behind when they come to
us that we cannot follow the district's
weak curriculum.

If the students are to pass any dis-
trict/state-required tests, we have



to consider the fact that
some children are not
equipped to pass; the only
way we will reach these
students is by being given
enough time to spend with them one-
on-one in the classroom, and in small
group settings teaching and drilling
on their weak skills.

—ANONYMOUS TEACHER

Thank You Mr. Martel

I am writing in response to your article
in the Winter 2006-2007 issue, "Pro-
tecting Academic Standards: How My
Union Makes It Possible." The author,
Erich Martel, taught me senior year AP
U.S. History at Woodrow Wilson High
during the 1994-1995 school year.

I am currently a teacher with union
membership in the Albuquerque
Public Schools, and I too teach his-
tory, albeit at the middle-school level.
I read some information regarding Mr.
Martel's investigation of fraudulently
issued diplomas over the last several
years, and I think the article is a testa-
ment to his integrity, persistence, and
loyalty to teaching.

What strikes me most about this
article is his perseverance in uphold-
ing all that we as teachers stand for
regarding academic integrity—that
students get credit when credit is
earned. Students at my former high

school stole credit with the assistance of the administration. Without Mr. Martel's pursuit, countless more graduates would walk across the stage without earning the proper credits. Despite his efforts, it seems students will continue receiving illegitimate diplomas and a fraudulent academic foundation.

His article is a call for teachers to demand accountability from their administration for the proper upkeep of academic records and adherence to grading policies of their respective districts. Mr. Martel was punished for his actions by being stripped of his AP classes. I am pleased the union has helped him tackle this issue. Hopefully the union can lobby for him to regain his AP classes and restore credence to the diploma.

I appreciate Mr. Martel's guidance as a teacher, his calm demeanor, and vast knowledge of history. He truly does have the "in-depth knowledge" to prepare students for the AP exam. I aspire to be the teacher he is, and I know, and continue to appreciate since finishing his class, he is making a difference in students' lives.

—JASON FABRIKANT, JD
*Jimmy Carter Middle School
Albuquerque, N.M.*

Erich Martel demonstrates a scenario that, in greater or less measure, affects all of us who are teaching on the high-school level. Parents and students may seek passing grades and graduation without the student meeting performance standards, but administrators who change earned grades as described are morally bankrupt.

—SYDNEY J. CHASE
*Central Visual & Performing Arts H.S.
St. Louis, Mo.*

Librarians Are Key to Recreational Reading

As I read about the Reading Academy's efforts to improve students' reading (Winter 2006-2007), I noticed one child's eager comments about how he could now "read any kind of books—*Goosebumps* books, I like them, and one of my favorite books is *Charlotte's Web*." This little boy is talking about reading library books, not textbooks. But the importance of school librarians

is too often ignored.

A school is lucky to have even one full-time librarian, who usually works alone moving books from the review pages of *School Library Journal* to the child or teen who needs them for a report or for recreational reading, or to the teacher who needs them to supplement the textbook when teaching a lesson.

Reading scores improve dramatically when students engage in recreational reading. The school librarian is often the person, especially in the case of students from low-income homes, who introduces children to the joys of recreational reading. Unfortunately, it seems like few school boards or school administrators (my high school's principal being a notable exception) seem to care about strengthening or even maintaining their libraries or hiring sufficient qualified staff to run them.

—PAM KANE
*Librarian at Lane Tech High School
Chicago, Ill.*

Support for Education Professionals

I belong to many professional organizations in addition to the AFT, and the *American Educator* is by far the most helpful subscription for my practice as a classroom teacher that I receive. Thank you for reminding me every quarter that we are highly-educated and valued professionals. Whenever I am feeling down about my career, I open an *American Educator* and instantly I am recommitted to my students and colleagues.

—LOUISE YAKEE
*Levy Middle School
Syracuse, N.Y.*

I want to thank you for the excellent article by Daniel Willingham on reading comprehension strategies (Winter 2006-2007). I have often questioned the value of teaching the "strategies" multiple times and his analysis of the research showing that they are "easy to learn and require little practice" matches my experience.

Also, with regard to "The Teacher Experience Gap: Recognize the Real Cause," I would like to see a study on teacher transfers that separates years

of teaching and effective teaching. My observation is that at least some newer teachers who transfer out of high-poverty schools are excellent teachers who want to spend more of their time teaching rather than on behavior management. Too many of our high-poverty schools have administrators who fail to provide a school environment where teachers can teach, that is, where an effective schoolwide behavior plan, supported by the parents, is in place and where all staff members support each other. I suspect that really good teachers are willing to teach in any school where their efforts are supported and where they feel safe.

—ROBERT RUTH
*Alice Fong Yu Elementary
San Francisco, Calif.*

Music Entertains—and Educates

High praise for the terrific story on music education in the Fall 2006 issue ("The Neglected Muse: Why Music Is an Essential Liberal Art"). It was refreshing to read an article that could serve as a philosophical primer for all teachers, while challenging and stimulating one's intellect.

My mentors, when I was a young teacher, focused on the aesthetic as the main goal in teaching music students. It is tremendously difficult to translate that abstract ideal into action in a classroom setting. It is somewhat easier to bring beauty to a performance class of skilled students.

In either case, a committed and wise teacher needs to be leading the way. In my 42 years as an educator, I've known few with the "moxie" to demand a high level of performance. More and more, administrators and parents are looking to music study as an activity, rather than a part of the core of a humanities-driven education.

Bravo to author Peter Kalkavage, who synthesized these abstract ideals for your readers, for me, and for my colleagues. I sincerely hope that many superintendents and principals have digested his message too.

—JOHN WHITNEY
*Music Director, Southern Tier Symphony
Olean, N.Y.*

Get Real

Here's the Boost that Poor Children, Their Teachers, and Their Schools Really Need

By Antonia Cortese

By the time children from low-income homes enter school, they are, on average, already far behind their middle-class peers. At the beginning of kindergarten, disadvantaged children are three times more likely than other children to score in the bottom quartile on assessments of reading, math, and general knowledge. In terms of specific skills, they are much less likely than their more advantaged peers to be able to identify the letters of the alphabet or to count beyond 10.¹

But the actual challenge they face is even greater: The same home and community factors that lead to the school-entry achievement gap are at work over the summer. Middle- and upper-class children not only enter kindergarten knowing more, they continue learning more every summer.² As a result, although the evidence indicates that in school, poor, middle-class, and wealthy children actually learn at about the same pace, by fourth grade, students from low-income families are nearly three grade levels below their peers in reading and about two grade levels below their peers in math.³

Think about that. On average, disadvantaged children make as much progress in school as their more middle-class peers. They are typically not behind because they have had worse teachers or attended worse schools, but because they entered school way behind. Unless these children are provided a much better-than-average, highly accelerated education, they will leave school behind, just as they entered. Simply legislating that they, and their teachers, make better-than-average progress won't change this reality. If we truly want to close the achievement gap,

Antonia Cortese is executive vice president of the American Federation of Teachers. This article is based on remarks she made at AFT's Winter 2007 Executive Council Meeting.

we have to find ways to make sure these children get a better-than-average education. They will need more, and they will need better: time, teachers, effective methods—the best we have to offer.

Meeting the challenge is partly going to be the work of the educational research community, who must continue to find more effective approaches to teaching and schooling. And, an important part of the answer is to be found outside the schools,⁴ in better healthcare, nutrition, and housing, and in community-based initiatives to enhance parenting skills.

But even as educational researchers try to find better answers and as we all push for more equity in social policy, there is an enormous amount that we can do now. Much trustworthy research has already identified five essential steps we should take: 1) Focus on teaching quality, and in particular, create the conditions and incentives that would stem the exodus of teachers from high-poverty schools and attract qualified teachers to them; 2) Improve student behavior by using effective approaches in the earliest grades to establish a positive, respectful school culture; 3) Diagnose reading problems early and intervene right away; 4) Provide a knowledge-rich, grade-by-grade core curriculum; and 5) Make sure that the schools that serve the neediest students get the extra attention, expertise, staff, time, and resources they need to meet the greater challenges they face.

1. Focus on teaching quality: Right now, high-poverty, low-achieving schools across the country are losing good teachers.⁵ We know from survey data that teachers leave these schools at higher rates than they leave other schools because of such issues as poor school leadership, inadequate support for kids who need it, severe problems with student discipline, inadequate facilities, etc.⁶ In short,



they leave because the conditions make it impossible for them to do the job they want to do.⁷ This turnover typically means a less cohesive and a less experienced staff. How can we stem this turnover? What would attract teachers to the great challenge of teaching in these schools?

Certainly a substantial salary increase would be part of any solution. But, survey data as well as conversations with scores of teachers make it clear that increased pay alone will not suffice.⁸ Teachers are more likely to come and stay if the school is known to have an effective principal, good facilities, exciting opportunities for professional development and collaboration, a voice in decision-making, and the staff and resources to quickly and effectively provide the one-on-one and small group work necessary to help struggling students. In addition to these basics, what's necessary to attract teachers to a district's toughest schools inevitably varies from district to district. In some cases, the most appealing incentives might also include tuition reimbursement and assistance with reaching out to parents; in others, pension credits and opportunities to transfer as a group along with other qualified colleagues would work. Who knows best what will work? Teachers in the district. So, the best incentives will be those that are negotiated between the teachers union that knows its members and the district. In the ABC school district in southern California, the negotiated contract provides \$5,000 to new hires, which can be used to defray the high housing and transportation costs that come with teaching there, and entry salaries that are in the area's top quartile. Today, there are no "hard-to-staff" schools in ABC. Federal and state funds can support such district/union efforts.

It's also important to identify and attract a good number of highly skilled teachers to these schools. The wrong way to identify such teachers (or conversely, to identify weak teachers) is solely through the narrow lens of student test scores. Testing technology is simply not sophisticated enough to be used that way. Imagine, for example, if the medical profession just looked at raw morbidity and mortality data when determining whether or not surgeons are effective. Surgeons that take the toughest cases would likely be accused of being ineffective, and many would avoid such work. As a result, patients in need of very complicated surgery would have a hard time finding a good surgeon to treat them. Clearly, any time professionals—be they surgeons or teachers—are being judged, the whole picture must be considered.

In contrast to identifying teachers based on such narrow and flawed means, a well-designed career ladder can be an excellent way to build broad teacher knowledge and leadership *and* identify, in a fair, credible way, teachers who desire and are well suited (by experience, skill, knowledge, and classroom effectiveness) to take up the unique challenge of accelerating academic progress as never before. Of course, there are many ways to create a career ladder—and there are many places where the union and the district have already negotiated varied roles for teachers (for example, mentors, coaches, and curriculum specialists). Toledo,⁹ Cincinnati, Chicago, Rochester, N.Y., and

Research strongly suggests that 80 to 90 percent of children respond well to simple, schoolwide discipline policies that emphasize good behavior.



St. Francis, Minn., are just a few places where the union and district have negotiated procedures for identifying expert teachers and deploying them in needed roles, such as taking primary responsibility for mentoring and evaluating new teachers.

The Teacher Advancement Program (TAP)¹⁰ can also be a tool for this. Among other things, TAP gives teachers opportunities to earn "master" and "mentor" teacher status and, as a result, receive more responsibilities, higher compensation, and additional training related to helping other teachers improve. Importantly, TAP also carves out time during the school day for all teachers to build their knowledge and improve their instruction through professional development, analysis of student data, and collaboration with other teachers.

Together, these steps will strengthen our neediest schools. But, let's be clear: While research tells us that teaching quality is the most important school factor in determining student success,¹¹ the best teaching possible won't lift children to the levels we all want. What else is necessary? The quick answer is the same fundamentals as any school, but more and better.

2. Support a culture of respectful student behavior:

According to a recent survey, 69 percent of all teachers—and 78 percent of teachers in urban schools—say that

students disrupting class is a serious problem.¹² Disruptive student behavior makes it impossible for teachers to teach and students to learn. Plus, parents fear that routine school misbehavior ends up teaching their children the wrong values.

In the early grades, the solution rests on creating a school culture that is respectful. If elementary schools establish well-coordinated schoolwide and classroom-based efforts to build and sustain good behavior, they can have an enormous impact on current behavior in these lower grades—and a positive impact on these students' behavior when they are middle- and high-school students. These efforts need to include training for teachers and administrators in early screening for behavioral problems, behavior modification, and classroom management, as well as a school structure that assures that students who need more specialized help get it.¹³ An example of such a model is Positive Behavior Support, a research-based program that is being disseminated by the U.S. Department of Education.¹⁴

It is a substantial undertaking to do it right. But, research strongly suggests that 80 to 90 percent of children respond well to simple, schoolwide discipline policies that emphasize good behavior. That leaves just 10 to 20 percent of children in need of more intensive interventions. A longitudinal study found that aggressive first-grade boys who were assigned to disorderly classrooms were about 59 times more likely than average boys to be highly aggressive in middle school—but aggressive first-grade boys who were assigned to orderly classrooms were only about three times more likely than average boys to be highly aggressive in middle school.¹⁵

Of course, some children have severe behavioral problems that no regular classroom teacher should be expected to resolve. For these students, intensive interventions must be delivered at school and at home; teachers with special training, counselors, school social workers, and parents should all be involved.

At the secondary level, efforts to build a respectful school culture—backed by good discipline codes, an effective, consistent system of incentives and penalties, and effective teaching and classroom management—may be enough for students who are only sporadically or mildly disruptive.¹⁶ For chronically and severely disruptive youth, high-quality alternative placements are the most appropriate response—but they are expensive and not as effective as early intervention. These placements must have substantially lower teacher-student ratios, a specialized curriculum, counseling and psychological services, and individualized interventions.

3. Diagnose reading problems early and intervene right away: With appropriate early instruction, including early screening combined with well-targeted, well-designed, intensive, and immediate intervention, about 90 to 95 percent of our students could be reading at or near grade level by third grade. Without such supports, the vast majority of those who struggle with reading in elementary school continue struggling in middle and high school.¹⁷

The dissemination of the research on early diagnosis of and intervention in reading problems—and the technology that enables teachers to use it (good textbooks, appropriate screening tools, evidence-based interventions, etc.)—appears to be having an impact. From 1998 to 2005, the percentage of fourth-graders from low-income families who scored at or above basic on the National Assessment of Educational Progress increased from 39 to 46 percent.¹⁸ But, the gap between where we are and where we could be if early reading were well-addressed in every high-poverty school is still great.

What's necessary to move this forward more rapidly? Professional development, on a huge and sophisticated scale, would go a long way in improving early literacy. Traditional professional development (a workshop with little to no opportunity for teachers to practice, discuss, digest, and absorb into their practice the new techniques/content, and little to no follow-up) is not very effective—and that's not what we need more of.¹⁹ The new research on reading is not simple—and it contradicts much of what has previously been taught to teachers about reading. Teachers really need the opportunity to study the new research and understand its implications for their practice and their students. If teachers feel they're just being spoon-fed a new technique that's just as faddish as the one they're being asked to give up, they will understandably resist. I hope AFT affiliates will want to work with their school districts to bring AFT's ER&D professional development courses in reading to their teachers, much as the Toledo Federation of Teachers²⁰ and the Providence Teachers Union have both done.

In order to put their new knowledge to work, teachers need the right tools for screening and intervention as well as instruction. And, importantly, there needs to be recognition that in high-poverty schools, where early screening is likely to identify many children who need intensive intervention, extra staff and specialists will be necessary. We all simply have to step up to the plate on this.

In the meantime, we have middle- and high-school students who are struggling to read at grade level. Some of these students are struggling with comprehension because they lack the necessary background knowledge to comprehend more sophisticated materials or content (a topic I turn to next), others are struggling because they never mastered the skills of reading and, as a result, never attained fluency. We know that these students need lengthy, intensive interventions. We need to step up the hard work in this area, including an increased research effort.

4. Provide a knowledge-rich, grade-by-grade, core curriculum: Our focus on beginning reading skills can't be allowed to crowd out content subjects. To comprehend more advanced material, children need a very large store of background knowledge—and the vocabulary that goes with it. For example, a student can't comprehend a high school lesson (or even a sixth-grade lesson) on the atmosphere if he or she does not have some familiarity with water vapor and gasses, does not understand what outer

To comprehend more advanced material, children need a very large store of background knowledge—and the vocabulary that goes with it.



space is, and does not know anything about altitude. And it's pretty hard to understand the current debates about global warming if one doesn't have at least a cursory knowledge of the atmosphere and how it can be damaged.

Much of the background knowledge that enables advanced comprehension is imbibed as a matter of course by middle-class children. Plus, these children's initial knowledge acts like a magnet, allowing them to more quickly and easily pick up new knowledge at a faster rate.²¹

But again, poor children are not so lucky. We don't have good research on exactly how far behind they are in accumulating background knowledge, but vocabulary is considered a good surrogate for background knowledge. Research tells us that in their first three years of life, children from low-income families have, on average, been exposed to roughly 30 million fewer words than children from professional families. The result? The disadvantaged three-year-olds have vocabularies of about 525 words, and their advantaged peers have vocabularies of just over 1,100 words.²² When these disadvantaged children enter kindergarten, they will learn new material less quickly and easily than their middle-class peers.

If we are to bring these children to high levels of reading

comprehension, we can't wait one minute to begin building their knowledge base. What does that mean, practically? That the educational content we impart to students must be well-chosen and efficiently sequenced in the curriculum. We can't afford to teach *Charlotte's Web* twice and classic Greek myths not at all.

First, there has to be agreement on the vital knowledge that children must acquire to become advanced readers. And, that knowledge needs to be distilled into a clear, specific, grade-by-grade curriculum sequence that can guide teachers' instruction. Second, that curriculum can't delay the systematic teaching of rich content. The broad, knowledge-rich curriculum that children need can begin in kindergarten (or earlier), by immersing children systematically in such fascinating content as classic fairy tales, insects and frogs, Langston Hughes poetry, or the way Picasso used color and shape in his paintings.

Third, part of this knowledge curriculum will need to be conveyed to kindergarten through third-grade children orally (since their reading skills are limited), through a thoughtful, well-sequenced series of knowledge-building discussions and read-alouds.²³ That will require new kinds of instructional materials and opportunities for teachers to build their understanding of this approach to building background knowledge.

Finally, we must resist the encroachment of instruction in beginning reading skills on the rest of the school day. I've heard of many cases where elementary schools devote their 90- to 120-minute reading block solely to skills instruction, leaving little time for teachers to offer instruction in science, history, geography, and the arts. As absolutely essential as early reading skills are, research suggests that instruction in such skills should not take all of this time.²⁴ The rest of the block should be dedicated to imparting the necessary background knowledge. This will require that administrators, as well as teachers, at every level understand the relationship between background knowledge and later reading comprehension—and the need to devote large portions of the school day to building that knowledge.

5. Deliver additional supports, staff, time, and resources to the schools that serve the neediest students: Qualified teachers, discipline policies that support good behavior, research-based reading instruction, and a rich curriculum should be the foundation of any child's schooling. But for children who enter school behind in the knowledge and skills that will allow them to succeed academically, we need to provide more and we need to do it better. What does this mean? It probably does mean a longer day and/or year, as is provided to the children in Miami-Dade's School Improvement Zone, featured in the next article. And for the students who are the furthest behind, it also means summer programs that are designed to bring them up to grade level. It means taking special care to identify and attract to high-poverty schools a good share of the district's experienced, knowledgeable teachers, as is done in the South Bronx, which was highlighted in the last issue of

this magazine.²⁵ It also means finding the best principals, a responsibility that superintendents need to take far more seriously than has generally been the case.

It means offering the best professional development for teachers in these schools so that they can take advantage of new research and quickly translate it into classroom instruction. It means starting these children off earlier, in the best possible pre-kindergarten programs, where they can begin to build their background knowledge, their early reading skills, and their appreciation of a respectful school and classroom culture. And, as described in the following article, it means special attention from school district leadership, so that structural obstacles to children's learning can be addressed immediately.

Providing all of this is a substantial commitment. But if we realistically identify our really struggling schools and focus our efforts on them—instead of spreading our efforts more thinly on the ever-growing list of “needs improvement” schools identified by No Child Left Behind—we could afford the commitment and make it. And that's what we need to do, all of us: teachers, paraprofessionals, other school professionals, superintendents, school boards, parents, mayors, governors, Congress, and the President. □

Endnotes

¹ National Center for Education Statistics (2001). *Entering Kindergarten: Findings from the Condition of Education 2000*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.

² McCoach, D.B., O'Connell, A.A., Reis, S.M., and Levitt, H.A. (2006). “Growing Readers: A Hierarchical Linear Model of Children's Reading Growth During the First 2 Years of School.” *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(1), 14-28. Also see Alexander, K.L., Entwisle, D.R., and Olson, L.S. (2001). “Schools, Achievement and Inequality: A Seasonal Perspective.” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 23(2), pp. 171-191.

³ National Center for Education Statistics (2007). *National Assessment of Educational Progress 2005 Assessment Results*. See http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nrc/reading_math_2005.

[ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nrc/reading_math_2005](http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/nrc/reading_math_2005). In reading, while students who are not eligible for free or reduced-price lunch attained an average scale score of 230 points, those who are eligible scored 203 points. In math, while students who are not eligible scored 248 points, those who are eligible scored 225 points. The research community generally accepts that on the fourth-grade NAEP, 10 points is roughly equivalent to one grade level.

⁴ Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.

⁵ Ingersoll, R. M. (2002). “The teacher shortage: A case of wrong diagnosis and wrong prescription.” *NASSP Bulletin*, 86, 16-31. Also see Smith, T. and Ingersoll, R. (2003). “The wrong solution to the teacher shortage.” *Educational Leadership*, 60(8), 30-33.

⁶ Ingersoll, R.M. (2003). “Is There Really a Teacher Shortage?” Research report co-sponsored by Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy and The Consortium for Policy Research in Education. September 2003. See www.gse.upenn.edu/inpress/Is%20There%20Really%20a%20Teacher%20Shortage.pdf.

⁷ Johnson, S.M. et al. (2006). “...and Why New Teachers Stay.” *American Educator*, Summer 2006, pg. 8-21,45.

⁸ Ingersoll, R.M. (2003). See endnote 6.

⁹ To learn about the Toledo Plan, go to www.tft250.org/peer_review.htm.

¹⁰ To learn about the Teacher Advancement Program, go to <http://www.talentedteachers.org/tap.taf>.

¹¹ Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). “Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence,” *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 8(1).

¹² Public Agenda (2004). *Teaching Interrupted*. Washington, D.C.: Public Agenda.

¹³ Walker, H.M., Ramsey, E., and Gresham, F.M. (2003/04). “Heading Off Disruptive Behavior: How Early Intervention Can Reduce Defiant Behavior and Win Back Teaching Time.” *American Educator*, Winter 2003-04, p. 6-21, 45-46.

¹⁴ To learn more about Positive Behavior Support, see www.pbis.org/schoolwide.htm.

¹⁵ Kellam, S., Rebok, G. Ialongo, N., and Mayer, L. (1994). “The course and malleability of aggressive behavior from early first grade into middle school: Results of a developmental epidemiologically-based prevention trial.” *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 35(2), 259-281.

(Continued on page 52)

Getting Real about Helping Schools: The Details

To learn more about each of these five ways to help struggling schools, turn to *American Educator's* Web site, www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/index.htm.

1. Teaching quality: The Summer 2006 issue featured two articles on why new teachers leave the profession and how they can be enticed to stay. The Winter 2006-2007 issue also has a couple of relevant articles, one on union-led professional development and one on attracting experienced teachers to high-poverty schools in the South Bronx.

2. Good behavior: The Winter 2003-2004 issue featured an article on how to support positive behavior and intervene with disruptive children as

well as an article on how to deter students when they start escalating hostility and disorder.

3. Early reading interventions: The Fall 2004 issue devotes two articles and several sidebars to explaining how to prevent early reading failure through screening and intervention.

4. Knowledge-rich core curriculum: The Spring 2003 issue examines several facets of disadvantaged students' knowledge gap—from their lack of exposure to a rich vocabulary in their first few years of life to how a rich curriculum and non-fiction books can help remedy the problem. The Spring 2006 issue takes a more detailed look at how broad knowledge enables reading comprehension.



5. Additional expertise: In addition to this issue's article on Miami-Dade's School Improvement Zone (see p. 10), the Winter 2002 issue featured an article on New York City's Chancellor's District, an initiative designed to attract well-qualified teachers to struggling schools and give them the support they need to succeed.

In the Zone

How a Virtual District Provides Real Help for Really Struggling Schools

By Jennifer Jacobson

At Miami Edison Senior High School, Judy Brown's 10th-grade reading class runs like a well-oiled machine. The comparison is a fitting one on this January afternoon. Two students sit near the back of the room listening to books on tape, as seven others quietly work on their reading skills at a bank of computers along the wall. Meanwhile, Brown reviews a poem with six students, grappling with similes and metaphors.

"I know what the caged bird feels," she reads aloud from "Sympathy," by Paul Lawrence Dunbar. In the poem, a bird symbolizes the plight of African Americans in the late 19th century.

After the teacher's pushing and prodding, the students begin to understand the figurative language. "What would be the idea of the poem?" Brown asks. "What is going on in the bird's life?"

A teenaged girl makes the connection: "He's struggling," she says.

It's a theme that for these students hits close to home. Many come from low-income families. They are below grade level in reading—and Brown's class is designed to deliver the support they need to bring their reading skills and comprehension up to speed.

For years, test scores languished at the school, which also has seen high rates of absenteeism and little parental involvement. Like many urban, high-poverty schools, this one has suffered from neglect. Teachers had become frustrated with the lack of support and left, and district administrators seemed to have forgotten about the school.

Jennifer Jacobson is assistant editor at American Educator. Previously she was a journalist with the Chronicle of Higher Education.

But starting in January 2005, Miami-Dade County Public Schools took a different approach. Schools like Miami Edison that face multiple challenges, both academic and socio-economic, have received increased attention and greater resources from the district's main office and the superintendent, himself.

Rudy Crew, Miami's charismatic district leader, took the 39 lowest-performing schools under his wing. He put them in the "School Improvement Zone," a virtual district whose boundaries are defined by student needs, not geography.

The Zone includes elementary, middle, and high schools and has an extended day and year. Teachers earn higher salaries to teach in these schools and must participate in intensive professional development.

A focus on student data is a cornerstone of the Zone, and the number-crunching has paid off. All 39 schools have seen tremendous gains on standardized tests.

To interrupt the pattern of failure that had become commonplace in Miami's schools, Crew mixed conventional wisdom with complete transformation. He also did not go it alone.

Crew enlisted the help of





Above, Judy Brown, 10th-grade reading teacher at Miami Edison Senior High School, provides small group instruction. Below and right, Brown's students work on fluency, reading comprehension, and summarizing what they've read. Photographs © Joshua Prezant.



the local teachers union. The mutual agreement between the United Teachers of Dade (UTD) and the district about how to move forward with the plan is set forth in a memorandum of understanding.

He “realized how terribly important it was to collaborate with the local union so that the initiative could be successful,” says Karen Aronowitz, UTD’s president. “None of us is being imposed upon. We are full partners in this relationship.”

At a time when the hot-button issue of improving student achievement has divided constituent groups such as politicians and parents, the partnership in Miami shows the importance of focusing like a laser on those schools that need help the most. “It’s a lot like putting them in intensive care so that they can get well and move on with the rest of the district,” says Geneva Woodard, the Zone’s associate superintendent. “We’ve made tremendous progress in that area. So we know it’s working.”

Success in New York

To understand Miami-Dade’s success, one must first look at Crew’s track record in New York. Before coming to Miami, Crew served as the chancellor of the New York City public schools from 1995 to 1999. In 1996, he convinced the school board to let him establish the “Chancellor’s District” for the city’s lowest-performing schools.*

Like the School Improvement Zone, the Chancellor’s District was a virtual district. Some 68 elementary, middle, and high schools were removed from their home districts and essentially rehabilitated.

That rehabilitation consisted of paying greater attention to low-performing schools than the district had done previously, especially in the 39 Chancellor’s District schools dubbed “Extended Time Schools.” These schools received a uniform literacy curriculum, intensive professional development, greater teacher salaries, and an extended day and year. It was a commonsense approach that didn’t just require more money, but a realization that struggling schools need an extra boost.

As in Miami, Crew included New York City’s local teachers union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), in crafting this school improvement plan. District and union representatives held joint meetings to discuss changes in the affected schools.

The district and the union negotiated a uniform literacy curriculum, Success For All, in Chancellor’s District elementary and middle schools. There was an SFA facilitator in each school and the UFT Teacher Center aligned its professional development and support with the program.

Crew did not limit support in the Chancellor’s District to just teachers. Joseph Colletti, UFT’s special representative for educational programs, says Crew reviewed the record of “every single principal” and then removed those



he believed were not working or encouraged them to retire. He moved some to other schools that might be a better fit and supported those in the Chancellor’s District with professional development, much of it similar to what the teachers received.

Schedules in all schools included literacy blocks and a heavy focus on regularly assessing student progress. Kindergarten through grade three could have classes no larger than 20 students, while the maximum class size for grades four through eight could not exceed 25 students.

In the “Extended Time Schools,” the school day was lengthened 40 minutes, and the school calendar was extended by one week. Generally, teachers in Extended Time Schools provided tutoring to their own students from 3:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. in



*To learn more about the Chancellor’s District, see “Using Well-Qualified Teachers Well,” in the Winter 2002 issue of *American Educator*, available online at www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/winter2002/UsingTeachers.html.

small groups for students who needed help in reading or math. Teachers who chose to work in Extended Time Schools received a 15 percent pay increase for their heavier workload.

In addition, students participated in a range of after-school programs and activities that ran, in some cases, until 6:00 P.M.

According to Colletti, before the virtual district was implemented, district and union officials went to individual schools and spoke to the teachers. Those who did not feel that staying in their schools was a good fit, “were able to get out with their rights and dignity intact,” Colletti says, which was important since some teachers had family and other obligations that prevented them from working an extended day.

But in 2003, Mayor Michael Bloomberg terminated the initiative, despite significant gains in student achievement. He imposed a new structure on the city school system and transferred the remaining 32 schools in the Chancellor’s District back to their home districts. Why? That’s hard to say, but cost may have been a factor.

In June 2004, Norm Fruchter and three co-authors at New York University’s Institute for Education and Social Policy published a report, *Virtual District, Real Improvement: A Retrospective Evaluation of the Chancellor’s District, 1996-2003*.** They found that Crew allocated additional funds, initially \$20 million, to begin implementing the Chancellor’s District.

They also note that according to New York City Board of Education School-Based Expenditure Reports for fis-

cal year 2001, Chancellor’s District elementary and middle schools in 2000-2001 spent an average of \$13,150 per student compared to an overall average New York City per student expenditure of \$9,679 for elementary- and middle-school students.

With such innovations, there is always a high cost, says Fruchter, who is now the director of the community involvement program in the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. According to Fruchter’s study, that cost was worth it. “By developing, mandating, and implementing a comprehensive set of organizational, curricular, instructional, and personnel changes, the Chancellor’s District significantly improved the reading outcomes of the students in those schools in three years of focused effort,” the report states.

Mary Atkinson, a social studies teacher at the High School for Health Careers and Sciences in Manhattan, was sorry to say goodbye to the virtual district reform. A teacher for 10 years, Atkinson was just starting her third year when her school was placed in the Chancellor’s District. The smaller class size (25 students then, compared to the union’s contractual limit of 34 now) allowed her to give a lot more individual attention to kids.

Atkinson also recalls that teachers in the Chancellor’s District could request that the district provide extra money to sponsor afterschool programs, like a book club that Atkinson ran at her school. “It’s not the kind of thing you would get funded now,” she says.

She also misses the professional development in the Chancellor’s District. Teachers had a say in making sure the courses related to their work in the classroom, she says. Professional development she had attended before the Chancellor’s District focused on such basic topics as writing lesson plans, even if some of the teachers in the class had been teaching for 20 years and had written hundreds of them, Atkinson says. But the Chancellor’s District’s professional development centered on topics like research-based reading instruction, a really useful topic for high school teachers who often don’t know how to provide literacy instruction.

Building the Capacity to Improve

This focus on professional development, curriculum, and materials is based on the argument, which several education experts have made, that if teachers and administrators in low-scoring schools had the capacity to fix their own problems, they would do so.



Above, Brown reviews a reading assignment with students. Upper left, students concentrate on the material. Photographs © Joshua Prezant.

** *Virtual District, Real Improvement: A Retrospective Evaluation of the Chancellor’s District, 1996-2003*. New York University Institute for Education and Social Policy, June 2004, pg. 9.



In her 90-minute literacy blocks, Brown engages the students in whole-group, small-group, and computer-based instruction. Photograph © Joshua Prezant.

Richard F. Elmore, a professor of educational leadership at Harvard University, explains it this way:[†]

It is important to understand that teachers and students don't get better by applying knowledge and skill they already have—they are stuck because their existing knowledge isn't enough. They get better by having access to new knowledge and discovering that they can use it in ways they did not fully appreciate before.

That new knowledge comes from intensive professional development that helps teachers and principals understand what works. And this is exactly what these virtual districts, like the one in Miami, deliver.

Fruchter believes that urban school districts must provide access to this new knowledge. This means that district officials must build low-performing schools' capacity to help themselves. "Capacity-building interventions are imperative in urban systems, which contain the great majority of the nation's poorly performing schools," he writes in *Urban Schools, Public Will: Making Education*

[†] "Building New Knowledge: School Improvement Requires New Knowledge, Not Just Good Will," *American Educator*, Spring 2005, pg. 24.

The 21 schools in Philadelphia's virtual district outpaced the rest of the district in math in all three years of the program's implementation and in reading in the first year.

Work For All Our Children.[‡] "Yet the history of state and district improvement efforts suggests too few attempts to provide such ... interventions to schools."

An experience that Fruchter had some years ago when he served on a New York State Education Department panel brought this lesson home to him. He writes that the panel had been convened to review the plans of New York City schools identified as in need of significant improvement. One school's improvement planning had been rejected by two former panels, and the plan that Fruchter's panel was reviewing was the school's last chance to avoid closure and reconstitution. But his panel unanimously concluded that the school's plan was inadequate.

When the school's team was ushered in for the formal review, our frustration was evident in the tone with which we began our questioning. The chair of the team, a young math teacher, angrily interrupted us. "I'm the most senior teacher in the whole school," she snapped. "And I've been here only 4 years! How the hell do you imagine we can write a decent plan in these condi-

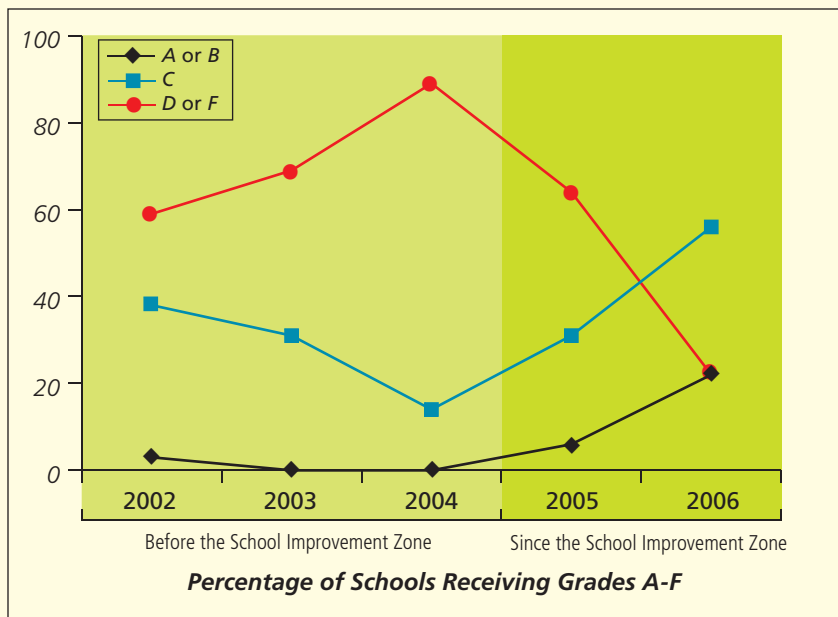
[‡] *Urban Schools, Public Will: Making Education Work For All Our Children*, Teachers College Press, 2007, pg. 56-57.

Zone Schools Are Off to a Strong Start

District officials, union representatives, and teachers all laud the School Improvement Zone. Although the initiative is too new to declare it a success, the early results are very promising.

Created in January 2005, the Zone includes 20 elementary schools, 11 middle schools, and 8 high schools. To take part in the effort, schools had to exhibit at least two of the following three criteria: poor academic performance for at least three years; patterns of low performance among elementary schools feeding low-performing middle and high schools; and signs of ineffective leadership capacity. In other words, the 39 schools selected for the Zone were struggling.

Under Florida's accountability system, schools are assigned letter grades based on student achievement data from the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)—but the grades aren't based on current achievement alone. Improvements in student achievement, especially among the lowest-



performing students, are also taken into account.

As the figure above shows, in the three years before the initiative was implemented (2002 to 2004), the percentage of Zone schools that received a *D* or an *F* actually increased. But since entering the

Zone in January 2005, the percentage receiving a *D* or *F* has dropped dramatically, from nearly 90 percent to just 22 percent. By 2006, nearly 60 percent of Zone schools received a *C*, while a little over 20 percent earned an *A* or *B*.

—EDITORS

tions? We can't even figure out how to keep our kids from sneaking out of the building, or stop them from turning the lunchroom into a daily food fight. What do you expect from us?"

What Fruchter's panel expected was a comprehensive reform plan that the school did not have the capacity to develop or implement. While education reforms based on similar expectations have come and gone in urban districts in the last three decades, they have produced little improvement in low-performing schools, Fruchter writes, "because they have ignored the critical role of local school capacity."

A Growing Trend

Miami and New York are not the only cities that have paid attention to the critical role that the district plays in school improvement. Nor have they been the only places that saw an increase in student test scores after implementing a district intervention. In 2001, Carmen Russo, then superintendent of the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS), placed the lowest-performing schools in a virtual district of her own.

Schools in Russo's CEO District had an extended day and year, and featured intensive professional development. Teachers received an 11 percent salary increase to compensate them for the added work.

The Baltimore Teacher's Union (BTU) negotiated the contract for the CEO's District with the school system. And the initiative significantly improved students' results: The CEO District schools increased their median percentile rankings on the TerraNova between 2000-2001 and 2002-2003; they moved from the 28th percentile to the 36th percentile in reading and from the 23rd percentile to the 38th percentile in math. The CEO District's gains outpaced those of other reconstituted schools in the school system, which dropped from the 39th percentile to the 37th percentile in reading and moved from the 31st percentile to the 36th percentile in math.

Unfortunately, when the district experienced a budget deficit of \$54 million in 2003, the CEO District was one of the first things to go, according to Marietta English, president of BTU. "It was expensive. But it worked."

A virtual district also worked in Philadelphia. In 2002, in response to years of low student achievement and budget deficits in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), the state of Pennsylvania took control of the school sys-

tem. The state ousted the local school board and replaced it with an appointed School Reform Commission (SRC), which hired a new CEO, Paul Vallas.

The SRC selected seven external providers (e.g., Edison Schools, Inc., Victory Schools, Inc., and Foundations, Inc.) to manage 45 low-achieving schools. The commission also created a virtual district when it restructured 21 schools that were not as low-performing, but still faced numerous challenges. A spokeswoman for SDP says those 21 schools benefited from a standardized curriculum, new textbooks and instructional materials, and benchmark assessments every six weeks to measure student progress. And according to a recent study, "State Takeover, School Restructuring, Private Management, and Student Achievement in Philadelphia," published by the RAND Corporation,[§] that supplemental support paid off. The 21 schools that the district restructured outpaced the rest of the district in math in all three years of the program's implementation and in reading in the first year. It further concluded that "despite additional per-pupil resources, privately operated schools did not produce average increases in student achievement that were any larger than those seen in the rest of the district."

Focus in Miami

Soon after Crew arrived in Miami, he knew he wanted to implement something similar to the Chancellor's District. These "schools are in need of focus and the institution, generally speaking, pays less and less attention to schools that are more and more in conflict," he says, seated in a district office conference room. "If I have to go to another school district, I'd do this all over again. I do think this is a requirement of urban schools."

Crew speaks confidently on the subject of how to boost student achievement. On a balmy January morning in Florida, it seems odd to hear his New York accent come through. Even in this heat, he dresses well, too. He wears a crisp white shirt, with his initials, RJC, monogrammed on the left pocket. A yellow tie hangs around his neck and two silver bracelets adorn his right wrist. Nothing is out of place. In his wardrobe as in his work, he likes to make order out of chaos.

This is exactly what he aims to do in the School Improvement Zone. The district needs "to know every nuance of what is happening in these schools," Crew says. To that end, he appointed a single administrator to oversee the Zone. That person doesn't "have to pay attention to anything else," he says. She just needs "to know what is happening instructionally in the schools."

That has been Geneva Woodard's sole responsibility since July 2006. As associate superintendent of the Zone, she visits at least five schools every week and constantly reviews school data.

Of the 39 schools in the Zone, 20 are elementary, 11 are middle, and eight are high schools. Nearly 50,000 students

[§] "State Takeover, School Restructuring, Private Management, and Student Achievement in Philadelphia." RAND Corporation, February 2007, Research Brief, pg. 3.

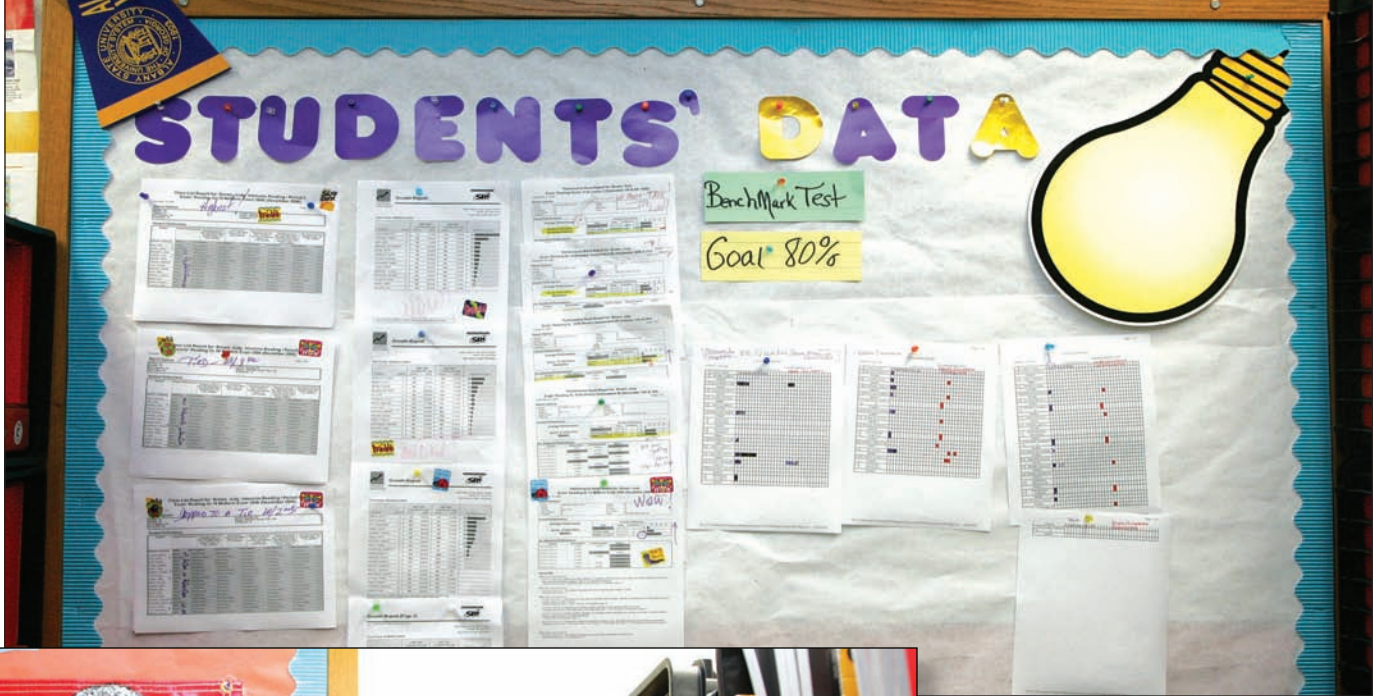
The extended day consists of an "Academic Improvement Period," in which teachers tutor small groups of students who are below grade level and who need extra help in reading or math.

attend Zone schools. And they include the city's most disadvantaged populations: 78 percent of the students receive free and reduced-price lunch, 17 percent are English language learners, 16 percent are in special education, 66 percent are African American, and 30 percent are Hispanic.

Every Friday, Woodard and her staff review a database they keep on Zone school visits. In it, they log their observations about various schools and classes. Woodard says they look for red flags. For example, if students seemed disengaged, Woodard would arrange for assistance, such as from a curriculum specialist.

The visits are not punitive. According to Randy Biro, director of educational policy for the United Teachers of Dade (UTD), "In the vast majority of cases, it's handled in a way that is truly supportive. But there are times when we've had to intervene." In one Zone elementary school, reading teachers adamantly refused to allow a particular support specialist back into the school because her attitude was demeaning; that support specialist has since been reassigned and her attitude has improved.

Denise Stewart, who teaches fifth-grade reading and language arts, has had only positive experiences. For six years, she has taught at West Little River Elementary School. District administrators have sat in on her classes and have taken notes.



Above, at the back of her classroom, Brown keeps a data wall where she can track students' progress on benchmark assessments. Left, students strengthen their reading skills with the Read 180 program. Photographs © Joshua Prezant.

Because West Little River is a Zone school, Stewart gives students assessments every other week. That may sound like a lot, but she doesn't believe the Zone tests too much. "We're doing assessments ... so that we can see where students are," she says. The data make it possible to quickly identify anyone who is behind and figure out what is necessary for the child to advance. "I've started telling my kids, 'Don't look at it as a test. You're trying to see exactly what you know.'"

Woodard is also trying to find out what students know. That's why she periodically meets with principals to review student data, which she did three times in the first half of this school year. She and the principals review student assessment results by subject area, teacher, and student. If she notices that a student is continually achieving only 20 percent out of a possible 100 percent on an assessment of say, reading mastery, Woodard will ask the student's principal what is happening with this student. "That alerts them

there's a problem," explains Woodard. The principal would then find out from the teacher what's holding the student back and what could help. Again, the goal is to make sure teachers get the support they need.

At individual Zone schools, principals should be doing ongoing data checks with their teachers, and teachers should be doing such checks with their students, "so that everything is connected to data in order to improve instruction and learning," Woodard says.

Added time for both student and teacher learning is another key feature of Zone schools. Zone schools start two weeks earlier than the district's other schools. They also have an extended day four days a week that is an hour longer. The extended day consists of an "Academic Improvement Period," which is typically held the eighth and last period of the day. In it, teachers tutor small groups of students who are below grade level and who need extra help in reading or math. Such tutoring lasts as long as it takes to

get students up to grade level. Students who don't need this remediation can participate in enrichment activities like internships at the local hospital and doctors' offices or other extracurricular activities, such as chess clubs or tutoring other students.

The district provides Zone schools with a uniform curriculum in literacy, writing, mathematics, and science for below-grade level students. The reading curriculum, for example, consists of Early Success in elementary school, Voyager Passport in middle school, and Read 180 in high school. These programs are research-based and geared toward helping students become proficient, grade-level readers.

Teachers in the Zone are paid 20 percent more than other teachers and participate in a minimum of 56 hours of professional development annually. To ensure that students receive consistent instruction, teachers in Zone schools must work in their school for a year before requesting a transfer.

Every Wednesday, students in Zone schools are released one hour early. According to the district's memorandum of understanding with the United Teachers of Dade, teachers use that time for collaborative planning.

Hiring also takes priority in Zone schools. Woodard says that the district's human resources office ensures that vacancies are filled in Zone schools first, before they're filled in other schools. The goal is to open Zone schools fully staffed by early August, the start of the academic year.

The Zone is a three-year initiative. And the district is only in its second year. However, the end of the Zone should not mean the end of the district's focus on these schools. Rather, the district must sustain its support so these schools can continue to improve. "The fallacy would be to say we're done," Crew contends. Now the school system must "never ever let a school backslide."

Contract Is Key

Making sure these schools continue to improve is a tall order. But union officials believe they have helped lay the foundation for the Zone's continued success. A key to the initiative was explicitly stated in the contract that the Zone would last for three years, says Karen Aronowitz, president of UTD. "We had a timeframe for this so that it wasn't going to go away." What happens with many teachers is that they just get so burned by new programs, she says. "People turn themselves into pretzels trying to comply." Then six months later, a year later, the money dries up and the program and the administrator that implemented it are gone. "After a



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF UNITED TEACHERS OF DADE



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MIAMI-DADE SCHOOL DISTRICT

while, teachers don't believe in new programs," Aronowitz says. "They find if they just wait long enough it'll go away." But with the Zone's three-year timeframe written into the contract, teachers knew that the effort they put into the Zone's reforms would be worthwhile.

Discussions between the union and the district began in November 2004. After Crew presented the idea to UTD officials, they embraced it. UTD's Randy Biro recalls that "we were very excited about an opportunity for schools that have historically received so little attention to be given the appropriate resources."

In negotiating with the district, the union pushed for the 20 percent salary increase for Zone teachers so they would be compensated for the extended day and year—and so it would be possible to attract teachers to the schools. "Our teachers are so poorly paid as it is ... we couldn't settle for less than that," explains Biro.

Left, Karen Aronowitz, president of the United Teachers of Dade, talks with members. She says the key to the Zone's success was explicitly stating in the contract that the initiative would last for three years; as a result, teachers knew that the effort they put into the Zone's reforms would be worthwhile. Below left, Rudy Crew, Miami-Dade's superintendent, partnered with the union to implement the Zone, a virtual district similar to one he established when he was New York City Schools Chancellor. Below, Crew talks to students at Holmes Elementary, a Zone school.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MIAMI-DADE SCHOOL DISTRICT



“We were very excited about an opportunity for schools that have historically received so little attention to be given the appropriate resources.”

—Randy Biro
UTD's director of educational policy

While the union and the district mutually agreed on the extended time in Zone schools, the district wanted a greater number of hours of professional development (56 hours annually) for Zone teachers—more than the union would have liked, according to Biro. UTD wanted professional development more in the 42-hour range, she says, an amount that would have been less onerous. “Teachers are already extending their day,” Biro says. In the final agreement, professional development is the full 56 hours. But the quality of the support, the time for teacher collaboration, and the additional pay all made the agreement an exciting one.

After all the give and take, UTD helped market the Zone to teachers. UTD ensured that all teachers had the opportunity to transfer out if they couldn't commit to the longer day and year. Only about five percent of the teachers chose to transfer before the Zone was implemented midyear in January 2005, Biro says. In addition, less than two percent were asked to transfer by their school administrations who felt it was in the school's best interest.

Biro, the union's point person for the Zone, meets with Woodard, the associate superintendent, regularly. Biro

says they talk about concerns they may have about individual schools or teachers—and ways to help them. They also try to head off grievances, but that's not always possible. The union has filed a grievance against the district for involuntarily transferring a union building steward and is getting ready to file another one over a Zone school that is not implementing the Academic Improvement Period the way it was intended.

The Zone works because the partnership isn't just a slogan. Initially, Crew appointed Irving Hamer, a former Columbia University Teachers College professor, to the Zone's top spot. “Every Zone principals meeting, we were a part of,” Biro explains. “Every union building steward meeting, the district representative was a part of.” At these principals' meetings, which Biro or another UTD representative still attends, principals would share information, give updates, and review best practices. But then came difficulties. When Hamer left, his two successors, according to Biro, “resented the fact that we participated in principals meetings.” They “weren't part of the initial conversation of the seriousness of this collaboration. They didn't clearly understand the intention.”



A teacher freshens up on material in an ER&D professional development session at Norland Senior High School. The courses, provided by the district and UTD, are grounded in research that teachers can apply to their own classroom. Photograph © Joshua Prezant.

One in particular, she says, wanted the Zone to function like other regions in the county. For example, he did not provide enough oversight to Zone schools. So some administrations ended up turning the extended time in Zone schools—the Academic Improvement Period—back into a traditional academic course which was not at all its original intent. Because the use of the Academic Improvement Period was in the contract, the district couldn't backslide.

Rudy Crew admits as much, saying that “their penchant for doing business as usual did not match the sense of urgency for these schools.” It took a while to find someone like Woodard, a former Miami-Dade principal, who knew enough about the system to change it, he says.

Now with Woodard, Biro says, “the collaboration is back.”

Both the district and the union have also agreed to bring intensive professional development to teachers in the Zone. For more than 20 years, the American Federation of Teachers has offered Educational Research and Dissemination (ER&D) courses, high-quality professional development, to teachers across the country. This past summer, UTD sent 23 union members to ER&D training so that they

Alex Heras credits the ER&D courses with helping him become a more effective teacher. The courses have made him more aware of “little faux pas” that all teachers make. “If we provide a better lesson, the kids will always get more out of it,” he says.

could then teach ER&D courses.

Norland Senior High School, in the School Improvement Zone, was chosen as the ER&D model site for this semester since a number of Norland's teachers were interested in having the courses there. (Courses were also offered in the district last semester.) So every Wednesday evening for about three hours, from February through April, Foundations of Effective Teaching I; Managing Anti-Social Behavior; Instructional Strategies That Work; and School-Home Connection are taught there. Each course is worth 45 hours of credit, which goes a long way toward helping Zone teachers fulfill their 56 hours of annual professional development. Teachers at Norland have first crack at signing up for the ER&D courses, usually capped at no more than 25 participants.

This is the first year that the district and the union have jointly funded the courses. The district gave the union \$50,000 to pay for the materials and trainers' salaries, according to Tom Gammon, UTD's teacher coordinator. The union takes care of the rest.

Gammon emphasizes that the 10 consecutive sessions are grounded in research that teachers can apply to their own classroom. In one case, ER&D-trained teach-



Teachers work collaboratively during an ER&D session. The professional development requires their full attention and participation. Photographs © Joshua Prezant.

become a more effective teacher. Last fall, the social studies teacher at Norland Middle School took Foundations of Effective Teaching 1, and he's now enrolled in Managing Anti-Social Behavior. The courses have improved his teaching delivery, he says. For instance, when students interrupt his lessons with questions about whether they can be excused to go to the restroom or other distractions, Heras would often find himself skipping over parts of the lesson. Students would then yell out that he skipped something. "That's called dangling," says Hera. He explains: It's when you don't provide clear enough road signs in your instruction. The courses have made him more aware of "little faux pas" that all teachers make. "If we provide a better lesson, the kids will always get more out of it."

A teacher for 15 years, Heras has been at Norland Middle School for nine years. When the school became part of the Zone, he stayed. "I was close to some of the folks," he says. "I didn't feel comfortable leaving. I knew it was a good school." And most importantly, he says he was up for the challenge.

Heras says the union and the district have provided the support he needs. Although Woodard, herself, has not visited his classroom, a Zone official from the district did sit in on his class last year. Heras recalls the administrator telling

ers responded to a principal's excessive loudspeaker announcements with research that showed how such announcements interrupt the flow of instructional practice and set students back academically. And, as a result, the principal reduced such interruptions.

Alex Heras credits the ER&D courses with helping him

Atunya Walker, a 14-year veteran teacher who moved to Edison in the summer of 2005, says the longer day and year are not difficult for her and that while money is a big incentive, a passion for teaching—and not a bigger paycheck—keeps her in the job.

him, “I like what you’re doing. What do you need?”

Heras told him that he needed extra workbooks and materials, “stuff we don’t normally get.” Since the Zone, Heras says his school has received these supplies. He’s also seen more district officials and more staff both visit and work at the school, which primarily serves lower-middle-class, African-American students. “There are a lot of obstacles for them,” Heras explains. Many come from single parent homes and receive free and reduced-price meals at school.

The increased attention and resources have paid off. Under the state’s accountability system, schools are assigned letter grades based primarily on student achievement data from the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Last year, Norland Middle School improved its letter grade from a *C* to a *B*. (To learn more about the grading system and find out how the Zone as a whole is doing, see sidebar, p. 15.)

With the extended day and year, “I know the kids get tired,” Heras says. “We get tired.” But “if I keep seeing results like this, the sacrifice will be worth it.”

A Matter of Time

Despite all the support it provides, the Zone is no silver bullet. District and union officials do not believe the initiative will solve all the schools’ problems overnight. Especially in the high schools, it will take time. Older students have not come through the Zone, UTD President Aronowitz says. So high school is “the last place you’re going to see success.”

On the school grounds at Miami Edison Senior High, success appears to be in short supply. The red and gray box of a building is located right off I-95. Two tall, chain link fences surround the school. A security guard must unlock them for visitors who wish to park in the lot.

Inside, another security guard sits at a small desk and asks visitors to sign in. A few feet away in the main office, a map of the world hangs on one wall, celebrating the school’s enormous diversity. “Countries of Birth of Edison Students,” is the name of the display. Alongside the map is a list of nations: France, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Pakistan, India, Belize, Brazil.

Edison is one of three Zone high schools that the state has placed under corrective action. This means that under the state’s scoring system, the schools earned *F*s two years in a row. Because of their low-performance, Crew redesigned the leadership structure in each of these schools. Instead of one principal, all three schools now have two.

Jean Teal and David Moore have been the co-principals at Edison since July 2005. He deals with discipline and operations, while she focuses on curriculum and instruction. According to Moore, Crew appointed co-principals in these schools “to ensure that everyone’s appropriately focusing on teaching and learning.”

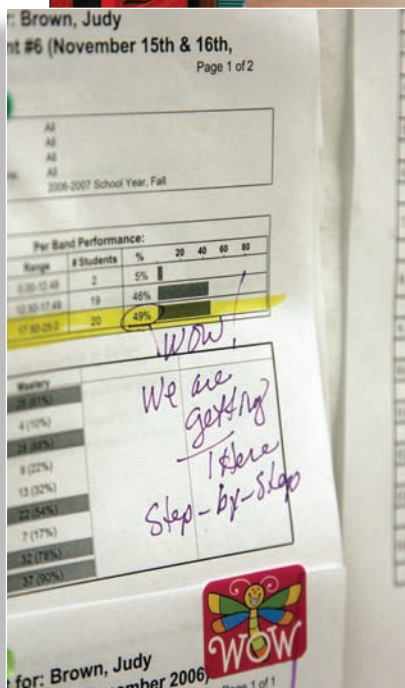
Both Moore and Teal say the school has benefited from the district’s ongoing support. A science education specialist, a professional development specialist, and an ESOL specialist are each assigned to the school. Last year only one reading coach and one math coach served all grades. But this year, after test scores showed that students still needed to improve in those areas, the school has a reading coach and a math coach for each grade, nine through 12. “Where there’s a need, the district is right there,” Teal says.

The increased attention has improved student performance. Last year, Edison registered a 20-point increase in the state’s scoring system. But it fell short of the cut off score for a *D* by four points.

“We were disappointed,” Teal says. Although school officials wanted the letter grade to change, they were proud of the improvement students had made. “We were only here eight months,” she says. “We were trying to change what had been done over years.”

A Passion For Teaching

Atunya Walker welcomed the challenge. That’s why the 14-year veteran teacher moved to Edison in the summer of 2005. “I relish the opportunity to offer my expertise to students who are struggling,” says the teacher in Edison’s



Above, students use Brown's data wall to keep tabs on their progress on the benchmark assessments. Left, when Brown posts the results, she writes notes of encouragement: "We are getting there step-by-step." Photographs © Joshua Prezant.

I will bring you where I want you to be. I don't whine about where you are."

Brown knows exactly where her students are academically. In her classes—90-minute literacy blocks—they keep a daily reading log, in which they write summaries of what they have read. "That makes them accountable for what they do here," she says.

Every week, Brown reviews student data. Everything in her class is tracked because these students are below-grade level and need to be brought up to speed. One look at the back wall of her room, labeled the "Student Data Wall," reveals this. Printouts of her 10th-graders' mastery of reading on benchmark assessments are posted on a bulletin board there. The printouts allow Brown and her students to see where they need to improve.

The first sheet, dated September 5, 2006, shows that, according to bar graphs next to students' names, only seven percent achieved mastery on that particular test. On the sheet Brown has written, "We must talk. Too low!"

The next printouts, from September, October, and November, show steady improvement to 12, 27, and 49 percent. "We are getting there step-by-step," Brown has scrawled on one of them.

By December, 61 percent of the class achieved mastery. "Wow!" Brown has written on that sheet. She also has posted a sticker that reads "Nice Work."

Brown came to Edison in 1991. She stays because, as she puts it: "I feel I'm needed here more than somewhere else." □

Academy of Law Studies and Public Service, a small learning community within the school. She also enjoys "working with students previously overlooked."

Walker says the longer day and year are not difficult for her and that while money is a big incentive, a passion for teaching—and not a bigger paycheck—keeps her in the job.

The Zone works, so "kudos to Dr. Crew," she says. "He came in and saw a need." Walker applauds the superintendent for making it mandatory for schools like Edison to provide students more time on task. The school's increase in test scores, she believes, proves one of Crew's points: Give the students support and they will achieve.

Judy Brown also felt the Zone concept would work. A teacher for 34 years, Brown says "the children need more time." And she's happy to give it to them. "My philosophy is

Mismatch

When State Standards and Tests Don't Mesh, Schools Are Left Grinding Their Gears

By Heidi Glidden and Amy M. Hightower

Imagine this: Sylvia and Steve are seventh-graders in different states. They're both eager, hard-working students, and do reasonably well in school. Come springtime, they join most students across the country in taking various state assessments in (at least) reading and mathematics. You know these tests: they're the ones that teachers give to students on behalf of their state to monitor how students are doing in school. They are also used for federal accountability purposes to determine if schools and school districts are doing a good job educating students.

Sylvia and Steve have had different experiences with these assessments. For Sylvia, they're just par for the course. Sure, she'd rather be playing softball, but taking a test of the things she's been taught that year in school has become routine. No huge surprises, no big deal.

But bluntly put, Steve is dreading assessment season this year, based on the state test he had to take last year in math. Last year, he'd worked hard to learn the material he was taught. He always submitted the homework his teacher assigned and listened hard as his teacher explained the concepts of mean, median, and mode. From fractions and ratios to probability and circumference, Steve felt like he was mastering some tough sixth-grade math concepts. His teacher thought so too, giving him *As* and *Bs* all year. When springtime testing came around, he'd been ready to strut his stuff. But when he sharpened his #2 pencil and sat down to take the state test, darned if they didn't ask him about the Pythagorean Theorem and three-dimensional objects!

Heidi Glidden, assistant director, and Amy M. Hightower, associate director, are assessment and accountability specialists for the AFT teachers division. This article is based on a research brief they published in July 2006.

These were things he hadn't studied and his teacher hadn't taught. Wait, wasn't his brother, an eighth-grader, studying some of this stuff? How was he supposed to know the answers now? Had someone given him the wrong test by mistake? No mistake: He just didn't have the knowledge he needed to answer the questions. So he did what anyone in this situation would do—he flipped through the exam and guessed. And he fidgeted. And he watched the clock, waiting for the uncomfortable moment to pass. He remembers the moment like it was yesterday.

What went wrong? Why did both Sylvia and Steve feel ready for the test, but only one of them was actually prepared? Here's a dirty little secret that educators know all too well: State tests and state content standards don't always match up. It's far too often assumed that what's expected, what's taught, and what's tested are cut from the same cloth. That's the way it should be. It's what advocates of standards-based education assumed. It's certainly rational, and it's something that's never even questioned by the general public once the test results come in—the results that judge students, schools, and sometimes teachers. But as it turns out, this assumption is too often untrue and a lot of things are at play behind the scenes.

As it happens, Steve's state isn't particularly clear about what it expects of students in each grade and in each subject. This puts his teachers in a guessing game about what to teach. It also has test developers guessing about what content to sample from as they design their assessments. Maybe they guess the same, and maybe they don't. But why leave it to chance?

Sylvia's state, in contrast, is more explicit about the grade-by-grade standards students are to meet. Her state doesn't direct teachers in *how* to teach or at what precise moment to introduce a particular concept, but it does set



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specific, helpful year-end goals for every grade and every subject. These standards are explicit enough for teachers like Sylvia's to build their curriculum around and for testing companies to know what content to draw upon for their tests.

While Steve and Sylvia are fictitious, the problem we've identified is real. Based on our research, just 11 states are like Sylvia's, with all of their reading and math tests clearly aligned to strong standards. The rest, to a greater or lesser extent, are like Steve's. In fact, nine states do not have any of their reading or math tests aligned to strong standards. The consequences are far-reaching since the results of these tests are used to make consequential, high-stakes judgments.

* * *

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has led to the vast expansion of states' testing programs and heightened the stakes associated with testing results. Specifically in reading and math,* NCLB requires states to have grade-level standards in grades 3 to 8 and once in high school, and to annually test students in grades 3 to 8 and at least once in high school using assessments that are criterion-referenced/standards-based and aligned with the state's content area standards. The results of these assessments are used to determine if schools and districts are making adequate yearly progress. If not, NCLB imposes a series of escalating sanctions. (To learn more about NCLB, see www.aft.org/topics/nclb/index.htm.)

Given the fact that state standards are often deemed inadequate (see, for example, "The State of State Standards 2006" from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute; "Staying on Course" from Achieve Inc.; and "Making Standards Matter" from the American Federation of Teachers), we wondered how states are doing in developing assessment systems that meet NCLB's requirements and, therefore, can be legitimately used for accountability purposes. So we conducted a study to address two key questions. First, since (as we demonstrate in the next section) it is not possible to align a test to vague standards, are states' content standards in reading and math clear and specific? Second, for those standards that are clear and specific, is there evidence posted on states' Web sites for all to see that the state assessments are aligned with those standards?

For grades 3 to 8 and high school, we looked at all 50 states' and the District of Columbia's reading and math standards, as well as at the test specifications that the states and D.C. provide to their test developers.** Of course, we would have preferred to look directly at the actual tests, but they are confidential. Nevertheless, looking at the test specifications is the next best option; it seems highly unlikely that a test could be better aligned to the standards than the specifications upon which the test is based.

*NCLB also requires states to have science standards and, as of the 2007-2008 school year, administer science tests, but the law does not hold states accountable for their science results. Therefore, our main analysis focuses on reading and math, and we deal with science briefly in the box on page 31.

Just 11 states have all of their reading and math tests clearly aligned to strong standards. Nine states do not have any of their reading or math tests aligned to strong standards.

Our first step was to examine the strength, clarity, and specificity of the standards themselves. Content standards are at the heart of everything that goes on in a standards-based system, including testing. They define our expectations for what's important for children to learn, and serve as guideposts about what content to teach and assess. These state-developed public documents are the source that teachers, parents, and the general public consult to understand content-matter expectations. Content standards should exist for every single grade, kindergarten through high school, in every subject. Grade-by-grade content standards increase the likelihood that all students are exposed to a rigorous, sequenced curriculum that is consistent across schools and school districts. Grade-specific standards also make it possible to align not only assessments, but also curriculum, textbooks, professional development, and instruction. States that organize their standards grade-by-grade are best able to specify what students should learn and when they should learn it.

**For brevity's sake, throughout this document when we refer to the states collectively, we are actually referring to the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

We examined each state's content-standards documents to determine whether there was enough information about what students should learn to provide the basis for teachers to develop a common core curriculum and for the test developer to create aligned assessments. There is no perfect formula for this; we made a series of judgments based on a set of criteria. **To be judged "strong," a state's content standards had to:**

- Be detailed, explicit, and firmly rooted in the content of the subject area so as to lead to a common core curriculum;
- Contain particular content:
 - Reading standards must cover reading basics (e.g., word attack skills, vocabulary) and reading comprehension (e.g., exposure to a variety of literary genres);
 - Math standards must cover number sense and operations, measurement, geometry, data analysis and probability, and algebra and functions;
- Provide attention to both content and skills; and,
- Be articulated without excessive repetition in both math and reading in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and once in high school.



Grade-by-grade content standards increase the likelihood that all students are exposed to a rigorous, sequenced curriculum that is consistent across schools and school districts.

For any standard we found to be strong, we then examined the extent to which the state's test specifications were aligned with the standard. In our alignment review, each state received a yes/no judgment for each of the NCLB-related tests it administered. **To meet our criteria for alignment, a state must:**

- Have evidence of the alignment of its tests and content standards through documents such as item specifications, test specifications, test blueprints, test development reports, or assessment frameworks; and,
- Post the alignment evidence on its Web site in a transparent manner.

The need for alignment should be obvious, but the need for transparency may not be. Transparency "demystifies" how (or if) the pieces connect to function as a unified system. A transparent system is not necessarily an aligned system, but only with transparency can we determine if the tests and content standards are aligned. A transparent testing program provides information to parents, students, teachers, and the public about the development, purpose, and use of state tests. It also brings any problems within the testing program to light so that they can be addressed. This is why, in our review, states could not simply assert that their tests were aligned to their standards. And yet, our alignment criteria were still not as stringent as we believe

they should be. A state could receive alignment credit for fairly minimal documentation. For example, if a state had grade-by-grade math standards organized by number sense, algebra, measurement, etc., we gave that state credit for evidence of alignment if it indicated the percentage of items devoted to each of these topics.

As our opening vignette indicates, what we found was not what the average person would assume. There were two basic problems: Standards that were too weak to guide teachers or test developers, and standards that were strong, yet mismatched with tests nonetheless. To explain the problems with the weak standards, in the following section, we provide examples of vague and repetitive standards—and examples that show why tests cannot be aligned with such weak standards. We wrap up that section with data on how widespread weak standards are. Then we turn to the mismatch between strong standards and test specifications. Once again we provide examples of the mismatch as well as data on how widespread this problem is.

Vague Standards Inevitably Lead to Mismatch

The quality of content standards matters greatly to teaching, learning, and testing, so it directly affects the fairness and validity of tests and the accountability systems they support. Despite this obvious and indisputable fact, we found that across the country, many states have failed to write clear and specific standards for every subject and grade. As you read the examples[†] of vague state standards in the table below, consider them from both the teachers' and the test developers' perspectives. None of these standards gives enough information to teachers about what to teach or to test developers about what to test.

Subject	Grade(s)	Examples of Vague Content Standards
Reading	4	Demonstrate the understanding that the purposes of experiencing literary works include personal satisfaction and development of lifelong literature appreciation.
	8	View a variety of visually presented materials for understanding of a specific topic.
Math	4	Students will describe, extend, and create a wide variety of patterns using a wide variety of materials (transfer from concrete to symbols).
	9-12	Model and analyze real-world situations by using patterns and functions.

In contrast, take a look at the following standards; they are clear and specific enough to eliminate the guesswork.

Subject	Grade	Examples of Strong Content Standards
Reading	4	Distinguish between cause and effect and between fact and opinion in informational text. Example: In reading an article about how snowshoe rabbits change color, distinguish facts (such as snowshoe rabbits change color from brown to white in the winter) from opinions (such as snowshoe rabbits are very pretty animals because they can change colors).
Math	4	Subtract units of length that may require renaming of feet to inches or meters to centimeters. Example: The shelf was 2 feet long. Jane shortened it by 8 inches. How long is the shelf now?

[†] When providing examples, we chose not to name the states in the main article because it would unfairly place emphasis on them instead of on the broader problem. The examples are drawn from the following states: 1) vague standards—Arkansas, Connecticut, and Montana; 2) strong standards—Indiana; 3) repetitious standards—Connecticut and Texas; 4) mismatched standards and test specifications—Florida, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, and Pennsylvania.

These latter examples are particularly strong—most states do not have standards this clear and specific. Instead, most states occupy a middle ground between these and the terribly vague standards shown previously. But even with middling standards, it's very hard for a teacher to know what to teach and a test developer to know what to test. Teachers may feel like they just have to make do—but test developers often do not. In states with weak standards, additional information is often given to testing companies that further clarifies or elaborates on the standard to be tested. In essence, these states are creating an additional layer or set of “shadow” standards, which are often more specific and detailed than the official standards from which they presumably came. However, it is the test developer who receives these “shadow” standards, not teachers.

Surprised? So were we. Let's look at an example to make this a little easier to understand. Here is a 4th-grade math standard and the corresponding test specification. Clearly, the test developer received much more specific information than teachers—information that would be just as helpful in preparing lessons as it is in preparing tests.

What 4th-grade teachers receive:

Describe, model, and classify two- and three-dimensional shapes

What the test developer receives:

Students demonstrate understanding of two- and three-dimensional geometric shapes and the relationships among them. In the grade 4 test, understanding is demonstrated with the following indicators as well as by solving problems, reasoning, communicating, representing, and making connections based on indicators—

- Using properties to describe, identify, and sort 2- and 3-dimensional figures [Vocabulary in addition to that for grade 3: polygon; kite; pentagon; hexagon; octagon; line; line segment; parallel, perpendicular, and intersecting lines]
- Recognizing two- and three-dimensional figures irrespective of their orientation
- Recognizing the results of subdividing and combining shapes, e.g., tangrams
- Recognizing congruent figures (having the same size and shape) including shapes that have been rotated

Clearly, it is possible for a teacher to believe she has covered a vague standard, and for a test developer to come up with an angle that she hasn't considered. In the example above, a teacher may do several lessons on describing, modeling, and classifying two- and three-dimensional shapes—but she may not think to teach students to recognize them “irrespective of their orientation,” as the test specifications state. The only way to avoid such problems

Some states are creating “shadow” standards, which are often more specific and detailed than the official standards. However, it is the test developer who receives these “shadow” standards, not teachers.

sound reasonable—but the exact same thing is expected of 2nd-graders, 10th-graders, and students in every other grade in between.

Repetition of standards makes it hard, if not impossible, for a teacher to know what content students have mastered in previous grades or to determine the specific differences in student expectations from grade to grade. It certainly isn’t enough for a teacher to build his or her lesson plans.

Let’s look a little more at that state that expects 2nd-through 10th-graders to develop a critical stance. The vast majority of its reading standards are exactly the same from grade 3 to grade 10 and, shockingly, *more than 40 percent of the 10th-grade standards come from grade 2 standards*:

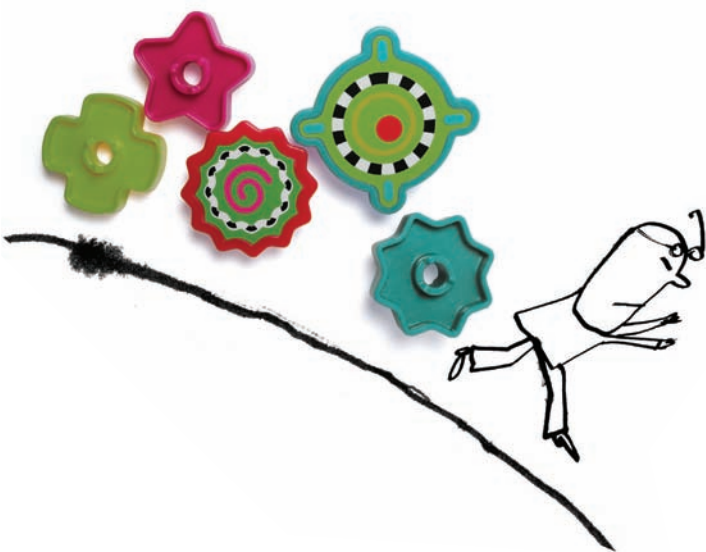
- 71 percent of the 4th-grade standards are repeated (56 percent come from grade 2)
- 87 percent of the 6th-grade standards are repeated (44 percent come from grade 2)
- 92 percent of the 8th-grade standards are repeated (42 percent come from grade 2)
- 81 percent of the 10th-grade standards are repeated (42 percent come from grade 2)

One can easily imagine how 2nd- and 9th-grade teachers, for example, would develop different lesson plans based on these repetitive standards. But what would prevent 2nd- and 3rd-grade teachers from teaching almost identical lessons? And what happens to the unlucky student who is assigned in 4th, 5th, and 6th grades to use *Charlotte’s Web* to “describe how the experiences of a reader influence the interpretation of a text.” Or the unlucky student who is never assigned *Charlotte’s Web* for any reason? A central purpose of state standards is to avoid such repetition and such gaps—but repetitive standards that do not specify what should be taught at each grade can’t serve that purpose and, as a result, they can’t be used to develop standards-based tests either.

Unfortunately, the example we’ve been using is a pretty typical one. Here’s an example of reading standards from another state that are even more repetitious from grade to grade:

- 75 percent of the 3rd-grade standards are repeated from K-2
- 98 percent of the 5th-grade standards are repeated from grade 4
- 94 percent of the 7th-grade standards are repeated from grade 4

Repetitious standards are neither clear nor specific enough to guarantee that what’s taught in each and every grade and subject is also what’s tested. The result? Guesswork on the part of teachers and testing companies. Or, as we saw with the vague standards, sometimes the teachers are left to guess, but the test developers get the extra information they need.



is for the teachers and the test developers to receive the same clear, detailed standards.

Repetition Makes Standards Vague

Even when states manage to write standards that sound reasonably specific, they sometimes poison the effort by repeating the standard over four or more grades. This problem is especially evident in states’ reading standards. For example, one state’s reading standards expect eighth-graders to, among other things, “develop a critical stance and cite evidence to support the stance;” “use phonetic, structural, syntactical, and contextual clues to read and understand words;” and “describe how the experiences of a reader influence the interpretation of a text.” That may

In this example, 3rd- and 4th-grade teachers work from the exact same reading standard, with no indication of what is appropriate for a 3rd-grader versus a 4th-grader. The test developer, however, receives the standard *plus* specific indicators of what is appropriate for a 3rd-grader and what is appropriate for a 4th-grader:

What 3rd- and 4th-grade teachers receive:

Determines meaning of words through knowledge of word structure (e.g., compound nouns, contractions, root words, prefixes, suffixes)

What the test developer receives:

Determines meaning of words through knowledge of word structure (e.g., compound nouns, contractions, root words, prefixes, suffixes)

Grade 3 test

Assessment Indicators

Prefixes: *mis-, pre-, pro-, re-, un-*

Suffixes: *-ed, -er, -est, -ing, -ly, -y*

Only test prefixes and suffixes listed above

Grade 4 test

Assessment Indicators

Prefixes: *anti-, dis-, ex-, non-, under-*

Suffixes: *-en, -ful, -less, -ment, -ness*

Only test prefixes and suffixes listed above

Unlike teachers' information about the reading standard for grades 3 and 4, the test developers receive indicators that are unique to each grade. The indicators add information that would be useful to teachers, but teachers don't receive them—nor do they necessarily know that such an elaboration even exists. An excellent 3rd-grade teacher could, in good conscience and with good reason, deliver highly effective instruction on the prefixes *anti-*, *dis-*, and *non-*, but because she guessed wrong as to what would be on the 3rd-grade test versus the 4th-grade test, her test results would indicate that her students did not know anything about prefixes. Of course, the 4th-grade teacher is in an equally difficult position—how is she to know which prefixes the students have already learned and which will be tested?

Vague and repetitious standards are clearly a big problem, but just how widespread are they? It depends on the subject. States tend to have fairly good math standards, but weak reading standards. Here is what we found:

■ **A majority of states have grade-by-grade reading and math standards in every grade that NCLB requires them to assess.** Six states still have not developed grade-by-grade standards in reading and math despite being required to do so by the guidance written for NCLB: Colorado, Illinois, Montana, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. At the high school level, 20 states clustered their reading stan-

For example, while 3rd- and 4th-grade teachers work from the exact same standard, the test developer receives specific indicators of what is appropriate for a 3rd-grader and what is appropriate for a 4th-grader.

dards and 22 clustered their math standards.

■ **But, grade-by-grade standards do not guarantee clear, specific standards: Only a little more than one-third of states have strong reading and math standards in every grade that NCLB requires them to assess.** Just 18 states and the District of Columbia met our criteria for having strong standards in reading and math in all grades that NCLB requires states to assess: California, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia.

■ **Across states and subjects, of all the 714 content standards reviewed, 70 percent met our criteria for being strong.** States had strong standards in mathematics: Eighty-seven percent of the math standards we reviewed met our criteria. In contrast, only about half of the states' reading content standards met our criteria (53 percent).

■ **On average, the most vague and repetitious content standards are in reading.** Only 20 states had strong reading standards in grades 3 to 8 and high school; 12 states had weak reading standards in all of these grades. Twenty-one percent of all reading standards reviewed were significantly repetitious across the grades (meaning word-by-word repetition across the grades at least 50 percent of the time). Fifteen states had reading standards that repeated the same reading standards in three or more grades.

(Continued on page 32)

Science Standards and Tests Suffer from Mismatch, Too

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is somewhat more lenient with science than it is with reading and math. Science standards need not be grade by grade; academic expectations at each of the three grade-level ranges (such as grades 3 to 5, 6 to 9, and 10 to 12) are sufficient. Likewise, starting in the 2007-2008 school year, science must be assessed annually, but just once during elementary, middle/junior high, and high school—and the results are not incorporated into federally required accountability determinations.

Nonetheless, we still wanted to examine states' science standards and the extent to which their standards and test specifications are aligned. Unfortunately, as with reading and math, we found serious problems.

As we explained in the main article, grade-by-grade standards are essential for guiding instruction. And yet, 13 states cluster their science standards at the elementary level, 13 states at the middle-school level, and 21 states at the high-school level. While permitted under NCLB, clustering results in vague standards such as these:

- Grades 5 to 8—Describe the historical and cultural conditions at the time of an invention or discovery, and analyze the societal impacts of that invention;
- Grades 9 to 12—Analyze the impacts of various scientific and technological developments.

Besides getting frustrated, what is a teacher or a test developer to do with such a directive? The teacher can guess what will be tested, and the test developer can guess what will be taught. Or, they can demand more specifics from the state. For the test developers at least, such demands appear to be working.

Take a look at the following example of one 7th-grade science standard and the corresponding test specification—it reveals something we reported on in the main article with reading and math.

The test designer gets the same standard that is given to teachers, as

well as very specific examples that help clarify the focus of the standard.

What 7th-grade teachers receive:

The student will cite examples of individuals throughout history who made discoveries and contributions in science and technology.

What the test developer receives:

The student will cite examples of individuals throughout history who made discoveries and contributions in science and technology.

- Examples of individuals (and some of their discoveries or contributions) are limited to: Rachel Carson—*Silent Spring*; George Washington Carver—agricultural products, technology; Nicolas Copernicus—Copernican revolution; Charles Darwin—classification, ecology, and natural selection; Galileo Galilei—gravity and telescopes; Jane Goodall—primate research; James Hutton—geology; Anton van Leeuwenhoek and Robert Hooke—microscopy; Johann Gregor Mendel—genetics; Isaac Newton—gravity, mechanics, light, and telescopes; Louis Pasteur—pasteurization; and Alfred Wegener—plate tectonics.

As a teacher, wouldn't you feel like you covered the standard if you taught your students about Thomas Edison's light bulb, Eli Whitney's cotton gin, and Lord Kelvin's Kelvin scale? You might feel good, but you would not have prepared your students for a test that focused on Rachel Carson, George Washington Carver, and Johann Gregor Mendel. Teachers (and their students) would benefit significantly from the additional information provided to the test developers, but that information

is not included as a part of the standards. Teachers wouldn't even know to look for this elaboration.

—H.G. and A.H.



In some states, the clarity and specificity of the standards are not the problem. The grade level and subject content to be taught are specific enough, but the tests simply cover other things.

A 3rd-grade teacher in this state is unlikely to have her students prepared for questions relating to words with multiple meanings, antonyms, or synonyms because, according to the state’s content standards, these concepts are not to be addressed until grade 4. As the example above demonstrates, the specific content standards that teachers receive from their state don’t always match up with what the state gives test developers to create the tests.

Here’s another example (taken from a different state) that reveals a similar problem. In this case, there are 8th-grade math standards and test specifications that *almost* match up. Both the standards and test specifications are about measurement, but they diverge in two important ways. First, although the standards say nothing explicitly about converting measurements, the test specification expects students to make several different types of conversions. Second, one of those conversions—moving from Fahrenheit to Celsius—involves content not even included in the 8th-grade standards.

Even with Strong Standards, Mismatch Can Happen

In some states, the clarity and specificity of the standards are not the problem; instead, it is the lack of follow-through. The grade level and subject content to be taught are specific enough, but the tests simply cover other things. For example, in one state, the 3rd-grade test pulls content from both the 3rd- and 4th-grade standards:

What 3rd-grade teachers receive:

Third-grade student uses a variety of strategies to determine meaning and increase vocabulary (for example, **prefixes, suffixes, root words**, less common vowel patterns, **homophones, compound words, contractions**)

What 4th-grade teachers receive:

Fourth-grade student uses a variety of strategies to determine meaning and increase vocabulary (for example, **multiple meaning words, antonyms, synonyms, word relationships, root words, homonyms**)

What the 3rd-grade test developer receives:

Third-grade test content limit—Vocabulary words for **prefixes** (e.g., *re-*, *un-*, *pre-*, *dis-*, *mis-*, *in-*, *non-*), **suffixes** (e.g., *-er*, *-est*, *-ful*, *-less*, *-able*, *-ly*, *-or*, *-ness*), **root words, multiple meanings, antonyms, synonyms, homophones, compound words, and contractions** should be on grade level

What 8th-grade teachers receive:

Under the header “Measurement and Estimation” are the following seven standards:

- Develop formulas and procedures for determining measurements (e.g., area, volume, distance)
- Solve rate problems (e.g., $\text{rate} \times \text{time} = \text{distance}$, $\text{principle} \times \text{interest rate} = \text{interest}$)
- Measure angles in degrees and determine relations of angles
- Estimate, use and describe measures of distance, rate, perimeter, area, volume, weight, mass, and angles
- Describe how a change in linear dimension of an object affects its perimeter, area, and volume
- Use scale measurements to interpret maps or drawings
- Create and use scale models

What the 8th-grade test developer receives:

Assessment Anchor: Demonstrate an understanding of measurable attributes of objects and figures, and the units, systems, and processes of measurement.

Convert measurements: Eligible Content

- Convert among all metric measurements (milli, centi, deci, deka, kilo using meter, liter, and gram)
- Convert customary measurements to 2 units above or below the given unit (e.g., inches to yards, pints to gallons)
- Convert time to 2 units above or below a given unit (e.g., seconds to hours)
- Convert from Fahrenheit to Celsius or Celsius to Fahrenheit

The 8th-grade standards have content that would require students to have, as the assessment anchor requires, “an understanding of measurable attributes of objects and figures, and the units, systems, and processes of measurement.” However, since teachers do not receive the specifics that the test developer receives, the 8th-grade teachers do not know to devote extra time to conversions, and the 8th-grade teachers—and their students—end up with the blame when the students perform poorly on the test.

Because of NCLB’s testing requirements, states have rushed to establish tests that comply with the law. However, there appears to be very little urgency to align those tests with the content standards or be transparent about which standards are assessed. Here is what we found:

■ **Eleven states met our criteria for having both strong reading and math standards and documenting in a transparent manner that their tests align to them in all NCLB-required grades.** They are: California, Indiana, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia. Eleven states is not a lot, but keep in mind that states could fall short for several reasons—having some content standards that are weak, not aligning their strong standards to their tests, and/or not providing evidence of alignment online. Of those who fell short (39 states plus the District of Columbia), 17 did so because at least some of their testing documents were not online, 32 did so because at least some of their standards were weak, and 18 did so because their standards and tests were not aligned.

■ **An additional three states had at least 75 percent of their tests aligned to strong content standards.** With a few adjustments in particular grades or in just one subject, these additional three states would fully meet our criteria for alignment to strong content standards: Mississippi (meeting 86 percent of our criteria), Oklahoma (meeting

Where and Why Does Mismatch Exist?

Only 11 states met our criteria for having tests transparently aligned to strong standards: Calif., Ind., La., Nev., N.M., N.Y., Ohio, Tenn., Va., Wash., and W.Va. This table shows why the others fell short.

State	Some test specifications not online	Some mismatch between standards and test specifications	Percentage of strong reading and math standards	Percentage of tests transparently aligned to strong reading and math standards
Alabama		✓	79	64
Alaska			79	79
Arizona			71	71
Arkansas	✓		79	0
Colorado		✓	14	14
Connecticut		✓	50	0
Delaware	✓		50	0
D.C.	✓		100	0
Florida			64	64
Georgia		✓	100	57
Hawaii	✓		50	0
Idaho		✓	57	50
Illinois		✓	0	0
Iowa	✓		0	0
Kansas			50	50
Kentucky			57	57
Maine	✓		50	7
Maryland	✓		57	57
Massachusetts	✓		100	43
Michigan	✓		100	43
Minnesota			50	50
Mississippi		✓	86	79
Missouri	✓	✓	50	0
Montana	✓	✓	0	0
Nebraska	✓	✓	29	29
New Hampshire			50	50
New Jersey	✓	✓	100	43
North Carolina	✓	✓	100	43
North Dakota	✓		100	0
Oklahoma			86	86
Oregon			71	71
Pennsylvania		✓	57	57
Rhode Island			50	50
South Carolina	✓	✓	64	14
South Dakota		✓	100	50
Texas			57	57
Utah		✓	71	50
Vermont	✓		57	57
Wisconsin		✓	21	0
Wyoming		✓	71	0

86 percent), and Alaska (meeting 78 percent).

■ **Twice as many states met our criteria for having strong and transparently aligned standards and tests in math than they did in reading.** Twenty-six states have aligned math tests across all grades tested. But, just 13 states have aligned reading tests across all grades tested.

(Continued on page 50)

How Wal-Mart Is (Mis)Shaping the Global Economy

By Richard Wilson

If you live in a big city outside the South, Wal-Mart probably crept up on you slowly and stealthily. Until recently, you probably thought of it as one of a growing number of “big box” retailers like Target and Costco—huge stores with large parking lots and low prices for products of all kinds. And—if you thought about it at all—you assumed that Wal-Mart was concentrating on smaller communities, especially in the rural South and Southwest—and it would be years before it showed up at a shopping mall near you.

Now, Wal-Mart seems to be everywhere. It’s the nation’s largest retailer, largest grocer, and largest employer. It is trying to open stores in New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, and other cities where it hasn’t had a presence. And whether that presence is good or bad for our communities, our consumers, and our workers is being debated in city councils and county boards, in the newspapers and on television, with conservative economists praising it for its “Every Day Low Prices” and the labor movement and others attacking it for its “Every Day Low Wages.”

Chances are you’ve heard that Wal-Mart pays much lower wages than unionized retail chains, that it skimps on health insurance for its workers and their families (forcing many to rely on Medicaid), that it fiercely resists union organizing efforts by its employees, and that it is being

blamed for holding down workers’ earnings and living standards throughout the retail and service sectors of the economy.

But what’s less well-known about Wal-Mart may be even more important: Wal-Mart exemplifies a major shift in the balance of economic power, with manufacturers getting weaker and retailers getting stronger. Since the dawn of the industrial age, American manufacturers have been the driving force behind our economic growth. By the 1950s and 1960s, our big manufacturers could honestly take credit for helping the U.S. become a global power and for contributing to the rapid growth in the country’s middle class. But today, the manufacturers that are left in the U.S. are a shadow of their former selves. Of course, Wal-Mart should not shoulder all of the blame for the demise of American manufacturing. But, as this article will explain, it has been a major player, particularly in clothing, housewares, and electronics.

Today, Wal-Mart is able to dictate what many manufacturers throughout the world will produce, how they will make their products, how much they will charge for them, and how much they will pay their workers. Thus, Wal-Mart’s fierce determination to cut prices at all costs drives down wages and benefits not only in the retail sector but also in the manufacturing sector—and not only in the U.S. but also throughout the world. To a large degree, Wal-Mart (the world’s largest employer), together with China (the world’s most populous country), is shaping the global marketplace.

It All Started Simply

The idea behind Sam Walton’s success was one shared by a number of “discounters.” The more you reduce the price, the greater the sales—and profit. Even if the profit on the

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It wasn't until the 1980s that costs could be cut along a new dimension, gouged deeper than ever before imagined, thanks to the incredibly cheap products that were to come from Asia and Latin America.

how small is legendary, and he applied it to both his personal and business lifestyle. He continued to wear cheap shoes, regularly borrow pocket change, and urge employees to use cheap hotels and avoid taxis by walking. The current CEO, Lee Scott, has bragged that those who stay in hotels are expected to bring the free pen from their room back to the national office for reuse. Those who pilgrimage to Bentonville, Ark., where Wal-Mart still has its headquarters, are surprised by the mix of furniture garnered from old floor samples in the offices of top executives.

In addition to experience as a discounter and his extreme frugality, Walton had a good sense of his customers: people who had little money to spend and had to stretch every dollar to get the basics for their families. With each reduction in price, more and more people started to buy.

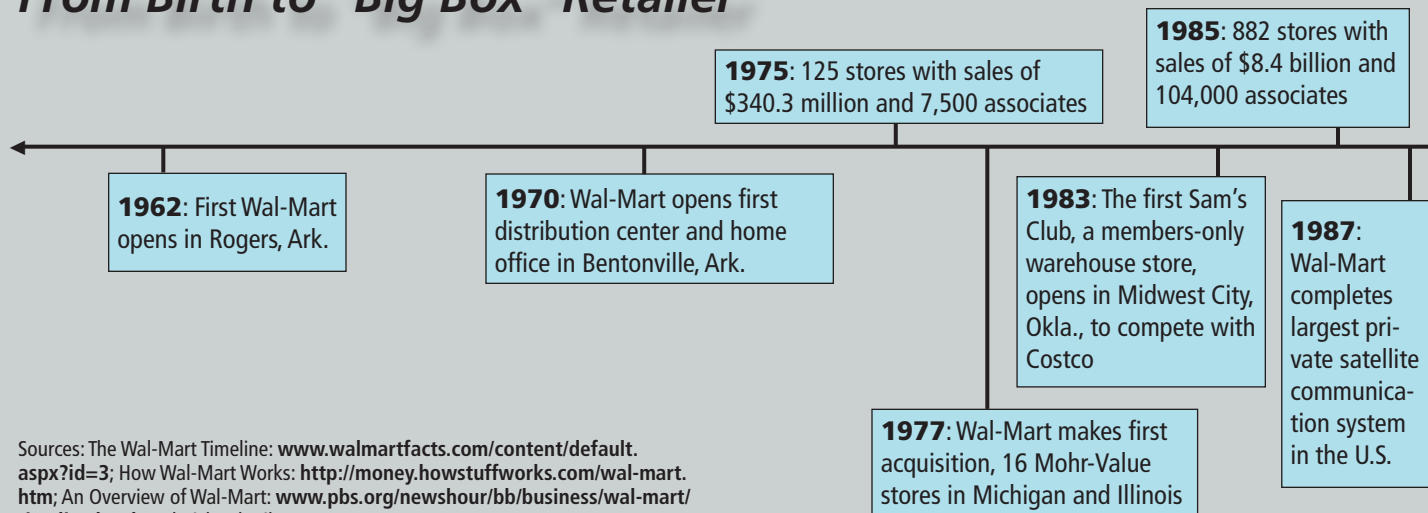
Walton took the company public in 1970. The stock was successful, giving him the means to build even more stores. From these grew more volume, and greater volume grew more stores. But it wasn't until the 1980s that costs could be cut along a new dimension, gouged deeper than ever before imagined, thanks to the incredibly cheap products that were to come from Asia and Latin America. By the late 1980s, Wal-Mart was no longer only a discount chain that built enormous stores with big parking lots; it was a force embarking on a complete overhaul of the retail industry.

Wal-Mart's large number of low-income consumers gave it the leverage to demand unprecedented cuts in prices from manufacturers and even changes in the products themselves. If a high-quality product couldn't be made cheaply enough, Wal-Mart would demand a similar product made with cheaper (and less durable) materials. Wal-Mart refused to meet with wholesalers or manufacturing representatives, demanding instead direct contact with the producer. This eliminated the cost of middle men and gave Wal-Mart a further cut in price. And it was yet another blow to small retailers, who depend on wholesalers to keep their inventory low. Small retailers must order

sale of an individual item is substantially cut, the increase in sales volume results in a larger profit. In turn, this larger volume arms the retailer to demand a lower price from the manufacturer.

Walton applied this approach with a vengeance; he never tired in his search for new ways to cut costs. His maniacal drive to chop away at every expense no matter

Wal-Mart: From Birth to "Big Box" Retailer



Sources: The Wal-Mart Timeline: www.walmartfacts.com/content/default.aspx?id=3; How Wal-Mart Works: <http://money.howstuffworks.com/wal-mart.htm>; An Overview of Wal-Mart: www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/business/wal-mart/timeline.html; and Richard Wilson.

Wal-Mart has 3,900 stores in the U.S., over 6,600 worldwide. Manufacturers will go to great lengths to secure even a portion of a business that operates on this kind of scale, leaving Wal-Mart free to make demands that were never dreamed of in the old retail industry.

Sears, J.C. Penny, Kohl's, Home Depot, Costco, and Best Buy combined. Its sales are six times larger than Target's, its nearest competitor. The major grocery and drugstore chains face the same dynamics. Wal-Mart runs way ahead, the others far behind. And this allows Wal-Mart to write new rules for the retail industry, the manufacturing industry, and the global economy.

Wal-Mart Is a Different Kind of Retailer

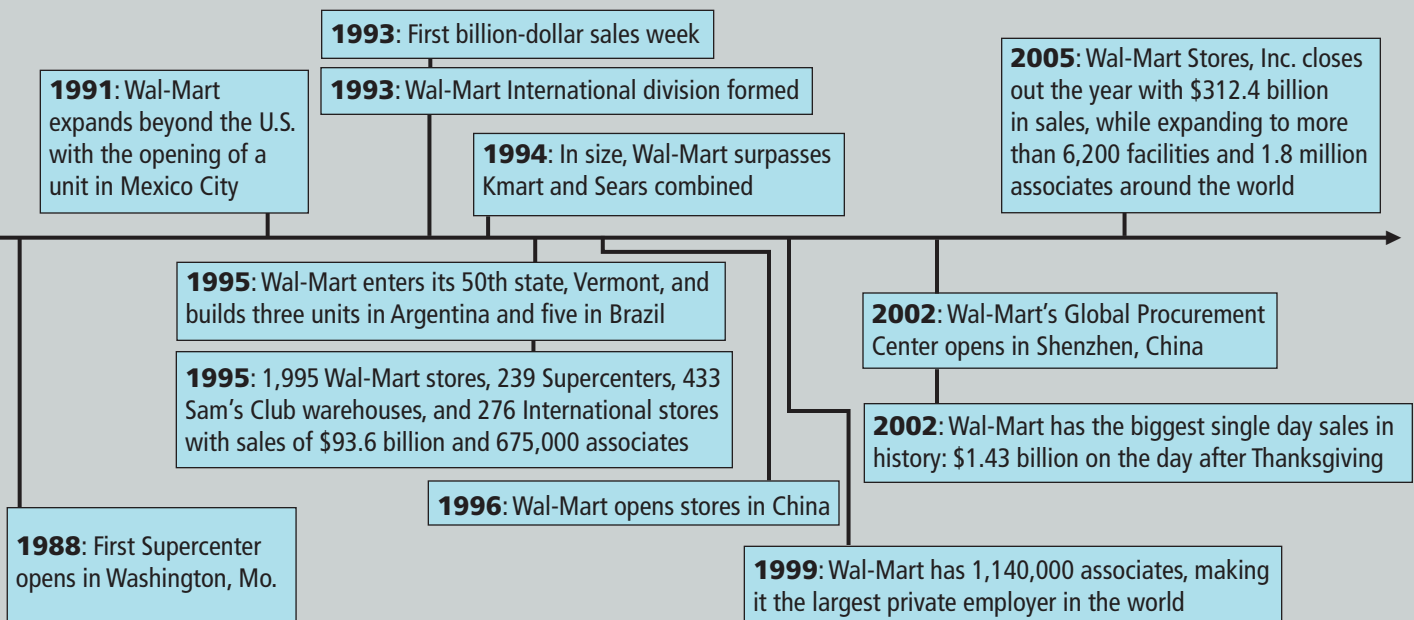
Wal-Mart does not wait to sell what manufacturers have to offer. Instead, it tells manufacturers what they must produce if they want Wal-Mart business. The sheer size of an order from Wal-Mart may well dwarf any one or all of those from other customers. Most retailers have one store; Wal-Mart has 3,900 stores in the U.S., over 6,600 worldwide. Manufacturers will go to great lengths to secure even a portion of a business that operates on this kind of scale, leaving Wal-Mart free to make demands that were never dreamed of in the old retail industry.

Wal-Mart determines not only what and how much to produce, but also the time and place of delivery. This may require a manufacturer to revamp his organization and make new investments to produce and deliver such a large number of items in the time allowed. The sticking point is price. Wal-Mart's offer will typically be very low, less than what would be acceptable from other retailers. But because the order is so large, the overall profit for the manufacturer is still very attractive, at least in the first round.

Huffy Bicycles, back in the early 1980s, received an order it couldn't fill even with its factories running on overtime. Wal-Mart wanted 900,000 low-end Huffy bikes—twice Huffy's production capacity. To keep Wal-Mart satisfied until it could expand its production capacity, the company turned its engineering and production plans over to competitors so that they too could make Huffy bikes and help Huffy meet the large order. But with subsequent orders

in small quantities to conserve their limited working capital. With only one or two stores, they are in no position to buy in large quantities or assume the risks that come with big inventories.

Of course, Wal-Mart isn't the only "big box" retailer on the scene today. But it is the heavyweight. Last year, Wal-Mart's sales of \$345 billion exceeded the total for Target,



came further demands from Wal-Mart on quantity, timing, and cost. Huffy couldn't make the grade in its unionized Celine, Ohio, factories. The only way to meet Wal-Mart's demands was to cut labor costs, so Huffy had to move.

The company's first move was to a non-union plant in Farmington, Mo., where it could pay \$2.50 an hour less. It wasn't enough. So Huffy left Missouri and moved to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, where wages were half those in Ohio. Even that wasn't enough. Finally, Huffy contracted with the Shenzhen Bo-An Bike Company in Shenzhen, China, to make its bikes. But it was too late: In 2004, Huffy filed for bankruptcy protection.

Today, the cloud of bankruptcy has been lifted by Sinosure, an agency of the Chinese government that promotes Chinese exports and foreign investments by offering export credit insurance. It is expected that Sinosure will have a 30 percent stake, and 70 percent will go to Huffy's creditors, led by Shenzhen Bo-An. Not only is Huffy no longer an American bike made by American workers, for all intents and purposes, it is now a company no longer managed by Americans. The only role left for an American is to buy a Huffy bike at Wal-Mart. Today, some 95 percent of all bikes for sale in the U.S. are made in China.

The story of Huffy's demise doesn't end there. Back in Celine, Ohio, with the help of the city fathers, the local Wal-Mart store expanded in May 2004 to a Supercenter on land formerly owned by Huffy. It is a story that so often follows Wal-Mart success. Wal-Mart drives away good jobs—and in so doing, creates a new crop of low-income families who must shop at Wal-Mart in order to stretch every dollar.

What happened to Huffy is, for Wal-Mart, a well-trod path. Once Wal-Mart has established a relationship with a manufacturer—and the manufacturer has made all of the changes and investments necessary to meet Wal-Mart's requirements—Wal-Mart again demands cuts in production costs, substantial cuts. Perplexed, the supplier examines each step in his production process. Some opportunities to become more efficient may be found, but such opportunities are limited; they are the result of research and development, which takes time.

But Wal-Mart is not about to wait.

The supplier again looks to see what other corners might be cut. How would less costly materials work? Might a design change lower costs, reduce unit labor costs? Too much is at stake not to find a way. But something else may be at stake if the manufacturer *does* find a way. Another famous American company—Levi Strauss—discovered this the hard way.

Levi Strauss jeans, at one time, sold themselves. Consumers saw James Dean, Bob Dylan, Elvis Presley, John Wayne, and Gary Cooper with the L-S logo on their back pocket. The company peaked in 1996 with about \$7 billion in sales. But then sales started to slide. The popularity of blue jeans drew in a wide range of competitors. As the market expanded, there was a demand for a new variety of design options. Designers met that demand with high-style jeans with big price tags. Levi was also hit on the

Faced with Wal-Mart's demand for lower costs, Huffy contracted with the Shenzhen Bo-An Bike Company in Shenzhen, China, to make its bikes. But it was too late: In 2004, Huffy filed for bankruptcy protection.

low end. After the North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect in 1994, cheaper jeans started coming in from Mexico. Wal-Mart, with its enormous customer base, appeared to offer Levi Strauss a way to return to the glory days of the early 1990s.

At the end of 2002, Levi Strauss hooked up with Wal-Mart. For Wal-Mart, Levi offered a name long associated in the public mind with a quality blue jean. The line was to include jeans with all the variations: low rise, boot-cut, relaxed fit, and so on. It was a new line that Wal-Mart could brag about.

Charles Fishman, in his excellent book *The Wal-Mart Effect*, describes the negotiations between the two firms. Levi Strauss had a problem right off. Its clothes were too expensive; they did not fit the everyday low price parameters of Wal-Mart. But Levi needed the business, and Wal-Mart wanted something new. To meet Wal-Mart's demands, writes Fishman, "Levi Strauss had to assemble a 50-person design and sourcing team, whose job was to develop a 'value' line of Levi-branded products made in cheaper denim, with simpler designs, that were easier and less expensive to manufacture." This became the new Signature Levi Strauss line—inexpensive, not of the same quality traditionally associated with Levi Strauss, and not made in the U.S.

Today, Levi Strauss puts its name on a product made by other companies—foreign firms—located in Mexico and

East Asia. In effect, Levi Strauss is now an importer rather than a manufacturer.

Levi must have known the risk it was taking to get a shot at Wal-Mart's high volume sales: Brand names, like machinery, can "rust" if not well maintained. Over time, deterioration in the quality of a product will reduce the appeal of a brand-name. For a while, Wal-Mart treated the Signature line with much fanfare, and Levi seemed to be holding its own. But then Wal-Mart decided to go after a more affluent customer—and that meant offering a higher quality jean. Since Levi was now identified with the lower quality Signature line on Wal-Mart's shelves, its name brand had become too rusty to draw in the more affluent customer. Wal-Mart selected Uncharted Territory as the new star. (That could well change by the time this article is printed.) On Wal-Mart's shelves, Levi Strauss is now down in a fight among the lowly brands, with some of its models at clearance prices.*

Wal-Mart itself is little affected by such changes. Wal-Mart's concern is not with this or that brand name, or with the loss of quality, or the collapse of American-made goods, or the demise of the small retailer. Wal-Mart has only two interrelated concerns: growth and profit.

Buy American, If It Does Not Cost More

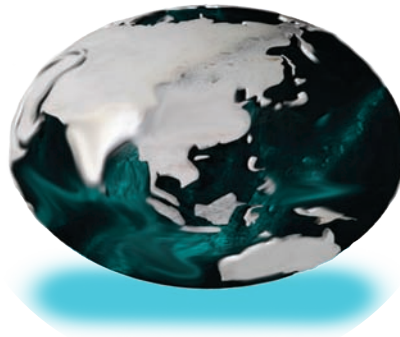
In 1984, then-Governor Bill Clinton asked Sam Walton for help to save a small Arkansas firm—Farris Fashions, Inc. The company was about to lose its flannel shirt business to a cheaper factory in Latin America. Walton placed an order to keep Farris in business. The Governor called Walton a "patriot" for his help.

A year later, and aware that many Americans were nervous about losing American manufacturing jobs to overseas factories, Walton kicked off a "Buy American" campaign, prominently featuring Farris Fashions, that was to continue for the next 12 to 14 years. But the reality of the Wal-Mart-Farris partnership was quite different from the campaign slogan. Farris Fashions cut costs by switching from U.S.-made fabric to imported fabric.

Just what did "Buy American" mean to Wal-Mart? In his letter to domestic suppliers Walton argued: "Something must be done by all of us in the retailing and manufacturing areas to reverse the serious threat to our free enterprise system.... Our Wal-Mart Company is firmly committed to the philosophy of buying *everything possible* from suppliers who manufacture their products in the United States" [emphasis added]. Sam's idea of "everything possible" hinged on his definition of "possible." In his mind, if the American-made product cost even a little more than the foreign-made version, it simply wasn't "possible" to buy the American one. Over the next two decades, Wal-Mart steadily increased its purchases of goods from other countries around the world. Walton apparently had no problem

*Levi is currently struggling to scrape the rust off its brand name. Last year it launched a high-end line, "Capital E," which has been somewhat successful in department stores. But despite the higher price tag, these Levis are also being made overseas.

Wal-Mart drives away good jobs—and in so doing, creates a new crop of low-income families who must shop at Wal-Mart in order to stretch every dollar.



simultaneously pursuing these two opposing tracks. As his friend and tennis partner George Billingsley said, "Sam was a tough man. I mean tough tough." Just as he never mentioned that the fabric for Farris Fashions' flannel shirts was imported, Walton did not discuss the second track in public: "Buy American" sounded a lot better than "Buy American only when it is the cheapest."

Well into the 1990s, the "Buy American" campaign remained a central focus of Wal-Mart advertising and its voice to the public. Meanwhile, in the early 1980s, Sam Walton quietly helped establish an independent firm with an office in Hong Kong and, soon thereafter, in Taipei, Taiwan, that could purchase foreign-made goods for Wal-Mart. This move was kept under wraps. During the "Buy American" campaign, Wal-Mart emphasized that it purchased only a small portion of what it sold from overseas suppliers. What Wal-Mart failed to say was that a great many of its "American" suppliers had their products made in other countries. Even worse, Wal-Mart outright lied about where some of its products were made: In 1992, the television program *Dateline* aired footage from a hidden camera showing foreign-made goods in Wal-Mart stores under signs that read "Made in America."

Setting up a "Buy American" façade while seeking out foreign-made goods was only one part of Wal-Mart's strategy. The other part was lobbying to open up new opportunities to manufacture goods overseas. As early as 1981,

several years before the “Buy American” campaign started, Wal-Mart executives were in Washington, D.C., to oppose proposed tariff increases on Chinese goods.

One of Wal-Mart’s greatest lobbying victories came in early 2000 when legislation normalizing trade with China passed both the House and Senate by wide margins and was signed into law by then-President Clinton. This legislation was supposed to do two things: 1) open China (with its one billion consumers) to American goods and 2) smooth the path for China to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The WTO sets the rules of trade for its members and is the source of agreements to lower trade tariffs and other barriers in order to expand the volume and extent of international commerce. For Wal-Mart, China’s entrance into the WTO would mean reduced tariffs on long lists of goods that Wal-Mart imports.

Just 14 months after the legislation passed, China did become a member of the WTO, and its goods now enter with lower tariffs. But the enormous Chinese market promised for American-made goods has yet to materialize. The fact is, the vast majority of Chinese people are not able to afford American-made goods. Last year, U.S. imports from China were \$287.8 billion, but our exports to China were a mere \$55.2 billion. The economic connection the Chinese people have to America is not as consumers, but as low-wage workers in the supply factories that make goods to export to American consumers (see sidebar, p. 41).

Wal-Mart continues to be an active supporter of various Free-Trade Agreements of the Americas. Its extensive lobbying network is currently focusing on the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). As with China’s entry into the WTO, what’s in it for Wal-Mart is lower tariffs on foreign-made goods. Wal-Mart is also heavily involved in so-called “technical issues.” These are exceptions to tariff requirements that allow some countries to export specific goods for a period of time without paying any tariffs. Not surprisingly, Wal-Mart asks for exceptions for goods that it wants to sell. In a 2005 letter to the U.S. House of Representatives’ Ways and Means Committee, for example, Wal-Mart asked that the tariffs on 42 different goods be temporarily suspended.

Forget “Buy American,” Just Buy Chinese

To truly understand Wal-Mart, one has to look at its partnership with China. Three decades ago, Wal-Mart’s main use of China was to get a price quote from a foreign manufacturer with a factory in China and then use it to beat down the prices quoted by American manufacturers with factories in the U.S. In those days, Wal-Mart was often bluffing; using a foreign manufacturer was difficult because of unreliable factories, uncertain transportation, unstable governments, and volatile currencies. By the early 1980s, that started to change—China had created four “special enterprise zones” and opened 14 coastal cities to foreign enterprise. The Chinese government told foreign investors that factories would be built to their specifications.

In 1992, the television program *Dateline* aired footage from a hidden camera showing foreign-made goods in Wal-Mart stores under signs that read “Made in America.”



Sam Walton saw the opportunity, and (as noted in the previous section) he helped establish a company in Hong Kong and Taiwan that purchased foreign-made goods for Wal-Mart. But by the late 1980s, Walton wanted even more control over his ties to Asia. He asked his friend, George Billingsley, to buy the company out and create a new one, Pacific Resources Export Limited (PREL) in Hong Kong. Billingsley described it as “one-stop-shopping for the world.”

In every legal sense, PREL was independent of Wal-Mart. With this third-party status, Billingsley scoured the world for the lowest production costs. Meanwhile, Wal-Mart—his only customer—was still hyping its “Buy American” campaign. But, when an American company was desperate to meet Wal-Mart’s demands, PREL was there to help it find a cheap foreign manufacturer, thus not only satisfying Wal-Mart’s needs, but also often introducing the American company to the “advantages” of out-sourcing to low-wage, minimum-regulation countries. Wal-Mart could continue to claim that it purchased only a small portion of what it sold from overseas suppliers, not mentioning that it was helping more and more “American suppliers” find their way to foreign factories.

PREL operated as a separate entity until 2002, when it was officially bought out by Wal-Mart. By that time there

Every Day Low Prices ... and Wages

“Sometimes, we work all night and we have to work our shift as usual the next day. You have to work overtime. If you don’t, it’s regarded as skiving off, and a fine gets deducted from our wages. There’s far too much overtime, and many of us really don’t want to do it. I know some women who’ve fainted because they were so exhausted.” And yet, according to this woman and others interviewed by The China Labour Bulletin (a watchdog group pushing to improve the lot of Chinese workers), the ones who faint are lucky. Some, like Yang Xixiang, have died from overwork. Xixiang had worked straight for 21 hours. Found in her dormitory room unconscious, she was declared dead at the hospital. The manager at first refused to compensate the family until a strike of co-workers forced his hand.

Why do these women put up with such horrible hours? They are an underclass hoping to make enough money to send home to a family living in rural poverty. Wages are low in China, but these women—typically migrants from rural areas aged 16 to 30—make low wages even by Chinese standards. And even if a woman decides to give up, to go back to her family and rural poverty, she often can’t: Several months’ wages are often held in arrears to prevent women from leaving.

These young women make up the large majority of the workers in the supplier factories for all those famous American brands that are no longer made in America. They assemble, sew, glue, cut, and bend products for export—everything from jeans to iPods, boots to stereo systems, toys to uniforms, and computers to wireless phones.

A study in Dongguan by The China Labour Bulletin found that the typical work schedule is 12 to 14 hours a day, 7 days a week, with one day off a month. When there is a rush to get an order out, even more hours are required. Verité, a respected monitoring organization with long experience in China, did a special study devoted to excessive overtime. It looked at 142 Chinese supplier factories largely in garment, shoe, and knitting industries. Of the 142, over 93 percent had overtime exceeding the legal limit of 60 hours overtime per month—and 33 percent had more than 100 hours per month.

Never mind the fact that this kind of schedule is not allowed under China’s laws or the various “codes” or “standards” set for these supplier factories by American corporations. Such laws and standards seem to exist for PR purposes, not to protect the workers. Wal-Mart has standards—



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MICHA PELED, FROM CHINA BLUE, TEDDY BEAR FILMS

These young women work in a Chinese sweatshop making blue jeans. For roughly six cents an hour, they often work 18-hour days, seven days a week. Sometimes they work even longer hours and are overcome with exhaustion.

and even conducts inspections. But it announces the vast majority of its inspections in advance, giving the factory owners time to “clean up” their records and coach employees on how to answer questions.

When two reporters from the *Washington Post* visited the Shenzhen Baoan Fenda Industrial Company, they watched “women hunch over worktables, many hands banded and few covered with gloves, pressing transistors into circuit boards ... [amid] clattering machinery ... and screaming electric saws.” After their observation of the workers, the reporters turned to the factory’s engineer for his story. It turned out that the company had an order from Wal-Mart for 350,000 stereos. He explained, “the profit is really small ... we constantly cut costs to satisfy Wal-Mart” (“Chinese Workers Pay for Wal-Mart’s Low Prices,” *Washington Post*, February 8, 2004, p. A1).

—R.W.



The Struggle for Democracy in China: Resource for Teachers

To teach your students about the plight of Chinese workers, see *China: The Struggle for Democracy and Freedom*. This AFT resource guide addresses issues such as worker rights, child labor, healthcare, and education. It can be ordered for \$5 from AFT’s online store: www.aftstore.org/aft/welcome.asp. Click on “special resources.”

were over 20 offices around the world, with the main center in Hong Kong. PREL then became Wal-Mart’s Global Procurement Center—and quickly moved across the border from Hong Kong to Shenzhen, China, the hub of China’s opening to the West and to a market economy.

The 1,600 people who now work for Wal-Mart’s Global Procurement Center are dispersed among 27 offices in 23

countries; they can get products made, cheaply, in over 70 countries. When a favorite American manufacturer just cannot cut costs any further, the Global Procurement Center steps in to find a foreign production facility for the American supplier. The American company, in essence, switches from being a manufacturer to an importer.

In all such decisions, China remains the paramount

Roughly 165 million people in China are looking for work. Not only is the labor force extraordinarily large, but the stream of new entrants will keep a lid on wages for years to come.

duction and stop any attempts to interfere with management, since management and government, according to Communist theory, are the true voice of what's best for the country and its people. Today's Chinese "unions" operate under the control of the Communist Party. Chinese workers have very little, if any, power to increase their wages, reduce the number of hours they are required to work, or improve their working conditions.

Wal-Mart is closely allied to China, not only as its largest customer, but also as a major player in China's \$841 billion consumer market—a market that promises to become the world's largest. Wal-Mart has already opened 71 stores in China, 66 of which are Supercenters. More are planned, and Wal-Mart is on the edge of much faster growth in China. It has bid \$1 billion for Trust Mart—a Taiwanese-owned retail chain of over 100 stores in China.

As Wal-Mart becomes more and more deeply embedded in China, its self-interest runs along the same lines as the government in Beijing. An authoritarian state, China opposes democratic change and regularly harasses and arrests democratic activists. Wal-Mart, in turn, is strongly wedded to the stability of the present regime. In fact, Wal-Mart has recently accepted the presence of Communist Party organizations in its Chinese national office in Shenzhen and in a number of its stores.

* * *

choice. Why? China's enormous supply of low-cost labor, combined with its stable authoritarian government, easily convertible and stable currency, high degree of literacy among both men and women, technical skills and capacity to make more sophisticated products, improvements in infrastructure, and openness to foreign business make it more appealing than other developing countries.

China offers an immense pool of cheap labor unsurpassed by any other country; roughly 165 million people in China are looking for work. Most of the available workers come from rural areas, and either they or their parents used to work the land. Until 1979, China's planned economy emphasized agricultural work, particularly grain production. As the government loosened the reins on people's economic activities in the 1980s, the share of the labor force in agriculture went down by 25 percent. Millions of Chinese poverty-stricken peasants left central and western China in search of employment in the east. The most recent official figures put these internal immigrants at 140 million, with many more to come. In addition, as China has made the transition to a more open, market-based economy, many state-owned factories that offered higher wages, healthcare, and pensions have been closed. Twenty-five million people who lost their jobs in these factories now seek work.

Not only is the labor force extraordinarily large, but the stream of new entrants will keep a lid on wages for years to come, especially since China has unions in name only. What the Chinese call "trade unions" adhere to Vladimir Lenin's conception of unions: Their role is to increase pro-

It seems that just the day before yesterday, the titans on the economic scene were manufacturing companies. Their factories were symbols of American power and success. We thought of General Motors, for example, not only as the largest auto company but also as exemplifying the biggest and best of American manufacturing firms. Respected brands like Huffy and Levi Strauss were also icons, symbolizing American quality. Today, American manufacturers stagger, cut production, and lay off workers. Wal-Mart is the new symbol of American power.

Wal-Mart sells more and makes greater profits than any of America's former heavyweights. Wal-Mart expands; they contract. In turn, Wal-Mart's customer base expands again: As workers are laid off from the large manufacturers and forced to take lower-paying jobs with less benefits, they are the perfect candidates to become the new customers at Wal-Mart. It is a final touch to the big success of the big retailers, and to the decline of manufacturing in America. In the old world, American manufacturers did well selling to their own well-paid workers. Now Wal-Mart welcomes the workers who lost those good jobs.

With the dominance of large retail chains over manufacturers, the power they now have to dictate the terms and location of production, the emergence of China as the first choice of supply, the atrophy of good jobs, the erosion of benefits, and the emergence of Wal-Mart as the leader of this transformation, it seems, to borrow the words of C.S. Lewis, "we have just turned some great corner, and that everything, for better or worse, will always henceforth be different." □

The Facilities Gap

Cameras in Hand, Students Capture Photos of Schoolhouse Decay

Nearly 20 years ago the American Federation of Teachers called for a “Marshall Plan” for urban schools, pointing out that the infrastructure of cities had deteriorated as federal funds were sharply reduced. Existing school buildings were crumbling and new schools were not being built. This problem has now spread far beyond the boundaries of urban school districts and touches nearly every school system in our nation.

Staff in the most neglected schools struggle to educate students in conditions that few corporations—much less building inspectors—would tolerate. Mold, leaking ceilings, extreme temperatures, raw sewage seeping into hallways, mice droppings, severely overcrowded classrooms—these unhealthy and unsafe conditions plague tens of thousands of old and new school buildings where millions of American children and adults must study and work. As a Boston math teacher put it, these deplorable conditions “convey a message to the students: You are not worth the effort of providing and maintaining a good school.”

Unhealthy and unsafe school conditions make it difficult for students to concentrate, for teachers to teach, and for staff to do their jobs. An elementary media specialist in Lake County, Fla., put it very well when she said, “Think of how much learning could take place if heads were clear, noses were not running, and coughing were not a constant distraction.”

This article is adapted from “Building Minds, Minding Buildings: Turning crumbling schools into environments for learning,” a new report from the AFT. For more information, see box on page 51.



DJ, Grade 8

“This picture has a lot of garbage. It has a ball, newspaper, a hubcap, a metal fence, candy wrappers, etc. All that garbage is floating on dirty water. This is a staircase to get to the basement of the school—looks like nobody’s been down there in a while. I took this picture because that is definitely a place they need to fix up.”

The AFT does not consider poor conditions an excuse for schools to escape accountability. But we will not shirk our responsibility to advocate for our members and their students by ignoring the situation. Poor school building conditions create a terrible inequity—a facilities gap—in which low-income and minority children are disproportionately affected by often appalling physical conditions. One of the greatest concerns is that unhealthy schools appear to be contributing to an increase in the number of students with asthma. Asthma can be caused—and exacerbated—by persistent exposure to air pollution and poor ventilation, both of which appear to be prevalent in school buildings. In a 1999 report on the condition of public school facilities, 26 percent of schools reported unsatisfactory ventilation and 18 percent reported unsatisfactory indoor air quality.¹ The consequences appear to be severe:

- Nearly one in 13 school-age children has asthma, and the percentage of children with asthma is rising more rapidly among preschool children than any other age group, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.²
- Among children ages 5-17, asthma is the leading cause of school absence due to a chronic illness. This translates to an annual loss of more than 14 million school days per

(Continued on page 46)

Students' Photos, Students' Voices

It's one thing to read about moldy bathrooms, drafty classrooms, and leaky ceilings; it's another to see them—and still another to see them through the students' eyes. The photos shown here, and on the previous page, were taken by middle- and high-school students in Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Md. These students are working with Critical Exposure, an organization founded by Adam Levner, a former fifth-grade teacher, and Heather Rieman, a former education policy analyst, to get students involved in documenting

the disparities in our school system. "Much as the Civil Rights Movement depended on those who were not directly impacted by segregation being exposed to brutal images of racial injustice," say Levner and Rieman, "the education movement will not succeed so long as Americans are shielded from seeing the reality that exists in many low-income schools."

Critical Exposure provides students with cameras and teaches them about documentary photography and visual storytelling. It then arranges

for the photos to be hung in art galleries, libraries, schools, cafes, and other public places to inform people about the conditions in our schools. In an effort to make the distribution of educational resources more equitable, Critical Exposure partners with community groups across the country to strengthen their campaigns by using the power of students' images and voices. To learn more, visit Critical Exposure online at www.criticalexposure.org.

—EDITORS

**Chris,
Grade 12**

"This is a picture of the broken water fountain in the school."



**Robert,
Grade 11**

"The Hole That Grew: When this chipped area in the wall first started it was not bigger than a cat eye. And now, due to no one fixing the hole when it first started it has grown."

Top right, **Frances, Grade 11**
Right, **Alexis, Grade 12**





**Kayla,
Grade 10**

"This is my AP Government and Politics class. This picture displays the conditions that students have to endure in order to obtain an education from a recognized school of excellence."



**Ian,
Grade 10**

"This window has been broken for months. Insulation problems lead to higher energy costs."



Above, **Timothy, Grade 10**



Far left and below, **Alexis, Grade 12**

(Continued from page 43)

“Temperature extremes range from being so cold in the winter that students/teachers have to wear their coats and gloves (making it difficult to write) and so hot in spring and fall (up to 98 degrees in some classrooms) that children have nosebleeds and vomiting, and teachers feel faint and nauseated.”

**—Teacher
New York City**

year, or approximately eight days for each student with asthma.³

■ The death rate from asthma for children ages 5-14 doubled from 1980 to 1998,⁴ with African-American children and young adults four to six times more likely than white children and young adults to die from asthma.⁵

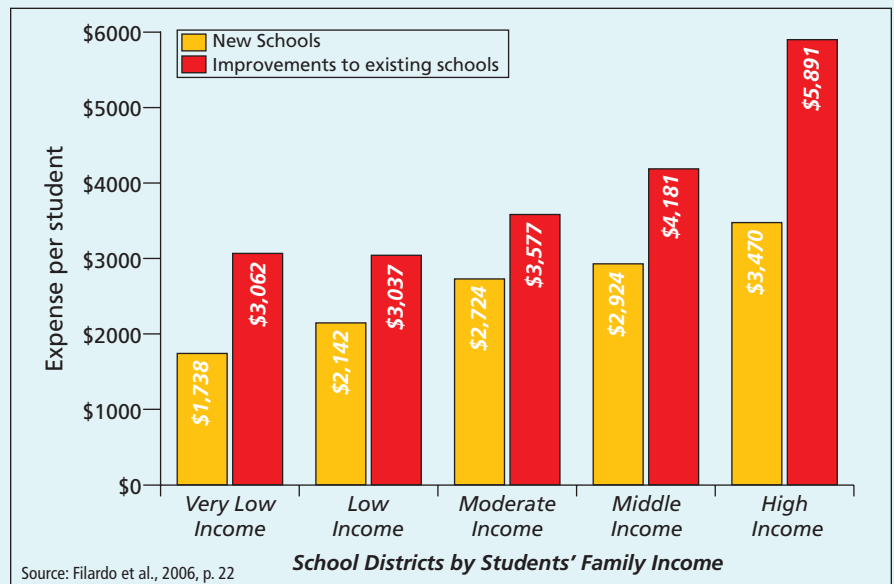
The need for additional federal support for state and local efforts to build, repair, and modernize schools is tremendous. But with or without additional federal dollars, teachers, support staff, parents, and other members of the community can bring unhealthy conditions to light, push for repairs to be made, and ensure that new construc-

The Facilities Gap Appears to Be Growing

A little over a decade ago, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that about 60 percent of the nation’s schools needed at least one major repair and that one-third of the schools—which educated 14 million students—needed extensive repairs or to be replaced (GAO, 1995). Not surprisingly, it also found that schools in need of repairs were concentrated in central cities and tended to have very high percentages of students from low-income families (GAO, 1996).

Since that time, nearly \$600 billion has been spent on school construction; more than 12,000 new schools have been built and over 130,000 repairs and other improvement projects have been completed (Filardo et al., 2006). But because that money has not been distributed and spent equitably, problems still exist—especially in urban areas.

As the chart above shows, high-income districts spent[†] roughly twice as much as very low-income districts



on school construction, improvements, and repairs, between 1995 and 2004.

But wait: It gets worse. Not only did high-income districts spend more, they were mostly doing upgrades. In contrast, the low-income districts were making desperately needed repairs. The researchers found that:

Most projects that took place in very low-income school districts were health- and safety-related projects, often the result of poorly maintained school buildings. Examples include the “warm, safe, and dry” initiative of the Cleveland Municipal School

District and the basic health and safety projects of the Abbott School Districts in New Jersey, where roof and boiler replacements, asbestos abatement, and other basic improvements consumed the vast majority of construction dollars. In contrast, in the high-income districts, projects in existing schools were much more likely to entail modernizing a science lab, adding a performing arts center, or investing in other facility improvements that enhance the quality of education. By modernizing their buildings, affluent districts are further increasing the edu-

[†]In this study, very low-income districts were those in which more than 75 percent of students qualified for lunch subsidies, low-income districts were those in which 40 to 75 percent of students qualified for lunch subsidies, moderate-income districts were those in which 25 to 40 percent of students qualified for lunch subsidies, middle-income districts were those in which 10 to 25 percent of students qualified for lunch subsidies, and high-income districts were those in which less than 10 percent of students qualified for lunch subsidies.

tion and modernization projects are planned, designed, implemented, and maintained in a manner that produces conditions conducive to teaching and learning. Here are several examples of how AFT affiliates have been trying to improve their local school facilities.

- In Newark, N.Y., the AFT local union played an active role when the district undertook a \$50 million building project in 2000. Union members sat on districtwide planning committees, and union leadership followed the process closely as construction proceeded, particularly when classes were conducted during construction. The union requested copies of air quality reports as they were issued and accompanied building and fire inspectors on their tours after construction was completed and before certificates of

(Continued on page 51)

ditional amenities available to their students, while poorer school districts are struggling just to keep their students dry. (Filardo et al., 2006, p. 22)

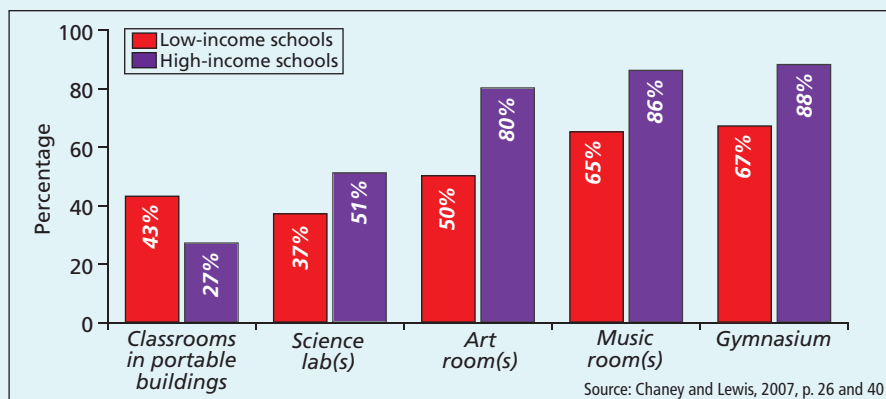
A thorough, national study of school facilities has not been completed since the GAO's study in the mid-1990s, so it is not possible to say what percentage of the nation's schools now need major repairs. However, two recent nationally representative surveys indicate that much work remains. One survey asked principals about a range of factors that affect the school environment (such as indoor air quality, acoustics/noise control, and heating); about one-third of principals reported that there was at least one factor that interfered with instruction (Chaney and Lewis, 2007). The other survey asked teachers if their school buildings and grounds were clean and in good condition; 18 percent of all teachers, and 24 percent of teachers who work in inner city

"The mold is so bad that in one of the teachers' bathrooms, mushrooms are growing."

***— Math specialist
Greenburgh, N.Y.***

schools, said no (Markow et al., 2006). Similarly, a 2002 study of the schools that 10th-graders attend found that many needed basic repairs and better maintenance. For example, in 30 percent of all of the schools studied and 38 percent of the urban schools, some bathroom stalls were missing doors; trash was found on the floor in 16 percent of all the schools studied and 26 percent of urban schools (Planty and DeVoe, 2005).

Trash on the floor and missing bathroom doors are, of course, urgent problems—but so too are disparities in science labs, gymnasiums, art rooms, and other amenities. For many urban schools, this isn't an issue of



"[Our school has] broken ceiling tiles, plumbing in bathrooms that have not been updated since the '60s, dirty carpets and electrical outlets that don't work (this causes the use of extension cords across the room), and finally, roaches everywhere!"

***—Paraprofessional
Oklahoma City***

needing repairs, it's an issue of needing to have such spaces. The survey of principals mentioned above revealed great disparities between schools in terms of what they can offer students. As the chart below shows, low-income schools* are much more likely to have classrooms in portable buildings and are much less likely to have amenities like science labs or music rooms.

—EDITORS

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*In this study, low-income schools are those in which at least 75 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and high-income schools are those in which less than 35 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Movie Fantasy vs. Classroom Reality

What Teaching Really Takes

By Tom Moore

In the past year or so, I have seen Matthew Perry drink 30 cartons of milk, Ted Danson explain the difference between a rook and a pawn, and Hilary Swank remind us that white teachers still can't dance or jive talk. In other words, I have been confronted by distorted images of my own profession—teaching. Teaching the post-desegregation urban poor, to be precise.

Although my friends and family (who should all know better) continue to ask me whether my job is similar to these movies, I find it hard to recognize myself or my students in them.

So what are these films really about? And what do they teach us about teachers? Are we heroes, villains, bullies, fools? The time has come to set the class record straight.

At the beginning of Ms. Swank's recent movie, *Freedom Writers*, her character, a teacher named Erin Gruwell, walks into her Long Beach, Calif., classroom, and the camera pans across the room to show us what we are supposed to believe is a terribly shabby learning environment. Any experienced educator will have already noted that not only does she have the right key to get into the room but, unlike the seventh-grade science teacher in my current school, she has a door to put the key into. The worst thing about Ms. Gruwell's classroom seems to be graffiti on the desks, and crooked blinds.

I felt like shouting, Hey, at least you have blinds! My first classroom didn't, but it did have a family of pigeons

living next to the window, whose pane was a cracked piece of plastic. During the winter, snowflakes blew in. The pigeons competed with the mice and cockroaches for the students' attention.

This is not to say that all schools in poor neighborhoods are a shambles, or that teaching in a real school is impossible. In fact, thousands of teachers in New York City somehow manage to teach every day, many of them in schools more underfinanced and chaotic than anything you've seen in movies or on television (except perhaps the most recent season of *The Wire*).

Ms. Gruwell's students might backtalk, but first they listen to what she says. And when she raises her inflection just slightly, the class falls silent. Many of the students I've known won't sit down unless they're repeatedly asked to (maybe not even then), and they don't listen just because the teacher is speaking; even "good teachers" are occasionally drowned out by the din of 30 students simultaneously using language that would easily earn a movie an NC-17 rating.

When a fight breaks out during an English lesson, Ms. Gruwell steps into the hallway and a security guard immediately materializes to break it up. Forget the teacher—this guy was the hero of the movie for me.

If I were to step out into the hallway during a fight, the only people I'd see would be some students who'd heard there was a fight in my room. I'd be wasting my time waiting for a security guard. The handful of guards where I work are responsible for the safety of five floors, six exits, two yards, and four schools jammed into my building.

Although personal safety is at the top of both teachers' and students' lists of grievances, the people in charge of real schools don't take it as seriously as the people in

Tom Moore, a 10th-grade history teacher at a public school in the Bronx, is writing a book about his teaching experiences. This article is reprinted with permission of the New York Times, January 19, 2007.



charge of movie schools seem to.

The great misconception of these films is not that actual schools are more chaotic and decrepit—many schools in poor neighborhoods are clean and orderly yet still don't have enough teachers or money for supplies. No, the most dangerous message such films promote is that what schools really need are heroes. This is the Myth of the Great Teacher.

Films like *Freedom Writers* portray teachers more as missionaries than professionals, eager to give up their lives and comfort for the benefit of others, without need of compensation. Ms. Gruwell sacrifices money, time, and even her marriage for her job.

Her behavior is not represented as obsessive or self-destructive, but driven—necessary, even. She is forced into making these sacrifices by the aggressive neglect of the school's administrators, who won't even let her take books from the bookroom. The film applauds Ms. Gruwell's dedication, but also implies that she has no other choice. In order to be a good teacher, she has to be a hero.

Freedom Writers, like all teacher movies this side of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, is presented as a celebration of teaching, but its message is that poor students need only love, idealism, and martyrdom.

I won't argue the need for more of the first two, but I'm always surprised at how, once a Ms. Gruwell wins over a class with clowning, tears, rewards, and motivational speeches, there is nothing those kids can't do. It is as if all the previously insurmountable obstacles students face could be erased by a 10-minute pep talk or a fancy dinner. This trivializes not only the difficulties many real students must overcome, but also the hard-earned skill and tireless effort real teachers must use to help those students succeed.

Every year young people enter the teaching profession hoping to emulate the teachers they've seen in films. (Maybe in the back of my

mind I felt that I could be an inspiring teacher like Howard Hesseman or Gabe Kaplan.*) But when you're confronted with the reality of teaching not just one class of misunderstood teenagers (the common television and movie conceit), but four or five every day, and dealing with parents, administrators, mentors, grades, attendance records, standardized tests, and individual education plans for children with learning disabilities, not to mention multiple daily lesson plans—all without being able to count on the support of your superiors—it becomes harder to measure up to the heroic movie teacher you thought you might be.

It's no surprise that half the teachers in poor urban schools, like Erin Gruwell herself, quit within five years. (Ms. Gruwell now heads a foundation.)

I don't expect to be thought of as a hero for doing my job. I do expect to be respected, supported, trusted, and paid. And while I don't anticipate that Hollywood will stop producing movies about gold-hearted mavericks who play by their own rules and show the suits how to get the job done, I do hope that these movies will be kept in perspective.

While no one believes that hospitals are really like *ER* or that doctors are anything like *House*, no one blames doctors for the failure of the healthcare system. From *No Child Left Behind* to *City Hall*, teachers are accused of being incompetent and underqualified, while their appeals for better and safer workplaces are systematically ignored.

Every day teachers are blamed for what the system they're just a part of doesn't provide: safe, adequately staffed schools with the highest expectations for all students. But that's not something one maverick teacher, no matter how idealistic, perky, or self-sacrificing, can accomplish. □

* Hesseman starred in *Head of the Class*, Kaplan in *Welcome Back Kotter*.

Mismatch

(Continued from page 33)

Overall, our results lead us to conclude that states are doing a better job in developing content standards than in using them to drive assessment. Simply put, in too many cases, tests that are not aligned to strong standards are driving many accountability systems. In order to comply with NCLB, states have been under enormous pressure to quickly develop new assessment systems. We hope this research provides some ideas on how they could improve those systems in the near future. For example, state departments of education need to post their content standards on their Web sites, along with information about how their state tests are aligned to these standards—they also need to keep this information current. When test developers or state officials clarify standards in order to write test items

that align to them, the clarifications should be made public and should make their way back to the original standards document in the form of clearly marked revisions. This way, educators will be able to skip the guessing game and teach the content that the state believes is most important.

Detailed information about content standards and what will be tested should be readily available to anyone (teachers, students, parents, the general public) at any point, and should not have to be ferreted out. Educators, in particular, need to know that what will be tested draws from the content standards to which they are teaching. Where there's a mismatch, or a fuzzy match, or only an assumed match between the content that's expected and the content that's assessed—and when the results are used to judge students, schools, and teachers—it's no wonder that folks in schools toss up their hands in frustration. □

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The Facilities Gap

(Continued from page 47)

occupancy were issued. The union was vigilant about ventilation systems for science labs and technology rooms, where it continually monitored gas jets, chemical showers, chemical storage closets with locks, and other safety issues. Once construction was completed, the union continued monitoring and reporting problems to district administrators, such as leaky roofs, incomplete classroom finishing work, malfunctioning parking lot lights, heating and air ventilation problems, and improperly mounted equipment that could fall (e.g., projection screens and televisions).

■ In Chicago, Ill., the AFT local union regularly monitors the condition of schools with a three-step process. First, members are encouraged to report problems to the building-level Professional Problems Committee, which makes sure the principal follows up with a work order for necessary repairs. Second, if repairs aren't made, the union then directly contacts Chicago Public Schools officials. Finally, if the problem is not fixed, a complaint is filed with the Illinois Department of Labor, which will visit the site and issue citations, if necessary. Examples of recent problems

“[We have] leaks and even the occasional icicle from my computer lab ceiling, asbestos coming up off the floor, the exterior walls are crumbling. We feel forgotten by our community and state and federal funding.”

***—Technology coordinator
Minnesota***

include large amounts of dust in a building from external sandblasting, ceiling tiles falling on students and staff, and dangerously loose floor tiles. The union newspaper regularly highlights unsafe building conditions, as well as the union's actions to protect students and staff.

■ In Baldwin, N.Y., AFT members participate in the district's very active health and safety committee. The committee formulated an indoor air quality document that is used as a standard in other districts. Air quality issues are investigated within 24 hours of a complaint being filed. When an addition was built to Baldwin's middle school, all members of the committee were furnished with hardhats and invited on walkthroughs during the construction.

AFT members bring to the school facilities process a vital institutional memory, a deep understanding of how the school building can help or hinder the learning process, and an abiding concern for the well-being of students and colleagues.

The urgent conversation about educational improvement in our country is usually missing one critical element—the physical condition of many of our schools. That omission is unfair to students and the staff who work with the students, and it inhibits the advances in achievement we need to

build a more equitable society and a stronger economy. High-performing schools—healthy and sustainable, built and maintained to spark learning and generate pride—cannot be reserved for select communities. They must be part of the academic agenda for every American student. If this nation is committed to high academic standards, we must stop ignoring the impact that the physical environment plays in students' health and learning. □

Endnotes

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“Building Minds, Minding Buildings” is available at www.aft.org/topics/building-conditions/downloads/minding-bldgs.pdf.

The report covers the problem of inadequate, unhealthy, and unsafe public school building conditions; the consequences of poor conditions on learning, health, and staff retention; the elements of well-designed, well-built, well-maintained schools; and recommendations for action at all levels to improve school buildings.



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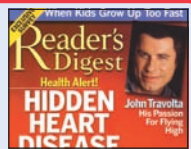
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