EDUCATION AND URBAN SOCIETY

an independent quarterly journal
of social research with implications for public policy

EDITOR
CHARLES J. RUSSO, University of Dayton

EDITORIAL BOARD
FRANK BROWN, University of North Carolina
GRACE L. BUTLER, University of Houston
PETER J. CISTONE, Florida International University
A. REYNALDO CONTRERAS, San Francisco State University
JOYCE L. EPSTEIN, Johns Hopkins University
JANE HANNAWAY, The Urban Institute
G. ALFRED HESS, Jr., Northwestern University
MARGARET LeCOMPTE, University of Colorado, Boulder
JAY D. SCRIBNER, University of Texas at Austin
CAROL CAMP YEAKEY, University of Virginia

For Corwin Press: Jason Dean, David Neyhart, Kelli Palma,
and Elena Nikitina

EDUCATION AND URBAN SOCIETY

Organizations interested in adopting our journal and providing subscriptions for their members may contact Elena Nikitina, Corwin Press, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320.
EDUCATION AND URBAN SOCIETY

CONTENTS

Volume 34, Number 1
November 2001

Editorial

CHARLES J. RUSSO

Designing Appropriate Curriculum for Special Education Students in Urban Schools
TIMOTHY E. MORSE

Racial Politics and the Elusive Quest for Excellence and Equity in Education
PEDRO A. NOGUERA

Organizing for Literacy Achievement: Using School Governance to Improve Classroom Practice
PRISCILLA WOHLSTETTER
and COURTNEY L. MALLOY

The Impact of Emerging Market-Based Public Policy on Urban Schools and a Democratic Society
CAROLYN S. RIDENOUR, THOMAS J. LASLEY, II, and WILLIAM L. BAINBRIDGE

Revisiting Paradigms in Black Education: Community Control and African-Centered Schools
D. CRYSTAL BYNDLOSS

Urban Teachers Unions Face Their Future: The Dilemmas of Organizational Maturity
BRUCE S. COOPER and MARIE-ELENA LIOTTA

About the Authors
POLICY: During recent years, an increasing number of social scientists have been conducting research on education as a social institution. Research studies have not been limited to the workings of the institution but have begun to explore educational institutions and processes as agents of social change. Much of this work, of course, centers on the problems and needs resulting from the national concern with improving the urban environment but also involves the role of education in a society that is urban. EDUCATION AND URBAN SOCIETY exists to foster such research and to provide a multidisciplinary forum for communication.

SUBMISSIONS: Manuscripts should be sent to Charles J. Russo, Editor, Education and Urban Society, 324 Chaminade Hall, Department of Educational Administration, University of Dayton, Dayton, OH 45469. Manuscript style should adhere to guidelines of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (4th ed.). Please use double spacing, with tables and figures placed at the end of the article. An electronic copy must also be provided.

EDUCATION AND URBAN SOCIETY (ISSN 0013-1245) is published four times annually—in November, February, May, and August—and distributed by Corwin Press, a Sage Publications Company, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320; telephone (800) 818-SAGE (7243) and (805) 499-9774; fax/order line (805) 375-1700; e-mail order@corwinpress.com. Copyright © 2001 by Corwin Press. All rights reserved. No portion of the contents may be reproduced in any form without written permission of the publisher.

Subscriptions: Regular institutional rate $295.00 per year, $90.00 single issue. Individuals may subscribe at a one-year rate of $85.00, $30.00 single issue. Add $8.00 for subscriptions outside the United States. Noninstitutional orders must be paid by personal check, VISA, or MasterCard.

Periodicals Postage Paid at Thousand Oaks, California, and at additional mailing offices.

This journal is abstracted or indexed in Automatic Subject Citation Alert, BMDS (Health and Psychosocial Instrument), Current Contents, Current Index to Journals in Education, Education Index, Educational Administration Abstracts, Family Resources Database, Historical Abstracts, Human Resources Abstracts, International Bibliography of Periodical Literature and CD-ROM, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Public Affairs Information Service, Sage Public Administration Abstracts, Sage Urban Studies Abstracts, Social Planning/Policy & Development Abstracts, Social Science Index, Social Sciences Citation Index, Sociological Abstracts, Sociology of Education Abstracts, United States Political Science Documents, and Urban Affairs Abstracts, and is available on microfilm from University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Back Issues: Information about availability and prices of back issues may be obtained from the publisher’s order department (address below). Single-issue orders for 5 or more copies will receive a special adoption discount. Contact the order department for details. Write to the London office for sterling prices.

Inquiries: All subscription inquiries, orders, and renewals with ship-to addresses in North America, South America, and Canada must be addressed to Corwin Press, a Sage Publications Company, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320, U.S.A.; telephone (800) 818-SAGE (7243) and (805) 499-9774; fax (805) 375-1700; e-mail order@corwinpress.com. All subscription inquiries, orders, and renewals with ship-to addresses in the U.K., Europe, the Middle East, and Africa must be addressed to Sage Publications, 6 Bonhill Street, London EC2A 4PU, England; telephone +44 (0)20 774-0645, fax +44 (0)20 774-8741. All subscription inquiries, orders, and renewals with ship-to addresses in India and South Asia must be addressed to Sage Publications, P.O. Box 4215, New Delhi 110 048, India; telephone (91-11) 641-9884; fax (91-11) 647-2426; Address all permissions requests to the Thousand Oaks office.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by Sage Publications, for libraries and other users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) Transactional Reporting Service, provided that the base fee of 50¢ per copy, plus 10¢ per copy page, is paid directly to CCC, 21 Congress St., Salem, MA 01970. 0013-1245/2001 $5.00 + 10.

Advertising: Current rates and specifications may be obtained by writing to the Advertising Manager at the Thousand Oaks office (address above).

Claims: Claims for undelivered copies must be made no later than six months following month of publication. The publisher will supply missing copies when losses have been sustained in transit and when the reserve stock will permit.

Change of Address: Six weeks’ advance notice must be given when notifying of change of address. Please send old address label along with the new address to ensure proper identification. Please specify name of journal, POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Education and Urban Society, c/o 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320.
EDITORIAL

This issue marks the beginning of a new era in the long and successful history of Education and Urban Society (EUS) as we move to adopt a traditional peer-reviewed format. To date, each issue of EUS was a guest-edited journal by an expert (or team of experts) on a given topic and focused on a salient question that affects urban schools. As valuable of a function as these guest edited issues served, and can still serve, we are broadening our horizons to traditional peer review to cover an even wider range of timely and evolving issues. At the same time, in order to preserve some of EUS’s tradition, we will devote one issue per year to a single theme identified by a guest editor. In addition, as appropriate, we will include focus sections offering perhaps two or three articles on a single topic that will provide for more in-depth coverage of a particular issue. Finally, we will shortly add a new feature in the form of book reviews. Interested readers who have a proposal for a guest-edited issue or a focus section or any questions about EUS should feel free to contact me at charles.russo@notes.udayton.edu. We hope that you enjoy our new format.

Charles J. Russo
Editor
University of Dayton
DESIGNING APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS IN URBAN SCHOOLS

TIMOTHY E. MORSE
University of Southern Mississippi–Gulf Coast

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, our nation’s federal special education law, states that students with disabilities are to be provided specially designed instruction. Specially designed instruction refers to the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction that is presented to these students. Accordingly, the design of an appropriate curriculum for special education students in urban schools is discussed in this article. First, the unique circumstances of urban special education students are discussed. Afterward, a comprehensive curriculum model that can be used to design an appropriate curriculum for these students is presented.

Much has been written in the past 25 years about appropriate placements for special education students (Edgar & Polloway, 1994). The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA), our nation’s federal special education law, addresses this issue in its definition of the term least restrictive environment. In defining this term, the IDEA states that students with disabilities are to be educated in regular education classes to the maximum extent possible. Over the years, various terms have been used in the professional literature to describe the placement of special education students in regular education classes. Initially, the term mainstreaming was used to describe this placement but was recently replaced by the term inclusion (Simpson, 1996).

Efforts to include children with disabilities in regular education classes have been accompanied by controversial modifications to the curriculum that is presented in these settings. Lieberman (2001) argued that some educators, in their zeal to implement inclusion, have modified the regular education curriculum to the extent that the changes will enable some special education

AUTHOR’S NOTE: Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Timothy E. Morse, Division of Education and Psychology, University of Southern Mississippi—Gulf Coast, 730 East Beach Boulevard, Long Beach, MS 39560-2699.
students to be included in regular education classes throughout their school
careers. However, Lieberman noted that these students ultimately will be
excluded from many community environments (e.g., competitive, paid employ-
ment opportunities) during their adult years because they will not have
acquired the skills they need to access these environments. Polloway, Patton,
Epstein, and Smith (1989) supported Lieberman when they argued that the
curriculum decisions educators make are paramount. Polloway et al. (1989)
stated that, regardless of how effective educators’ instructional strategies are,
these strategies are of little use if the content that is taught to students is
irrelevant.

Given these circumstances, it is appropriate to address the curriculum
needs of special education students. More specifically, it is appropriate to
address the curriculum needs of special education students in different set-
tings, such as those who are attending urban schools versus rural schools.
Cronin and Patton (1993) identified practical reasons why curriculum deci-
sions should be local ones, such as the fact that students in some parts of our
country need to be taught that the strip of land that separates roadways is
called a median, but in other parts of our country students need to be taught
that in their community this strip of land is called the neutral ground. How-
ever, four additional reasons support the need to examine the design of appro-
propriate curriculum for urban special education students.

First, data suggest that special education programs in inner cities face
unique challenges and differ from nationally representative data on special
education students (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Thus, any discus-
sion about appropriate curriculum for special education students must, to
some degree, acknowledge the uniqueness of urban special education stu-
dents. McIntyre (1992) and Obiakor and Algozzine (1993) have argued that a
shortcoming of some school reform efforts has been that they have failed to
address the fundamental differences that exist between urban schools and
their rural and suburban counterparts. These criticisms are germane to this
discussion because it addresses curriculum reform for urban special educa-
tion students.

A second reason why it is appropriate to discuss curriculum design for
urban special education students is because data indicate that urban special
education students differ from their similarly classified peers of 25 years ago.
Specifically, today’s urban special education students are more patently dis-
abled than their similarly classified peers of 25 years ago. For example, some
data indicate that students who are classified as “learning disabled” today
would have been classified as “educable mentally retarded” 25 years ago.
(Gottlieb, Alter, Gottlieb, & Wishner, 1994). School personnel who are relying on the learning disabilities literature to guide them in their curriculum development efforts on behalf of these students may be honestly misguided in their work.

Third, the IDEA states that students with disabilities are to be educated in the general education curriculum. Yet, this law also states that these students are to be provided an appropriate education. This refers to an education that meets the student’s presenting needs. The practical result of the IDEA’s somewhat conflicting mandates is that some children with disabilities—such as the more patently disabled ones referred to above—will need to be placed in a modified general education curriculum or even an alternative curriculum (Clark, 1994; Knowlton, 1998; Weaver, Landers, & Adams, 1991). How these circumstances apply to urban special education students warrants discussion.

Fourth, some students’ disabilities highlight the fact that the curriculum decisions school personnel make on their behalf are of utmost importance. Wolery, Ault, and Doyle (1992) stated that school personnel will always be able to identify more skills that need to be taught to students with severe disabilities than those personnel will be able to teach to these students. Again, how these circumstances apply to urban special education students warrants discussion.

The following discussion about appropriate curriculum design for urban special education students begins with a discussion of the definition of the term curriculum. Next, the unique circumstances of urban schools and urban special education students are presented. Afterwards, the six critical features of Polloway et al.’s (1989) comprehensive curriculum model are discussed as they apply to the design of appropriate curriculum for urban special education students.

**IDEA AND THE MEANING OF THE TERM CURRICULUM**

In the IDEA, special education is defined, in part, as specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. Specially designed instruction, in turn, refers to the content, methodology, and delivery of this instruction. According to these definitions, a student’s placement in special education requires that the content of the student’s school program, meaning his curriculum, be examined to insure that it is designed to meet the unique needs that result from the student’s disability. Although many definitions for curriculum have been presented in the literature, for the purposes of
this discussion, curriculum will refer to the skills, tasks, and behaviors that school personnel want their students to learn.

The U.S. Department of Education (1996) noted that the provision of appropriate special education services to urban youth rests in part on the school’s ability to select an appropriate curriculum for these students. Because certain reform measures have been criticized for not examining the unique nature of urban schools, I will discuss the unique nature of urban schools and urban special education students before suggesting how curriculum should be designed for such students.

**URBAN SCHOOLS IN AMERICA**

Inner-city districts enroll 26% of all students in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 1996) and, according to Gottlieb et al. (1994), the vast majority of these students are poor and members of minority groups. The U.S. Department of Education (1996) reported data indicating that 30% of all inner-city students live in poverty, compared to 18% of students living outside the inner city. Regarding minority group enrollment, data indicate that public schools in inner cities enroll almost twice as many African American and Hispanic students as do non-inner-city schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

Urban districts in general, and inner-city districts in particular, enroll a greater percentage of limited English proficient students than do nonurban schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Thus, one can see that a couple of the precursors that are associated with dropping out of school—poverty, lack of school success, single-parent families, and limited English proficiency—are prevalent in urban areas. In fact, dropout rates in urban areas range from 40% to 60% (McIntyre, 1992). In certain cities, dropout rates for some minority groups are as high as 75% to 80% (McIntyre, 1992). These data compare to a national dropout rate of 12% (Blumberg & Ferguson, 1999).

These disconcerting data are compounded by—and may even, to some extent, be the result of—the difficulties urban schools face in recruiting and maintaining qualified teachers. The number of teachers leaving teaching is markedly higher in urban schools, and inner-city schools reportedly have greater difficulty recruiting teachers than schools in other areas (Obiakor & Algozine, 1993; Rousseau & Davenport, 1993). The lack of a trained, stable workforce could adversely affect the work these schools perform.
SPECIAL EDUCATION IN URBAN SCHOOLS

The U.S. Department of Education (1996) remarked that data pertaining to urban special education students and programs are scarce. However, the data that do exist suggest that special education programs in the inner cities face unique challenges and differ in some respects from nationally representative data on special education students, personnel, and services. Yet, the U.S. Department of Education also stated that there are some similarities between inner-city and suburban and rural districts. Each serves similar percentages of students with disabilities—10.4% and 10.8%, respectively—and the types of disabilities vary only slightly. Unfortunately, the ways in which these areas differ do not bode well for urban special education students.

Students with disabilities in urban areas are more likely to be exposed to risk factors that are associated with school failure, such as poverty, one-parent families, and families in which the parent does not have a high school diploma. Blumberg and Ferguson (1999) reported that (a) 47% of youth with disabilities live in households with annual incomes of less than $12,000, (b) 22% of urban special education students have parents who have not completed high school, and (c) only 10% to 25% of urban special education students live in two-parent households.

Another risk factor associated with dropping out of school—limited English proficiency—is also more prevalent among urban special education students than their nonurban counterparts. The U.S. Department of Education (1996) reported that 5% of special education students in inner-city districts have limited English proficiency compared to 1% of the special education students in non-inner-city districts.

Not surprisingly, relatively high dropout rates for students with disabilities in urban areas have been reported in national studies and surveys conducted from 1985 to 1998. These data indicate dropout rates of 36.6% for urban special education students compared to rates of 24% and 31.4% for special education students in rural and suburban areas, respectively (Blumberg & Ferguson, 1999). Similarly, high school graduation rates for urban special education students do not compare favorably to their nonurban peers. The U.S. Department of Education (1996) reported that the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students revealed that just more than 50% (50.8%) of youth with disabilities in urban areas graduated from high school compared to 66.9% of their counterparts in suburban areas and 60.8% in rural areas.

Again, a possible contributing factor to the dropout and graduation data just reported is the special education teacher shortages that are particularly
severe in inner-city areas. Thirty-eight percent of all public schools had teaching vacancies in special education from 1990 to 1991, ranging from 42% in inner cities to 35% in rural communities. Not surprisingly, urban public school administrators have said that vacancies in special education were the most difficult to fill (U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

Given the fact that research consistently shows that high school graduation is an important predictor of postsecondary success for individuals with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 1996), the relevant data reported above are not very encouraging. In fact, postsecondary outcome data indicate that these individuals continue to struggle after exiting school.

Data indicate that individuals with disabilities are less likely to be employed than their peers in the years immediately after high school. Blumberg and Ferguson (1999) reported that nearly 1 in 5 of these individuals were not employed and not looking for work 3 to 5 years after exiting high school. Furthermore, Blumberg and Ferguson reported that a 1992 survey of 13 million U.S. working age people revealed that 34% of adults with disabilities worked full or part time compared to 79% of adults without disabilities.

Available data do not indicate that urban youth with disabilities are unemployed because they have opted to enroll in postsecondary education immediately after high school rather than enter the workforce. Only 14% of urban special education students who were out of secondary school for up to 2 years reported having taken any postsecondary coursework in the past year (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Likewise, when they graduate from high school, urban special education students are less likely to attend any type of postsecondary school. Blumberg and Ferguson (1999) reported that 3 to 5 years after graduating from high school, 37% of these students had attended some type of postsecondary school compared to 68% of high school graduates in the general population.

These outcome data may be influenced by that fact that urban special education students are fundamentally different from their peers in other settings even though both sets of students share the same disability labels. In one study, Gottlieb et al. (1994) found that the mean IQ score of children labeled learning disabled in urban schools was 81.4 as compared to 102.8 for children labeled learning disabled in suburban schools. Thus, Gottlieb et al. have concluded that the textbook disability definitions, such as the one for learning disabled, may not apply to children identified as such in urban settings. Related literature, including discussions pertaining to appropriate curriculum for these students, may be equally inapplicable.
GENERAL DATA PERTAINING TO DISABLED YOUTH

Blumberg and Ferguson (1999) reported additional postschool adjustment data pertaining to individuals with disabilities that, even though they do not single out urban special education students, must be considered applicable to these individuals as it is applicable to all similarly situated persons. Individuals with disabilities are achieving lower levels of independent living than their peers in the general population: 37% of individuals with disabilities are reported to have achieved some form of independent living within 5 years of leaving secondary school compared to 60% of nondisabled individuals. Also, many youth with disabilities experience significant social isolation and, as adults, this situation is likely to worsen. Thirty-three percent of students with disabilities reported going out once a week versus 55% of the general population, and 69% of adults with disabilities reported regularly socializing with friends versus 86% of the general population.

APPROPRIATE CURRICULUM FOR URBAN SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

Gottlieb et al. (1994) stated that we must know who our students are before we can design appropriate programs for them. The information presented above addresses Gottlieb et al.’s concerns by providing educators insight regarding the curriculum needs of urban special education students. Hence, the six critical features of Polloway et al.’s (1989) comprehensive curriculum model can be applied to this information so that school personnel can design appropriate curriculum for urban special education students.

Comprehensive curriculum should be responsive to the needs of an individual student at the current time. Urban special education curriculum must account for the fact that, at present, the population of students who are being served in special education programs in urban settings (a) may not fit the textbook definitions of the disability classifications they have been assigned and (b) may be more patently disabled than their similarly identified peers just 25 years ago (Forness, 1985; Polloway, Epstein, Patton, Cullinan, & Luebke, 1986). Today, some urban special students who have been identified as learning disabled are more characteristic of individuals who, in the recent past, would have been considered to have mild mental retardation (Gottlieb et al., 1994). Thus, an appropriate curriculum for these students should address both the acquisition of basic academic skills and adaptive behaviors (i.e.,
behaviors that lead to independent functioning, such as cooking and purchasing skills). If educators rely solely on the learning disabilities literature to determine the curriculum needs of urban learning disabled students, it is quite possible that these students would be offered an inappropriate curriculum that focused solely on remediating their academic deficits without addressing their adaptive behavior needs.

Furthermore, urban special education students who are presently labeled mentally retarded have average IQ scores (i.e., mean IQ = 54) that indicate they have moderate or more significant mental retardation (Gottlieb et al., 1994). This means that a functional curriculum—one that focuses primarily on teaching these students daily living skills rather than traditional academic skills—should be offered to them (Siegel-Causey & Allinder, 1998).

Comprehensive curriculum should be consistent with the objective of balancing maximum interaction with nondisabled peers against critical curricular needs. Data indicate that urban special education students are spending relatively more time in regular education classes than are their peers in suburban and rural settings (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). The placement of urban special education students in a regular education class for a relatively high amount of time may represent an effort on behalf of urban schools to (a) respond to the inclusion movement, (b) address the data indicating that minority students tend to be placed into what are considered to be lower academic tracks that have the net effect of limiting their future options (Obiakor & Algozzine, 1993), and (c) respond to the special education teacher shortage these schools face.

Yet, given the extent of urban special education students’ disabilities, one must question whether their curriculum needs are being met in these classes. The data presented above indicate a need to design curriculum for urban special education students that differs somewhat from the general education curriculum but still allows special education students opportunities to interact with their nondisabled peers.

These competing forces—designing an appropriate curriculum and maximizing interaction with nondisabled peers—can be addressed reasonably over the course of an urban special education student’s academic career. First, because all students are working to acquire basic academic skills when they are in elementary school, urban special education students will have many appropriate opportunities to be educated in regular education classes during this time. When these students enter junior and senior high school, integration can be achieved through other means, such as community-based instruction (Langone, Langone, & McLaughlin, 2000; Smith & Hilton, 1994). That is, when urban special education students receive needed life-skills
instruction in the community, they will be integrated among nondisabled individuals. Even though community-based instructional (CBI) activities might be problematic in some urban neighborhoods (Dever & Knapczyk, 1997), CBI activities are one option that can be exercised to address integration concerns.

Comprehensive curriculum is integrally related to service delivery options (i.e., resource programs, self-contained classes, and modified models). Gottlieb et al. (1994) and others have stated that, given the level of disability exhibited by urban special education students who have been classified as either learning disabled or mentally retarded, a self-contained special education classroom may be the least restrictive environment for these students (MacMillan & Borthwick, 1980). Thus, though much has been written about how students with these categories of disability can be kept in regular education classes through the use of consultative/collaborative service delivery models (e.g., see Zigmond & Sansone, 1986), this literature may not readily apply to urban special education students so labeled.

In fact, given the data presented above, one may question how applicable all of the placement literature is to urban special education programs. For example, the literature that exhorts the full inclusion of special education students in regular education classes acknowledges that additional resources, such as certified teachers, paraprofessionals, and planning time, will be needed when this service delivery model is used (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Leal, 1999). The data presented above indicate that providing these additional resources will be problematic for urban schools because, among other challenges, they experience difficulties retaining and recruiting qualified personnel.

This uninviting scenario does not mean that this feature of the comprehensive curriculum model cannot be addressed adequately. Urban educators can use available service delivery options and still allow for the integration of special education and nondisabled students by remaining mindful that the continuum of special education settings does not obviate every single opportunity for the inclusion of special education students in regular education classes. Even self-contained placements allow for some integration because, by definition, a self-contained placement means a student with a disability will be educated in a special education classroom for more than 60% of the school day. In other words, a student in this placement could be educated for approximately 40% of the school day in a regular education setting.

Comprehensive curriculum is delivered from a realistic appraisal of potential adult outcomes of individual students. Projecting potential adult
outcomes for a student is a risky proposition for those who are making the projections. At the very least, any attempt at outcome projection should be based on available data rather than mere speculation. For example, Smith (1998) provided some guidance for individuals who are making projections on behalf of students with mental retardation. Smith stated that individuals with mild mental retardation have been shown to be capable of mastering elementary-school literacy skills and daily living skills, whereas students who are moderately mentally retarded can be expected to learn how to read basic sight words, master basic counting skills, and learn to perform some semi-independent living skills. This information is relevant to urban special education students because many who are presently classified as learning disabled are functioning like their mildly mentally retarded counterparts of 25 years ago, and those who are labeled mentally retarded are functioning as if they are moderately mentally retarded or more significantly disabled. Thus, the curriculum that is offered to these students should reflect an understanding of this adult outcome data.

When urban educators address this feature of the comprehensive curriculum model by taking into account the data just presented, they will also address several issues that were highlighted previously. For example, some data indicate that special education students achieve lower levels of independent living and experience social isolation as adults. Consequently, an appropriate curriculum for these students that includes the teaching of independent living skills would address these deficit areas (Polloway, Patton, Smith, & Roderique, 1991). Offering urban special education students this curriculum would also address the fact that their parents—approximately one quarter of whom are not high school graduates—may not be as capable of teaching them daily living skills as are the parents of nondisabled students.

One caveat that school personnel must keep in mind is that the content in each special education student’s individualized education program (IEP) must be based on the student’s presenting needs and not his categorical label. The categorical label can provide some guidance for IEP development, but the student’s individual needs should determine the precise content in the IEP (Beck, Broers, Hogue, Shipstead, & Knowlton, 1994).

Comprehensive curriculum is focused on transitional needs across the life span. The IDEA has, since 1990, emphasized the need to address special education students’ transitions from high school to postsecondary environments (Halpern, Benz, & Lindstrom, 1992; Smith & Puccini, 1995). The data showing that urban special education students are achieving relatively low rates of employment and are not accessing postsecondary educational opportunities indicate a particular need to address the transitional needs of urban special...
education students across the life span. A life span focus in particular is appropriate given the fact that adulthood can cover a much longer period of time (e.g., 70 years) than a student’s school career (Gerber, 1998).

Urban educators can address the employment needs of urban special education students by offering them a curriculum in which career preparation activities are included across each student’s school career. Career awareness activities can be presented in elementary school, followed by career exploration and preparation activities in junior and senior high school (Moore, Agran, & McSweyn, 1990).

Increasing the postsecondary educational opportunities for these students will have to be addressed through collaborative efforts between the public schools and adult service agencies. An appropriate starting point would be for public schools to make known to adult service agencies the curriculum taught to urban special education students (Bruininks, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1992). Adult service agencies can then design appropriate entry-level courses for these students as well as appropriate comprehensive adult curricula.

Comprehensive curriculum is sensitive to graduation goals and specific diploma track requirements. The relatively high dropout rates reported for both urban special education students and their nondisabled peers are cause for alarm. These dropout rates raise a number of questions, one being whether students in these settings are being presented a curriculum that, in their estimation, does not meet their needs and results in their decision to drop out of school (Smith & Dowdy, 1992). This scenario is likely to emerge when a traditional college-preparatory curriculum is being offered to students who, for a number of reasons, simply do not belong in this curriculum.

The data presented in this article indicate that an alternative curriculum leading to the awarding of a high school diploma is certainly needed for today’s urban special education students (Patton et al., 1996). This curriculum would focus on teaching these students basic, functional literacy skills and independent living skills that lead to securing a job, performing independent living tasks, interacting in the community, and being prepared to enroll in relevant postsecondary coursework.

CONCLUSION

Gottlieb et al. (1994) noted that there are no simple solutions to the issues that need to be addressed on behalf of urban special education students. Designing an appropriate curriculum for these students presents a complex
challenge to the school personnel who must address this issue. This challenge will only be addressed adequately if these personnel possess a fundamental understanding of the unique circumstances that pertain to these students. This article is intended to be an initial attempt to provide school personnel with the relevant information they need to begin to adequately address the issue of designing an appropriate curriculum for these students.

Polloway et al. (1989) stated that there will always be a recurring need to develop innovative and relevant curriculum that address the six critical features of their comprehensive curriculum model. Consequently, urban school personnel can be assured that they will continuously be challenged to create a comprehensive curriculum that meets the presenting needs of urban special education students. Because one fourth of our nation’s students are enrolled in inner-city schools, educators must insure that this challenge is met.

As school personnel work to address the curriculum needs of urban special education students, these personnel must remain mindful of the IDEA’s pronouncement that disabilities are a natural part of the human condition and that, after receiving an appropriate education, individuals with disabilities will be capable of becoming full participants in all facets of our society. By designing appropriate curriculum for urban special education students, school personnel bring this pronouncement into fruition.

**REFERENCES**


Blumberg, R., & Ferguson, P. M. (1999). *Brief discussions of critical issues in urban education: On point . . . on transition services for youth with disabilities.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 437 472)


This article examines the factors that influence the development of educational policies and practices designed to ameliorate the achievement gap in relatively affluent school districts. To provide a context for understanding the issues surrounding efforts to promote educational equity, the article begins by describing initiatives undertaken by schools in the recently established Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN). The remainder of the article draws on research collected from a 4-year study carried out at Berkeley High School (BHS) to illustrate how racial disparities in academic outcomes are influenced by the structure of opportunity within schools and how efforts to address inequities often become politicized. The goal is to use the case of BHS to show how political factors complicate efforts to reduce racial disparities in student achievement and to make it clear why political strategies, rather than educational strategies alone, are needed to respond to the racial achievement gap.

The relationship between race and academic achievement is once again the focus of national attention. Periodically, this issue has become the subject of debate in the national news media, and on each occasion various experts are called on to put forward explanations of racial differences in academic performance—preferably one that can be summed up in two minutes or less. As the current debate about the relationship between race and student achievement has heated up, the performance of Black middle-class students in particular has been the subject of intense scrutiny. Despite their relative privilege, middle-class Black students typically lag behind White and Asian students of similar and even lower socioeconomic status (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Spencer, 2000). Similar patterns can be seen among Black and Latino students who attend well-financed, integrated schools in affluent communities (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). For such students, arguments related to inequities in funding and access to educational opportunities, which are relevant to poor students, do not seem pertinent. As such, the search for explanations to this apparent paradox has inspired renewed interest in the relationship
between race and academic performance, but once again there is more confusion than clarity in public discussions of the issue.

The last controversy surrounding the racial achievement gap was triggered by the publication of *The Bell Curve* by Hernstein and Murray (1994). In this case, the authors argued that genetic differences between Blacks and Whites accounted for unequal outcomes in academic performance, and much of the controversy related to their book centered on whether or not there was actual proof that African Americans were genetically inferior.\(^1\)

In the current period, cultural factors figure more prominently in the explanations that are proffered by experts and touted in the media. Scholars such as John Ogbu (1987) and more recently, John McWhorter (2000) attributed the lower performance of Black students generally, and the middle-class students in particular, to an “oppositional culture” (Ogbu, 1978), “anti-intellectualism,” and “a culture of victimology” (McWhorter, 2000). Despite the fact that such arguments tend to be based on generalized descriptions of Black American culture rather than intensive investigations into the experience of Black students in school settings, such theories have been widely embraced by scholars and educators. Like the genetic theories of intelligence that preceded them, cultural theories that attempt to explain the link between race and academic performance generally locate the cause of the problem within students (i.e., lack of motivation, devaluing academic pursuits, etc.) and in so doing, effectively absolve educational institutions of responsibility for finding solutions.

With the hope of shedding some light on the complexities surrounding the relationship between race and academic performance, this article examines the factors that influence the development of educational policies and practices designed to ameliorate the achievement gap in relatively affluent school districts. To provide a context for understanding the issues surrounding efforts to promote educational equity, the article begins by describing initiatives undertaken by schools in the recently established Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN). The remainder of the article draws on research collected from a 4-year study conducted at Berkeley High School (BHS) to illustrate how racial disparities in academic outcomes are influenced by the structure of opportunity within schools and how efforts to address inequities often become politicized. The goal is to use the case of BHS to show how political factors complicate efforts to reduce racial disparities in student achievement and to clarify why political rather than educational strategies alone are needed to respond to the racial achievement gap.
THE MINORITY STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT NETWORK

In February 1999, the superintendents of 14 urban and suburban school districts came together to form the MSAN. This newly formed consortium was created for the purpose of providing the districts with strategic support in tackling a common problem: the racial gap in student achievement. Although racial disparities in student performance are recognized as a national phenomenon (Jencks & Phillips, 1998), the 14 districts believed that they might be better positioned than most to eliminate or significantly reduce the gap because of the favorable conditions present within each of the member districts. All 14 districts in MSAN were located in affluent communities where per pupil expenditures generally exceeded the state average (MSAN, 1999). In addition, each of the districts has a record of high achievement among many of their White students as measured by performance on standardized tests and college enrollments (MSAN, 1999). This record of success led many to believe that it should be possible to produce similar outcomes among students of color. Finally, all 14 districts are in communities known for their liberal political values and their support for public education, and several of the districts are located in close proximity to major research universities. Since its inception, MSAN has hoped university-based researchers could be enlisted to support this effort.

Despite the relative advantages of school districts in cities such as Berkeley, Cambridge, Chapel Hill, and Ann Arbor, past efforts to elevate the academic performance of minority students yielded little success. Moreover, in each of the districts, clear direction with respect to future steps that could be taken to raise student achievement was lacking. Lack of success could not merely be attributed to institutional indifference or a lack of effort. Each district had a long history of developing innovative programs and enacting a variety of measures to boost the academic performance of students of color (MSAN, 1999). Moreover, at varying points in the recent past, several of the districts had been led by an African American, and in all of the districts, people of color occupied significant leadership roles. However, good intentions and the presence of an ethnically diverse leadership have not been sufficient to keep any of the districts from becoming mired in bitter political disputes that have arisen as a result of their failure to significantly improve the performance of minority students.

Conflicts about what could broadly be termed “educational equity issues” have plagued the districts within MSAN. Most often, these conflicts take the form of hostility from impatient and frustrated minority parents directed at district administrators. However, affluent parents whose students are generally well served by the schools are not disinterested parties in these disputes.
Occasionally, some of these parents also enter the fray when they believe their interests are endangered. Though by no means monolithic in their sentiments, this constituency has the ability to exert tremendous influence on district policies through its political and economic resources, which can be deployed whenever it believes high academic standards are threatened. Although it is unlikely that any interest group will ever directly oppose efforts to improve the academic performance of minority students, occasionally the interventions that are proposed require a reallocation of resources or the restructuring of educational programs. Such changes often encounter fierce opposition from the parents of high-achieving students if or when they are interpreted as compromising the educational interests of their children. Examples of the kinds of measures that might evoke the ire of this constituency include efforts to eliminate or reduce tracking or to open up access to gifted and talented or advanced placement courses (Wells & Serna, 1996).

Faced with frustrated minority parents who believe their children are not well served and well-organized, affluent parents who are prepared to do whatever it takes to defend the educational interests of their children, the leaders of MSAN find themselves stuck between a rock and a hard place. They must find ways to respond to the pressing concerns raised by the parents of low-achieving minority students while scrupulously avoiding any measure that might provoke the wrath of parents of high-achieving White students. The perception that the pursuit of academic excellence and the pursuit of educational equity are goals that are fundamentally at odds, and exist within a zero-sum scenario, is at the crux of many of the conflicts experienced by the districts in MSAN. The stakes are high in these conflicts because in most cases, they take on an unfortunate racial character, and if they escalate, the ensuing polarization can have an injurious effect on intergroup relations in the broader community and the job security of district administrators.

Hence, the districts that came together to create MSAN faced a common need. All were searching for educational strategies that would enable them to make measurable progress in the performance of their minority students but that would not arouse opposition from their affluent parents. Moreover, with the adoption of high-stakes testing in several of the states where MSAN districts are located, there was an even greater need for such strategies. Many of these districts were faced with the prospect that high percentages of their minority students were at risk of failing state-mandated assessments. The likelihood of such an outcome added to the urgency associated with the search for solutions to the racial gap in student achievement.3

However, after nearly 3 years of meetings and conferences, it is becoming clear that a common experience with failure in past efforts to raise minority student achievement, and a common need to demonstrate genuine progress
on the issue, may not be enough to serve as a useful basis for new direction and insight. Despite sharing research and information on their programmatic interventions among themselves, there is still no sign that the districts in MSAN have discovered ways to close the achievement gap or to reverse these disturbing academic trends. MSAN members continue to hold meetings several times a year at which information on best practices and research findings are shared, but the optimism that was present when the consortium was first established is gradually beginning to fade. Already, it is becoming increasingly clear that MSAN is largely a support group and that the organization is not able to provide its members with clear answers or direction.

I am one of several university-based researchers who was asked to serve on an advisory board of MSAN. Since the consortium was first created, I have attended their meetings, and on occasion I have been asked to deliver presentations on research I have done that relates to the MSAN effort. Having been a researcher and parent of four children who were enrolled in the Berkeley public schools, and having served as an elected member of the school board in Berkeley, I am intimately familiar with the problems and issues confronting these kinds of schools and communities. From the beginning, I was intrigued by the ideas that had influenced the establishment of MSAN, and I believed, or at least hoped, that the theory of change guiding its work had merit and could lead to improvements in patterns of academic achievement. My hope was that if we could show that change was possible, the efforts of MSAN would have national ramifications for the education of students of color, and for me, such a prospect was very compelling.

However, even as I hoped for the best, my past experience in the Berkeley public schools left me with nagging doubts and skepticism. Having worked for several years on an intensive effort to raise minority student achievement at BHS, I was left with the realization that even when an objective analysis of conditions suggested that change should be possible, well-conceived plans could easily be thwarted by obstacles that have more to do with politics and relatively little to do with educational practice. I felt strongly that unless members of MSAN were prepared to confront the political challenges that arise from zero-sum thinking on issues related to educational equity and excellence, their good intentions would fail to produce the results that were hoped for. In the absence of a strategic vision that could provide guidance on how to attain this balance, I was sure that MSAN would eventually be dismissed as yet another good idea that had not lived up to expectations.

In October 2000, I was invited to speak on a panel to address the subject of the achievement gap before an audience composed of program officers from major foundations. Also on the panel was Ron Ferguson, an economist at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and, like myself, a
research consultant to MSAN. Accompanying us on the panel were two superintendents from districts within MSAN. Because the creation of MSAN had generated national media attention, the audience was packed and those present eagerly awaited information that might be shared from our work.

Instead of revealing findings, much of the panel discussion focused on the goals of MSAN and the initiatives that had been undertaken by the consortium to date. Ron Ferguson started out discussing his research, much of which had been carried out in Shaker Heights, Ohio. His work, which was based on surveys with students, showed significant differences in study habits and attitudes toward school between African American and White students. Although it produced few recommendations for action, his research did shed further light on some of the factors influencing the lower academic performance of minority students (Ferguson, 2000). The two superintendents described past efforts that had been undertaken in their districts to raise minority student achievement, and they explained why they invested a great deal of hope in MSAN.

I started my presentation by suggesting that the lack of progress in minority student achievement in MSAN districts was a paradox in need of an explanation that went beyond a focus on the attitudes and study habits of minority students. Using language that made both superintendents visibly uncomfortable, I argued that the lack of progress on student achievement in MSAN could be attributed largely to the difficulty inherent in serving the educational needs of two different constituencies: affluent Whites and low-income African Americans and Latinos. I pointed out that middle-class Black and Latino students were more likely to identify with lower-class members of their racial group and that based on my experience in Berkeley, it would be difficult to raise their academic achievement unless it was possible to move beyond the zero-sum terms that framed how this issue was perceived. Particularly if the districts intended to initiate major changes in educational programs, fierce opposition was likely and should be expected.

Given that affluent White parents were typically more powerful and politically influential, I posited that it would be nearly impossible to bring about significant change in student outcomes unless the educational leaders in MSAN found a way to address the concerns they were bound to raise. Specifically, I suggested that MSAN had to find a way to deal with the perception that advances in educational equity would necessarily come at the expense of the educational interests of affluent White students. To the discomfort of the superintendents that were present, I also pointed out that in some communities, superintendents had been fired and school board members re-called when the pursuit of educational equity ignited the wrath of powerful and privileged parents. I concluded by arguing that the solution to the achievement
gap in MSAN districts would be based on political more so than educational strategies and that unless the political solution could be found, there would be no progress.

THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF RACE IN THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

My pessimistic prognosis on the efforts of MSAN are rooted in my experience with the Berkeley public schools, where for years I have worked with others to find ways to raise minority student achievement. In the beginning, I could not understand why schools that possess a track record of success in educating affluent White students are largely unable to produce similar success with students of color from low- or middle-class backgrounds. However, after years of experience and research in the Berkeley public schools, I have come to the conclusion that the explanation is complicated because it cannot simply be answered within the context of educational practice. Certainly, part of the answer lies in the difficulty educators experience in responding to the different needs of poor and affluent students; educational strategies that work for some students simply are not effective for others. However, a closer examination of the issues reveals that much more is involved.

The complexity surrounding the relationship between race and achievement is particularly evident when we consider what appears to be a paradox in the performance of two broad categories of students: recent immigrants and middle-class Black and Latino students. Several studies reveal that immigrant students of color, many of whom are from low-income families, are often academically successful (Ogbu, 1987; Stepick & Castro, 1991; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). In contrast, many middle-class Black and Latino students tend to be less successful even though their families are relatively privileged (Ferguson 2000, Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Although several factors directly and indirectly influence these patterns, it is my contention that both phenomena are largely related to the ways in which identities related to race and gender are constructed in school settings and to perceptions and expectations that develop among adults and students in response to these perceived identities.

For many years, a number of researchers have recognized the significance of the link between identity and academic performance. The subjective positioning of students has been found to have bearing on motivation and persistence (Newman, 1992), relationships with peer groups and teachers (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998; Steinberg, 1996), and overall self-esteem (Williams,
Yet, despite the substantial body of research in this area, there is far less agreement among scholars about how the development of racial identities among adolescents influences the stance and orientation that is adopted in relation to schooling. Despite overwhelming evidence of a strong correlation between race and academic performance, there is considerable confusion about the process through which students come to perceive a linkage between their racial identities and their academic ability and how these in turn shape their aspirations and behaviors toward education.

Scholars such as John Ogbu (1987) and Signithia Fordham (1996) have suggested that Black students from all socioeconomic backgrounds develop “oppositional identities” that lead them to view schooling as a form of forced assimilation. Positioned in this way, they argued, Black students and other “non-voluntary minorities” (e.g., Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans) come to equate academic success with “acting White.” For these researchers, such perceptions lead to the adoption of self-defeating behaviors that inhibit possibilities for academic success. The few who manage to achieve academically pay a heavy price for success. According to these researchers, Black students who perform at high levels are compelled to adopt a “raceless” persona so as to avoid the stigma associated with membership in their racial groups (Fordham, 1988).

In contrast, Ogbu and others (Gibson, 1988; Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) have argued that immigrant students of color are largely immune to the insidious association between race and achievement that traps students from domestic minority backgrounds. So-called “voluntary minorities,” whether they be Mexican, Asian, African, or West Indian, are more likely to perceive schooling as a pathway to social mobility, and for that reason they are also more likely to adopt behaviors that increase the likelihood of academic success. Moreover, having been raised in societies where people of their race or ethnic group are in the majority, they have not been subjected to socialization processes that lead them to see themselves as members of subordinate or inferior groups. Less constrained by the history of racial oppression in the United States, these students are more likely to accommodate the dominant culture and conform to the prescriptions that are integral to the social experience in schooling (Spring, 1988). Even if they avoid complete assimilation, they are more likely to adopt behaviors that contribute to school success (Gibson, 1988; Ogbu, 1987).

When viewed in combination with Claude Steele’s work (1997) on the effects of racial stereotypes on academic performance, a compelling explanation for the identity-achievement paradox begins to emerge. Through his research on student attitudes toward testing, Steele has shown that students are highly susceptible to prevailing stereotypes related to intellectual ability.
According to Steele, when “stereotype threats” are operative, they lower the confidence of vulnerable students and negatively affect their performance on standardized tests. According to Steele, “Ironically, their susceptibility to this threat derives not from internal doubts about their ability but from their identification with the domain and the resulting concern they have about being stereotyped in it” (p. 614). For Steele, the debilitating effects of stereotypes can extend beyond particular episodes of testing and can have an effect on overall academic performance. In his other work, Steele (1992) suggested that schools and universities can adopt strategies to reduce the stigma experienced by women and racial minorities and thereby mitigate against the effects of stereotype threats.

If we attempt to compare Ogbu’s arguments to those of Steele, one could extrapolate that recent immigrant students are less likely to be susceptible to the threat associated with negative racial stereotypes because their “newness” to the American social landscape protects them. Having not been socialized to see themselves as inferior, immigrant students are less likely to resist aspects of schooling that require conformity and assimilation to values and norms that domestic minorities regard as White and middle class. In contrast, middle-class Black and Latino students are more likely to identify with the styles and behaviors of lower class members of their racial/ethnic group (Portilla, 1999). Rather than risk being ostracized for differentiating themselves from their peers, these students may adopt attitudes and behaviors that undermine their possibilities for achieving academic success.

My own research on this topic suggests that the racial identity development process is not nearly so dichotomous (Noguera, 2001); a range of possibilities for expressing one’s identity exist. Racelessness, or “acting White,” is just one possibility. There are also many examples of Black and Latino students who manage to do well in school while retaining a sense of pride in their racial and cultural identity. In addition, there are many who achieve by adopting multiple personas: They adopt the cultural norms that are valued in school settings while embracing the speech, style of dress, and larger identity construct associated with their racial group outside of school.

Understanding the process through which racial identities are constructed in school is essential if we are to devise strategies that can transform the ways in which race and achievement become linked. The following section draws on data from 4 years of research at BHS to demonstrate how the link between racial identity and student performance becomes operative. However, in departure from both Ogbu and Steele, I will also show how the structure and culture of this school—and, I will argue, others like it—contribute to the creation of this linkage. That is, rather than treating racial identities as fixed categories, I maintain that oppositional identities and an antiacademic orientation
(e.g., an unwillingness to enroll in challenging courses) are social products that are directly related to the school experience of many Black and Latino students. Furthermore, I show that political factors related to the protection of privilege serve to maintain and reinforce structural and cultural barriers that obstruct efforts to improve minority student achievement. Without a strategy for confronting these barriers, lasting gains in student achievement at BHS or the schools in MSAN cannot be made.

GOOD INTENTIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH: THE FAILURE OF INTEGRATION AT BHS

To the unknowledgeable outsider, Berkeley would seem to be one of the most likely places to find excellent schools available for all children. Home to a world-class public university, the people of Berkeley tend to be highly educated and socially progressive. In fact, the liberalism and idealism of the citizenry have consistently placed the city at the forefront of various social movements and at the vanguard of innovation in American politics. From the movement against the Vietnam War to the movement to promote recycling of household goods, Berkeley has been at the forefront of progressive change in the United States. Not surprisingly, the liberal political inclinations of the community have historically also had a profound influence on the character of the public schools.

In 1968, Berkeley was one of the first cities in the nation to voluntarily desegregate its public schools (Kirp, 1982). It accomplished this through a novel system of shared bussing that called for minority students from the flatlands to be bused to predominantly White schools in the hills in the early grades and for older children from the hills to be bussed to flatland schools in the later grades. Berkeley’s progressive stance toward education did not stop there. Even as the rest of California embraced a revolt against property taxes in the 1970s and 1980s, Berkeley voters demonstrated a willingness to adopt a variety of local tax measures to provide additional funding to public education (Noguera, 1995).

Yet, despite this impressive track record of public support, Berkeley schools are characterized by extreme disparities in academic outcomes among students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. At every school in the district, patterns of student achievement on most standardized tests adhere to a bimodal distribution of scores (see Tables 1 and 2). The majority of White and Asian students score at or greater than the 80th percentile on most norm-referenced tests, whereas the scores of Black and Latino students
are generally closer to the 30th percentile (Berkeley Alliance, 1999; Noguera, 1995). Similar patterns emerge when the composition of special and compensatory education programs are compared to the composition of gifted and talented and advanced placement courses: Black and Latino students overwhelmingly compose enrollment in the former, whereas affluent White students populate the latter. Similarly, wide disparities are evident in the grades assigned to students, attrition rates, and suspension and expulsion rates at all schools in the district (Diversity Project, 2000).

Given their long history of liberalism and reputation for embracing progressive causes, one might expect that Berkeley citizens would have become outraged at the persistence of such glaring disparities. Yet, a careful analysis of the political dynamics that have shaped policy in Berkeley’s schools reveals that the community has been willing to tolerate a degree of racial inequality in student academic outcomes that any objective analysis would indicate is quite extreme. The most obvious example of this tolerance can be seen at Berkeley’s continuation school that was recently renamed Berkeley Alternative High School. Serving approximately 160 students—most of whom have been sent there because of poor grades, poor attendance, or poor behavior—the school is almost entirely composed of African American students, with a smattering of Latinos and an even smaller number of Whites and Asians. Though the school was recently moved to a new facility, in almost every sense imaginable, this racially segregated school has been marginal to the district. In fact, the academic performance of students at the school has received so little attention that such basic information as graduation, dropout, and college attendance rates is not even maintained.8

Yet, my own experience as a former school board member, parent, and researcher in the Berkeley schools leads me to reject the idea that there is a conspiracy to deny Black and Latino students educational opportunities. To understand how these disparities are rationalized and thereby come to be tolerated and maintained, it is necessary to understand how efforts to enact change tend to become politicized. In the following section, I will examine two elements of the structure and culture of the school: the practices used to assign and sort students into courses and the informal practices that shape voluntary association in clubs and other extracurricular activities. It is my contention that research on the organization of academic opportunity in schools can serve as a means to reveal the practices through which racial inequality is produced and maintained. Critical discussion of these practices must be the first step in the process of closing the achievement gap, because without such careful scrutiny, issues related to race and student achievement become obfuscated. As I will show, the lack of clarity about the nature of the
problem limits the possibility that action can be taken to improve academic outcomes for failing students.

TWO SCHOOLS IN ONE: SORTING STUDENTS AT BHS

BHS is a relatively large school with approximately 3,000 students and nearly 200 teachers, counselors, and administrators. According to the district’s data, approximately 40% of the students at BHS are White, 40% are African American, 10% are Latino, and 10% are Asian American (Berkeley Alliance, 1999). These numbers may be inaccurate because approximately 10% of the students who responded to a survey administered by the Diversity Project to the class of 2000 identified themselves as mixed race (Diversity Project Final Report, 2000). Racial differences tend to correspond closely to class differences. The vast majority of White students reside in middle-class and affluent neighborhoods in the hills and north Berkeley, whereas the majority of African American and Latino students come from low income communities in the flatlands of south and west Berkeley. In addition, approximately 25% of students do not reside in Berkeley at all. They enroll in BHS either through interdistrict transfer or by surreptitiously claiming Berkeley residence, and the vast majority of these are Black students from poorer neighborhoods in Oakland (Diversity Project, 1999).
On the basis of almost every significant indicator, BHS is a school that does not serve its Black and Latino students well. Nearly 50% of Black and Latino students who enter BHS in the ninth grade fail to graduate, and among those who do graduate, few complete the course requirements necessary for admission at the University of California or the state college system (Berkeley Alliance, 1999). African American students constitute the overwhelming majority of students who are suspended or expelled from the school for disciplinary reasons (Diversity Project, 2000), and they compose the majority of students enrolled in special education classes. Finally, the English as a Second Language (ESL) program functions as a distinct school within the larger school, and its students, most of whom are Latino and Asian, are effectively denied access to college preparatory classes and resources available at BHS.

In contrast, for most White and some Asian students, BHS is a highly successful school offering a vast array of educational opportunities and enriching experiences. The vast majority of White students graduate and matriculate to 4-year colleges and universities, and a significant number are admitted to Ivy League colleges and the University of California (Berkeley High School Counseling Department, 1996). BHS consistently produces several national merit scholars, most of whom are White, and the jazz band, debating club, and school newspaper (all of which are almost exclusively White) have received several national awards. With its rich and innovative curriculum, BHS is one of few public schools that actually draws White students away from private schools. Their parents, many of whom are professionals with advanced university degrees, know a good thing when they see it, and as a result many have refused to abandon this urban public school in the way that many White middle-class families have done elsewhere (Nocera, 1991). In fact, many White parents and students perceive the diversity of the school as an added benefit, and some regard sending their children there as an inherently progressive political act.

When Berkeley schools were desegregated in 1968, issues related to race and schooling seemed so simple and clear-cut that the advocates for desegregation merely argued that “it was the right thing to do” (Kirkp, 1982, p. 67). However, addressing racial disparities in the postintegration period has been far more difficult. With the advent of Black nationalist movements in the 1970s, “the right thing to do” became more ambiguous. In 1969, Black students at BHS demanded and were granted the first African American Studies department established at a high school in the United States. The logic behind this concession was rooted in the notion that separate and distinct approaches to educating Black and White students were necessary and desired. Such thinking led to the creation of several smaller separate high schools in the mid-1970s, including the Umoja House for Black students seeking a
culturally defined educational experience and the Raza House for Chicano students seeking something analogous for themselves. Ultimately, these experiments in racial separation were brought to an end by the U.S. Department of Education, which determined that maintaining racially separate schools was a violation of several civil rights statutes and was therefore illegal.\(^{11}\)

Despite this setback, the underlying philosophical premise that produced the racially defined schools retained its influence. Over time, BHS effectively became two schools within the same facility: an elite college preparatory school serving affluent White students and an inner-city school serving economically disadvantaged Black and Latino students. Officially, there was only one school, with one principal, one faculty, one football team, and so forth. But, for students and anyone else who spent their days at the school, the fragmented nature of BHS, where divisions occurred along racial and class lines, was evident and ever present in nearly every aspect of the school.

Patterns of racial separation are most evident when one enters the school grounds at the beginning of the school day. Across the sprawling campus, students can be seen huddled in racially distinct groupings. Black students congregate in front of the administration building near a map of Africa that has been painted on the asphalt. White students gather on the steps of the Community Theater. Along Martin Luther King Way on the periphery of the campus, groups of Latino students come together near and around a Mexican mural. Smaller groups of Asian students find their place along a wall adjacent to the Science Building. Each grouping is racially distinct, but the lines between them are permeable as can be seen from the significant number of students who mingle in mixed groups or who cross over to interact with individuals from another group.

Although this form of separation may be most noticeable, and such voluntary associations create the sense that this is what students prefer, the separation that occurs in classrooms throughout the school are largely involuntary and substantially less visible, yet their effect on student outcomes is far more profound. During the course of a 4-year study carried out at the school,\(^{12}\) the Diversity Project analyzed course enrollment patterns and the trajectories they create for students. Our analysis of the data revealed that White students are concentrated in the honors and college track courses, whereas African American and Latino students are predominant in less demanding remedial courses. These patterns are set in place from the time a student enters the school in the ninth grade; for this reason, this is where our initial research efforts were focused.

Since 1993, reports on the number of D’s and F’s received by students in major courses were produced and released to the public at the end of each
Because these reports disaggregated the student population by racial status, release of the reports tended to elicit considerable controversy and finger-pointing. Underlying the controversy were profound disagreements about the causes of academic disparities. Finger-pointing by those who attributed the problem to indifferent teachers, negligent parents, lazy and unmotivated students, or even society as a whole only contributed to further paralysis and inaction. More significantly, the lack of change in student outcomes over time contributed to a perception that racial dichotomies in patterns of student achievement were normal or even natural, and their consistency gave them a fixed and unchangeable quality.

To challenge assumptions about the link between race and school performance within the school and community, the Diversity Project used two research strategies: an annual survey administered to students in the class of 2000 (approximately 750 ninth graders who entered BHS in the fall of 1996) and an analysis of grades and course selections made by the same ninth graders, using student records as the database. The purpose of choosing these two data collection strategies was to find ways to show the school and community how students were being separated as they entered BHS.

During the course of the 1996-1997 academic year, data on course enrollment and student perceptions of their BHS experience were collected and analyzed. Once this process was completed, we contemplated ways of presenting the data to the school’s faculty for a discussion of the issues related to student achievement. Our goal was to move the conversation beyond an assignment of blame to a more constructive focus on potential solutions. To facilitate such a discussion, the faculty was divided into four groups and assigned to rooms where large graphics were displayed that illustrated findings from our investigation. In the first room, the charts illustrated how the assignment of students to math courses in the ninth grade influenced their trajectory into other academic courses and electives within the school. For example, it showed that students who were placed in honors geometry, 87% of whom were White and who disproportionately had come to BHS from private schools, were on track to complete the advanced math and science courses needed for admission to the University of California. We also displayed graphics that showed these students were more likely to be enrolled in honors biology and higher level foreign language courses (e.g. second-year or higher French or Spanish, first-year German or Latin).

In contrast, another set of graphics showed that students who had been placed in the lowest level pre-algebra class, 83% of whom were African American and Latino, were not on track to complete the university’s science and math requirements. With nearly 80% of the students who had been enrolled in this course failing it in the fall semester of 1996, the graphics
made it clear that it would be highly unlikely that more than a handful of these students would be able to complete the math and science course sequence needed to fulfill university entrance requirements. Moreover, students placed in pre-algebra were not likely to be enrolled in a college prep science course, and if they had a foreign language class, it was most likely to be beginning Spanish or Swahili (Diversity Project, 1999). Most surprising of all was the fact that nearly all of the students who had entered BHS through interdistrict transfer or under *caregiver status* had been assigned to pre-algebra.

The course enrollment charts were followed by the presentation of a map of the city of Berkeley broken down by zip code. Within each zip code, the average grade point average (GPA) for students residing within the area was indicated. As might be expected, the map revealed a clear and distinct pattern: Students from homes in south and west Berkeley, the poorest sections of the city with the highest African American and Latino populations, had the lowest GPAs, whereas students in north Berkeley and the affluent Berkeley hills had the highest GPAs. Interestingly, although the map revealed patterns that anyone associated with the school would expect, reaction to the map was striking. Teachers viewing the map were amazed by the consistency of the pattern and wondered aloud why such a pronounced trend existed. The comment of one veteran teacher captured the sentiment of many of the teachers: “I expected kids from the poorer sections of the city to do less well but I’m amazed that it’s this blatant. Something must be going on” (personal communication, May 2, 1997). The map turned out to be such a powerful illustration of the relationship between social class and academic achievement that the *San Francisco Chronicle* featured a copy of the map in a front-page article describing the research conducted by the Diversity Project (Walsh, 1997).

As teachers discussed the findings from the research, no one argued about the accuracy of the data nor did the conversation about the data deteriorate into a debate about who was to blame for these patterns. Instead, those present wanted to know more about what could be learned from the data, and they asked questions to further probe the information that had been collected. How did the grades students obtained in math compare to those in English and history? How did students’ grades correlate with their attendance in school? How effective were the academic support programs that had been set up to help students that were struggling academically?

There were similar reactions to the data derived from the survey that was presented in another classroom. The survey data provided information on what students liked and disliked about BHS as well as information about how often they studied, whether or not they were employed and for how many hours a week, and where they went when they needed academic support. Many teachers reacted with surprise when they discovered that a majority of
students indicated that the diversity of the student body was one of the things that students liked best about their experience at BHS. Students also expressed considerable support for the “freedom” they enjoyed at BHS, which they identified as the opportunity to set your own course schedule and the ease with which they were able to cut classes without being caught.

Discussion of the data generated from the student survey and course enrollment patterns opened the door to a more difficult discussion about the implications of the findings for students and the school as a whole. Confronted with evidence that course assignment in the ninth grade would determine the trajectory students were on during the next 4 years, some teachers began to question the fairness of the course assignment process. As teachers learned that course assignments in math were made by counselors who based their decision on a review of student transcripts and without a formal assessment of student ability, questions about the fairness of the process were raised. Concerns about the lack of structure at BHS (e.g., the absence of a coherent tardy policy and the inconsistent application of penalties for cutting) led to a discussion about the permissive culture of the school, which effectively allowed large numbers of students to fail and slip through the cracks.

The presentations in the third and fourth rooms focused on how patterns of separation extend beyond the classroom and show up in those areas of the school where membership is based on voluntary association. Our data showed that nearly every club, sports team, and extracurricular activity offered by the school had a racially exclusive makeup. Even more disturbing was the fact that any activity that might be regarded as having the potential to enhance one’s academic performance (e.g., academic clubs, the debating team, etc.) was composed almost exclusively of White students.

Because they have been in place for so long, such patterns of separation have been rationalized as the product of choices made freely by the students. Some adults at the school consciously condone these practices as a way of accommodating the diverse cultures and interests present within the school and argue that these patterns of separation provide a form of cultural affirmation. However, what some regard as a benign and voluntary form of racial separation actually masks the ways in which these patterns reinforce the racialized nature of academic failure and success at the school. Because many students and teachers have come to accept this form of racial separation as voluntary and therefore unavoidable, there has been relatively little willingness to take responsibility for the wide disparities in academic outcomes and the social tensions that accompany these patterns, nor has there been much acknowledgement that these patterns profoundly influence the future opportunities available to students once they leave BHS.
Several studies on extracurricular activities have shown that students who are involved in sports, music, the arts, and other clubs generally perform better in school than students who are uninvolved (Steinberg, 1996). Students who participate in extracurricular activities are also more likely to be engaged academically. In this way, school activities often counter alienation, antisocial behavior, and an orientation toward school that devalues the importance of academic pursuits. In addition, students who are involved in extracurricular activities are more likely to feel connected and identify with their schools. Studies have shown that the psychological effects of such a connection can positively influence academic performance (Steele, 1992).

Our discussions with teachers about the factors that produce racially distinct clubs and sports teams made it possible for the adults who had long come to accept these patterns as unavoidable to consider actions that might be taken to alter them. Perhaps with some encouragement, Latino students who frequently can be seen playing soccer on their own time in unstructured pickup games could be recruited to the school’s soccer team? Similarly, with a concerted outreach plan and even some arm-twisting, minority students could be recruited to write for the school newspaper, try out for a part in a school play, or join one of the predominantly White athletic teams such as golf, fencing, or tennis. It was acknowledged that to increase minority student participation, it might also be necessary to be open to their suggestions for how these activities might become more appealing to their interests and tastes. However, given the social benefits the school might gain from improved intergroup relations and the long-term academic benefits that might result from increased student engagement, several of those participating in the discussion indicated a willingness to take extra steps to make increased involvement from minority students possible.

CONCLUSION

MAKING STEPS TOWARD EDUCATIONAL EQUITY
BY OVERCOMING THE INSTITUTIONAL OBSTACLES

As is true in society, the other side of racial inequality at BHS is racial privilege. Just as certain institutional practices contribute to the concentration of African American and Latino students at the bottom rungs of educational performance, other policies and practices work to insure that high-achieving, upper-middle-class White students retain their academic advantages. Of course, a key point to be made here is that institutional bias is generally not
based on overtly racist behaviors and intentions on the part of school personnel. Rather, the policies and practices that reinforce academic disparities appear on the surface to be race neutral, even though close analysis of their impact reveals clear and distinct costs and benefits that break down along racial lines.

At BHS and at most schools, disparities in student achievement are most likely to be attributed to factors related to student motivation. The various ways in which the operations of schools serve to reproduce and maintain racial disparities in academic achievement are less likely to be considered in discussions about the achievement gap. Unless educators are willing to examine organizational practices that facilitate the perpetuation of the gap in academic opportunities, and unless they are willing and able to take actions to undo them, reducing the racial gap in student performance will not be possible.

This is obviously easier said than done because the structural mechanisms through which racial inequality is reproduced tend to be subtle and complex. This is especially likely to be the case in the schools within MSAN where the official discourse consistently appears to support efforts to raise the achievement of minority students. Until educators in these districts are willing to move beyond good intentions to address the institutional practices that reward academically motivated students and harm the interests of underachieving students, little progress can be made.

At the schools within MSAN and at many others as well, there are undoubtedly numerous ways in which race and class differences are maintained within the organizational culture and structure. At BHS, the Diversity Project initiated conversations with teachers first and used research to create a context in which the structure of opportunity could be discussed and challenged. However, even at BHS, changing these practices has been difficult. The difficulty comes from the fact that those who benefit most from existing institutional practices are generally able to mount fierce resistance to any effort aimed at reducing the benefits they enjoy.

To counter such a reaction at BHS, the Diversity Project found ways to provide Black and Latino parents with information about how the school operates so that they could be in a better position to advocate effectively for the educational rights of their children. Organizing African American and Latino parents was not an easy task because these parents have historically not been involved in making decisions at the school. To increase the involvement of Black and Latino parents and bring greater balance to the political forces that exert pressure on the school and district, the parent outreach committee of the Diversity Project organized a series of focus group discussions for Latino and African American parents designed to elicit their views on the
school. Specifically, we wanted to know what concerns they had about the education their children were receiving, what kinds of obstacles parents encountered when interacting with school officials on behalf of their children, and what kinds of changes they felt would help make BHS more receptive to their concerns.

During the course of 6 months, more than 70 focus groups were conducted with more than 400 parents. To insure that maximum opportunity was provided for open communication, all of the sessions with Spanish-speaking parents were conducted in Spanish. Food and child care were also provided as an added incentive to attract high levels of participation. The parent outreach committee also recruited parents to join it in conducting the focus groups and carrying out the research. This was important because the core group of the committee is now playing an active leadership role at the school. As a result of these efforts, the parent outreach group has already gotten the BHS administration to designate a surplus classroom for use as a parent center, and with the support of grants from foundations, two part-time parent organizers have been hired.

Confronted with the demand of an organized constituency, administrators at the school and the district have been forced to find ways to respond to the educational needs of underserved students. In the spring of 2001, Black parents succeeded in getting the administration to establish a new section of algebra classes for students who had failed the subject in the first semester. Although the initial reaction was that such an intervention would be too costly, when confronted by sustained pressure from organized parents, the administration eventually gave in and found a way to support the new initiative.

Much more must be done before a genuine balance between academic excellence and equity can be achieved at BHS, but for the time being, at least there is a climate in which a debate about these goals can occur. An active debate in which the concerns of all parties can be aired and openly discussed is undoubtedly the most that can be hoped for at this time. In an ideal situation, excellence and equity would not be regarded as competing goals. However, for now, the history of polarization on these issues makes it unlikely that a broad consensus will be achieved any time soon. The debate has at least allowed the school and district to move beyond the paralysis that previously characterized discussions of these issues, a paralysis that leaves so many other schools mired in acrimony and trapped in a zero-sum framing of the issues.

Even with changes intended to promote equity under way, it will undoubtedly take some time before significant reductions in the achievement gap are evident. Still to be addressed are the more challenging cultural factors that influence the orientation students adopt toward school. Primary among these
is student motivation. Even as new tutoring and support services are provided to low-achieving students, it is not clear that students will seek these out, nor is it clear that they will enroll in more challenging courses once the opportunity is provided. Student motivation does affect student achievement and, although it is essential that opportunities to learn are expanded, it is also necessary for schools, parents, and the community to find ways to motivate students who have come to see schooling and education generally as unimportant. In addition, it will take some time before we know if efforts to change BHS succeed in removing the rigid connection between racial identity and school performance that exist in the minds of some students of color. If students regard Blackness as being equated with playing basketball and listening to rap music but not with studying geometry and chemistry, then it is unlikely that changing the school alone will do much to change achievement outcomes for students. Certainly, it would help if similar efforts to change the structure and culture of school were initiated in the lower grades when students are more impressionable. But, it is also important to recognize that in their efforts to challenge the insidious relationship between racial identity and academic performance, schools are up against powerful cultural forces in the media that often reinforce the opposite message (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993).

Despite the odds against success, the challenge that has been taken on by the 14 districts in MSAN is extremely important not just for the schools involved but for public education in the United States generally. Throughout the country, integration as an ideal and practice is under attack. In the past 20 years, the courts have steadily weakened the legal basis for desegregation, and several communities have withdrawn their commitment to its goals (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). The failure of MSAN to produce significant improvements in minority student performance would further undermine support for the goals of school integration.

Yet, the experiences of places like BHS offer a glimmer of hope. When educators demonstrate a willingness to accept responsibility for their role in maintaining school structures that foster inequality, and when local discussions of these issues move beyond a search for blame to a search for concrete solutions, the possibility for genuine progress in raising student achievement can be significantly increased. Of course, even that possibility must eventually yield measurable results, and obtaining these results will take much more than good intentions.
NOTES

1. For reactions to the arguments and evidence cited in The Bell Curve, see The Bell Curve Wars by Steven Fraser (1995) and Inequality by Design by C. Fischer et al. (1996).

2. To provide support from researchers to the work of MSAN, the College Board convened a Research Advisory Board chaired by Dr. Edmond Gordon of Teachers College.

3. Several of the districts in MSAN are located in states where “high stakes” testing has been adopted. For a discussion of these policies and their impact on schools and students, see High Stakes: Testing for Tracking, Promotion, and Graduation by J. Heubert and R. Hauser (1999).

4. To review articles that have appeared in the news media on MSAN, go to www.eths.k12.us/MSA/msanetwork.html.

5. For an analysis of how affluent parents can exercise their power to oppose and resist educational reforms aimed at producing equity in schools, see “Outreach: Struggling Against Culture and Power” by Jeanie Oakes (1999).

6. Educational researchers have long recognized that cultural and class differences among students often require that different educational strategies be employed to meet the needs of different students. For a discussion on this topic, see “School Failure and Cultural Mismatch: Another View” by Maria Villegas (1988) and “Transformation and School Success: The Politics and Culture of Educational Achievement” by Frederick Erickson (1987).

7. Recent research by Marcello and Carolla Suarez-Orozco indicates that immigrant students are more likely to be overrepresented among both high achievers and low achievers. See Children of Immigration by Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001).

8. The lack of data on the performance of students at Berkeley High Alternative School prompted the Diversity Project to undertake an extensive study of the school. See the Diversity Project Final Report (2000) for an analysis of the school.

9. An indication of how many former private school students enter BHS is provided from the Diversity Project survey on the class of 2000. Nearly 25% of the ninth-grade students responding to the survey reported that they had attended private school prior to entering BHS. Also, whereas the percentage of White students in elementary and middle school in Berkeley is approximately 30%, the White student population at BHS is more than 40%.

10. I have heard this sentiment expressed to me on numerous occasions by White parents in Berkeley. Aggravated that her son entering kindergarten had not been assigned to the school she preferred, one Berkeley professor informed me that “I would think that the district should be happy to have White, middle-class kids like my son. For heaven’s sake, I want to do all I can to support the public schools myself, but they’ve got to be more flexible in how they apply their rules” (personal communication, April 16, 1998).

11. For a discussion on the history of these separate schools and the reasons for their eventual demise, see Just Schools by David Kirp (pp. 123-147).

12. The Diversity Project was established in the fall of 1996 as a collaboration between researchers from the Graduate School of Education at UC Berkeley and parents, teachers, and students from Berkeley High School. The focus of the project was to use research to understand and address the factors that contributed to racial disparities in the academic performance of students. See the Diversity Project Interim Report (1999) for a detailed discussion of the goals and findings of this research.
REFERENCES


ORGANIZING FOR LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT
Using School Governance to Improve Classroom Practice

PRISCILLA WOHLSTETTER
COURTNEY L. MALLOY
University of Southern California

The ability to read has become a vital tool for success in society. Reading failure affects more than school achievement; it has implications for job choice and economic prosperity. Moreover, students in urban areas are at greater risk for poor reading outcomes. Given the necessity of basic reading skills, how can schools design and implement successful reading reforms? This article attempts to answer this question by linking current research on effective reading instruction with current theory and research on school governance and reform. The review begins with an overview of historical approaches to reading curriculum and instruction and then presents current research on effective early literacy practices for kindergarten through third grade. An overview of research on governance and management structures in high-performance schools is also presented. The article concludes with a discussion about school organization and policy issues that can support reading instruction.

Over the past 20 years, the issue of literacy has dominated policy talk about educational reform in the United States. Federal, state, and local policy makers and educators are increasingly concerned about low levels of literacy for large numbers of students. Yet, despite attempts to improve literacy in the United States, the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Report Card indicated that the overall reading performance for 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds had not changed significantly since 1980 (Campbell, Voelkl, & Donhue, 1997). In 1998, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 38% of fourth graders in the nation performed...
“below the basic level” on reading achievement measures, suggesting that
over one third of students in the United States had not mastered the funda-
mental skills and strategies necessary for successful reading achievement

In their national report, Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children,
Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) noted further that reading difficulties are not
distributed evenly across the student population. The authors concluded that
urban learners are at greater risk for reading failure than others: “Children
from poor families, children of African American and Hispanic descent, and
children attending urban schools are at much greater risk for poor reading
outcomes than are middle-class, European-American, and suburban chil-
dren” (p. 27). If children in urban environments are at greater risk for reading
difficulties, they also are at risk for failure in other academic areas. In general,
students facing family-level poverty, low socioeconomic status, and resi-
dence in less economically advantaged neighborhoods—all more prevalent
in urban areas—experience less academic achievement and success (McLoyd,
1998).

In this article, we review the current research on effective early literacy
instruction and attempt to link lessons learned with what we know about how
schools are best governed and managed. Our aim is to highlight schoolwide
organizational strategies that can support effective literacy practices, particu-
larly in urban schools, and in so doing, to blend two formerly discrete areas of
research—effective school organization and effective literacy practices.

Literacy can be defined as “the competence to carry out the complex tasks
using reading and writing related to the world of work and to life outside
school” (International Reading Association & the National Council of Teachers
of English, 1989, p. 36). In early schooling, literacy refers to learning to read
and write fluently as well as reading critically to learn subject-specific con-
tent (Simonsen & Singer, 1992). Generally, students who fall behind in the
early grades (K-3) struggle to become fluent readers unless extensive help is
provided (Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 1997). Reading is also central for a
wide range of cognitive abilities, for without a strong foundation in reading,
students will struggle to gain other valuable skills and to achieve (Cunningham &
Stanovich, 1998). Past research has also demonstrated that skillful readers
score higher on standardized tests, which often determine access to educa-
tional and career opportunities (Au & Asam, 1996). Furthermore, high
school graduates must be able to analyze reading material and solve complex
problems to compete for work (Murnane & Levy, 1993).

The urgency to address reading failure is further augmented by changing
expectations for the workforce. Bronfenbrenner, McClelland, Wethington,
Moen, and Ceci (1996) argued that demands for literacy are on a constant rise
that will result in severe economic consequences for those who do not acquire literacy skills. The necessity for strong literacy skills stems in part from new advances in technology and global communication; careers in such fields depend on reading proficiency (Kaestle, 1991). In addition, 57% of jobs in the United States require high-level analytical reading and verbal reasoning abilities (Gibs & Fox, 1999). In sum, reading failure affects more than school achievement; it has implications for job choice and economic prosperity.

Given the low literacy levels of students in the United States, especially in urban areas, and the necessity of basic reading skills, educators and policy makers are faced with several challenges. What types of curriculum and instructional practices provide the best opportunity for early reading development? How can the school environment be organized to promote quality instruction and learning? Snow et al. (1998) argued the importance of creating reading reform efforts that focus on schoolwide organizational issues as well as improved instruction and curriculum.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to link theoretical arguments and research on effective reading instruction with theory and research on school reform and schoolwide organization. Much of this research has been conducted in urban settings with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. The first part of the article provides an overview of historical approaches to reading instruction and presents research on effective early literacy (K-3) classroom practices. In the second section, we review the research on school governance and management in high-performance schools and then conclude with a discussion about schoolwide organizational strategies that can support reading instruction.

TEACHING READING: WHAT WORKS

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE READING WARS

In Tinkering Toward Utopia, Tyack and Cuban (1995) spoke about the process of educational reform and suggested “certain calls for change do seem to have recurred again and again in a cyclical fashion, often within the lifetime of individual educators and sometimes at a dizzying pace” (p. 41). Debates about reading instruction resemble this cyclical model. Throughout history, educators and researchers have attempted to address one core issue: Should instruction focus solely on skills or on creating meaning from text? In this section, we first provide an overview of the historical shifts in reading
instruction and then follow with a discussion of current theory and practice. Our intent here is to ferret out contextual and programmatic elements critical to an effective literacy program.

The alphabet-spelling method dominated reading instruction from early colonial times to just after the Civil War. Teachers using this method began by teaching students individual letters of the alphabet. When students had mastered the letters, they began to “chorally” spell words out loud with other members of the class. If students were unfamiliar with a particular word in a text, they were taught to dissect the word and name each individual letter in the word to assist their reading. Biblical stories and patriotic essays were primarily used for instruction (Samuels, 1996).

Debates about reading instruction began in the mid-1800s as Horace Mann, secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, criticized the alphabet-spelling method and called for more meaning-based instruction. Mann supported the look-say/whole word method, which was designed to teach words and whole units with meaning. Students were expected to develop an ever-increasing vocabulary and were instructed to use context and pictures when they came across unfamiliar words (Chall, 1967). By the 1920s, the graded reading series, with controlled vocabulary and linguistic complexity based on the whole word method, replaced the religious and patriotic texts used by alphabet-spelling advocates (Adams, 1990). By the 1950s, nearly 90% of schools using basal programs instructed through the whole word method (Samuels, 1996).

The debate over reading instruction reappeared in the mid-1950s when educators and researchers advocated for systematic phonics instruction in addition to meaning-based instruction. Flesch (1955) attacked whole word instruction in his book *Why Johnny Can’t Read*. He argued that students were unable to recognize and learn unfamiliar words because the whole word method lacked essential phonics instruction. Flesch asserted that systematic phonics instruction must be used to teach reading because the English language is an alphabetically based language; to fully understand the code, students must be instructed in the code.

In *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*, published more than 10 years after Flesch’s *Why Johnny Can’t Read*, Chall (1967) suggested that reading programs incorporate systematic phonics instruction and meaningful reading. Based on her eclectic approach, teachers began to adopt supplemental phonics programs. However, for several years, whole word instruction continued to dominate the curriculum in many basal programs (Samuels, 1996). By the mid-1980s, most basals had been changed to reflect the more balanced approach advocated by Chall (Hoffman et al., 1998).
In the late 1960s and early 1970s, researchers and educators also began describing reading and learning as “meaning making.” The whole language method focused on the importance of language and context in learning to read. Whole language advocates described students as active participants in their own learning, whereas teachers were described as facilitators of “learners’ transactions with the world” (Goodman, 1992, p. 190). Whole language instruction was designed to teach students to read through experiences with authentic reading and writing instead of artificial texts or decontextualized lessons (Smith, 1992). The whole language movement argued that learning to read is a natural process, which should take place in an environment rich with text that is functional and authentic (Stahl, 1999). Thus, the whole language movement influenced the transformation of many basal texts into unedited literature selections and led many school districts to encourage greater emphasis on having students respond to the meaning of text (Hoffman et al., 1998). Although much of the educational policy community was focused on whole language instruction in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there is little evidence that teacher practice and curriculum significantly changed to incorporate whole language ideas (Allington, 1994; Hoffman et al., 1998; Johnston, Allington, Guice, & Brooks, 1998). As Tyack and Cuban (1995) concluded, policy talk is much less complicated than the implementation of reform. Accordingly, although the ideology about reading changed frequently over the last century, instructional practice and curriculum have been slow to follow (Allington, 1994; Hoffman et al., 1998; Johnston et al., 1998; Samuels, 1996; Stahl, 1999).

In recent years, systematic phonics instruction has reasserted its position in early reading programs. Research studies in the 1990s concluded that the ability of students to read advanced material was steadily declining (Mullis, Campbell, & Farstrup, 1993). Low NAEP reading scores for the nation, and the state of California in particular (a leading state in adopting whole language practice), resulted in concern about skills instruction (Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Dougherty-Stahl, 1998). Educators and policy makers became concerned that students were not learning the foundational skills required for reading proficiency. Recent articles in *Educational Researcher* (i.e., Trueba, Faltis, & Reyes, 1999; Trueba, Worthy, Goldstein, Faltis, & Reyes, 2000) attest to the current controversies in the debate about reading instruction. Although the cycle of reading wars continues, a fair amount of agreement has emerged from the research about what constitutes effective instructional practice.
EFFECTIVE CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Over the past two decades, considerable research has been conducted to identify effective practices in literacy instruction for beginning, emergent, and early readers. Most recently, the research effort in the field of literacy has concentrated on synthesizing findings across independent studies and recommending instructional components important to include in beginning reading programs (Adams, 1990; American Federation of Teachers, 1998; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; National Reading Panel, 2000). Taken together, these reports stress two main elements of literacy reform: word identification and comprehension. The following section highlights research in both areas and then presents instructional strategies that can be used to enhance reading development.

**Word identification.** Phonemic awareness, phonics, and word recognition are three of the most important skills to include in teaching the code system of written English. The most consistent variables in kindergarten for predicting later reading success are phonemic awareness, letter-name recognition, and the understanding of concepts of print (Adams, 1990; Byrne & Fielding-Barnsley, 1991, 1993; Scanlon & Vellutino, 1997). In fact, a meta-analysis of past research published by the National Reading Panel (2000) indicates that phonemic awareness and letter knowledge are the two best school predictors of how well children will learn to read during the first 2 years of instruction.

Phonemes are the smallest units of sounds in spoken language. Phonemic awareness is the awareness that spoken language consists of a sequence of small sounds or phonemes. Research studies indicate that children who have experiences with phonemic awareness in kindergarten and who are taught to spell using letter-name and letter-sound knowledge are more successful readers than those children who are not exposed to such early learning experiences (Cunningham, 1990; Scanlon & Vellutino, 1996, 1997; Tangel & Blachman, 1995).

Phonemic awareness is not correlated with intelligence, and few children acquire the skill spontaneously. However, phonemic awareness can be learned through exposure and instruction (Ball & Blachman, 1991). Consequently, phonemic awareness is one of the fundamental building blocks of instruction in any beginning reading program (Adams, Treiman, & Pressley, 1998).

Although phonemic awareness is a necessary condition for mastering reading, it is not sufficient for mastering the alphabetic principle (Torgesen et al., 1997; Tunmer, Herriman, & Nesdale, 1990). As noted earlier, letter-name
and letter-sound knowledge, or phonics, are also integral parts of a beginning reading program. In the research literature, phonics has two meanings. Phonics is the systematic relationship existing between sounds and symbols in an alphabetic writing system. Phonics is also the word used in reference to reading instruction in which the sound-symbol relationship is taught (Moats, Furry, & Brownell, 1998). Phonics can be taught directly using systematic, explicit instruction or incidentally using embedded phonics instruction. Most research supports the idea that phonics is best taught through systematic, explicit instruction as part of a balanced reading program (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics prepares early readers to decode text. Decoding is the process through which a reader sounds out words. The ability to sound out and recognize words is highly correlated with reading success. Studies indicate that approximately 80% of the variance in first-grade reading comprehension is due to the reader’s ability to decode text (Foorman, Francis, Shaywitz, & Fletcher, 1997). Most early readers are able to attend to the letters on a page and can link the letters to letter sounds. Through this application of the alphabetic principle, early readers sound out words using the sound-symbol association. With increased exposure to print, the early reader becomes more proficient. He or she will begin to recognize larger chunks of words, known as phonograms (e.g., -ack, -ill, -ould), and word endings (e.g., -ing, -ed, -er) as whole units (Moats et al., 1998).

Frequent reading practice and repeated exposure improves word identification and enhances fluency. Fluency is the speed at which a reader is able to read text accurately. Word recognition must occur quickly and accurately if a reader is to be able to comprehend what he or she is reading. The more cognitive energy being applied to decoding, the less energy is available to focus on the meaning of text. Moreover, if a reader does not recognize and gather meaning from individual words quickly enough, the meaning will be lost (Moats et al., 1998).

Comprehension. Whether reading for pleasure or academic study, the main reason to read is to gain meaning from the text. Consequently, comprehension is essential to effective reading programs. However, instruction in comprehension often does not begin until the upper elementary school grades. Although most research on comprehension involves children age 9 or older, there is evidence to suggest that comprehension skills should also be taught in beginning reading programs (Baumann & Bergeron, 1993; Cain, 1996; Yuill & Oakhill, 1991). Cain (1996), for instance, found that because many beginning reading programs emphasize only word identification—and not comprehension—the reading difficulties of students with weaker
comprehension skills typically were not discovered until students reached the upper elementary grades.

“A child cannot understand what he cannot decode, but what he decodes is meaningless unless he can understand it” (Moats, 1999, p. 16). Students will not comprehend well if they do not read with fluency or if they have limited vocabularies (Adams et al., 1998). For reading to be fluent, readers must recognize and understand the meaning of words. Between 4 and 14 exposures to a new word are required for the average reader to automatize the new word (Beck & Juel, 1992). Therefore, it is essential that beginning reading programs provide opportunities for children to read large amounts of text at a developmentally appropriate level. In addition, vocabulary instruction should be provided to early readers, especially those who are not fluent in English.

Readers enhance their understanding when they interact with the text through comprehension strategies. Activating a reader’s prior knowledge, summarizing, retelling, and predicting are strategies that will increase a reader’s comprehension. Other effective comprehension strategies include relating ideas in the text to the reader’s personal experience (Pressley, 2000) and questioning the author and the text (Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1997). Readers can acquire these strategies informally through reading; however, explicit, formal instruction in comprehension strategies has also been shown to be highly effective for increasing understanding (National Reading Panel, 2000).

**Instructional strategies.** In their report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, Snow et al. (1998) provided several recommendations for structuring beginning reading programs. Reading programs aimed at kindergarten students should focus on introducing students to the forms and formats of books, teaching students how to recognize and write most of the alphabet, providing instruction in basic phonemic awareness, and motivating children to be successful readers. When children reach the first grade, they must be prepared and motivated to learn how to read. In first grade, teachers should include instruction and practice in phonemic awareness, spelling-sound correspondences, and sight recognition of frequent words as well as independent reading. Throughout the second and third grades, teachers must prepare students to comprehend more complex and varied types of texts. By fourth grade, students must be proficient readers, able to recognize the words of a text, so that they can attend to meaning rather than word identification (Snow et al., 1998).

Teachers can use several instructional strategies to strengthen word identification and comprehension among readers at all levels of development. Initially, students should receive direct instruction in phonological awareness.
To enhance phonological awareness, teachers can create rhymes and alliterative speech in songs, identify objects in the classroom or at home that begin with similar sounds, or clap when a word is spoken to recognize phonemes. Several commercial programs are also available that focus on phonological awareness (Snow et al., 1998).

Reading aloud and independent reading have also been advocated by several theorists and researchers (Feitelson, 1993; Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, & Freppon, 1995; Snow & Tabors, 1993). Reading aloud to kindergarten students in particular introduces them to print and can motivate them to read. As teachers read to students, they should question students about the text and introduce them to the nature of print (i.e., letters and punctuation) (Snow & Tabors, 1993). At all levels of reading development, it is essential to provide an environment with several different types of books and print. For beginning readers, books in school and home environments encourage students to become interested in print (Gambrell, 1995; Gambrell & Morrow, 1996; Krashen, 1996). In later years, print exposure and independent reading strengthens vocabulary and enhances comprehension (Stanovich, West, Cunningham, Cipielewski, & Siddiqui, 1996). All beginning readers should be engaged in frequent independent reading—of both fiction and nonfiction—appropriate for their developmental level.

Teachers can also use writing activities to enhance reading development. In the earlier stages, teachers can engage students in writing activities that focus on spelling and letter-sound relationships. In addition, the evidence suggests that writing activities should be linked to other literacy activities and phonological instruction. For example, students might focus on writing recurring letters or words that are read aloud by the teacher. Writing activities also can be used to develop comprehension skills. Teachers can help students write descriptive words about pictures or objects that exist in the classroom. In essence, writing helps beginning readers understand the communicative nature of print (Snow et al., 1998).

Teachers and other adults can further develop comprehension skills of students through direct instruction and modeling. Studies indicate that children demonstrate increased reading comprehension when teachers model comprehension strategies, engage students in discussion and questioning, and provide students structured opportunities to practice new comprehension skills using text at appropriate levels of difficulty (Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1994). Students should be encouraged to engage in critical activities that facilitate comprehension, such as learning word meanings from context (Moats et al., 1998) and metacognition, or monitoring one’s own learning (Moats, 1999).
Studies on instructional practice also have found that effective teachers spend large amounts of time with small groups of students during literacy instruction (Anderson, Evertson, & Brophy, 1979). In their recent report, *Beating the Odds in Teaching All Children to Read*, Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (1999) found that students in schools with high reading achievement averaged 60 minutes a day in small groups. The students were placed in these groups based on their ability level. It is important to note that this process remains controversial (Anderson et al., 1985). Opponents of ability grouping have maintained that children placed into low-achieving groups, based on ability, will remain in these remedial groups throughout their educational career (Oakes, 1985). Recent studies also suggest, however, that ability level groups help ensure that instruction is provided to students at their appropriate levels and as a result, students progress at a faster pace. The key to using ability grouping, according to its proponents, is to assure that the small groups are flexible, not rigid. When assessments indicate that a student has made significant progress, he or she should be moved to another group (American Federation of Teachers, 1998).

As suggested earlier, it is essential to match curriculum and instructional strategies to the student’s developmental level. Teachers must assess beginning readers routinely to provide the best instruction. There are three kinds of assessments commonly used in literacy instruction: (a) entry-level assessment, (b) monitoring assessment, and (c) summative assessment. Entry-level assessments are used to determine a student’s achievement level when entering a classroom (California Department of Education, 1998). For example, an alphabet identification test might be administered to assess a student’s knowledge of the letters of the alphabet. Teachers can use monitoring assessments to determine the amount of growth or progress a student is making toward mastering skills and concepts that have been taught (California Department of Education, 1998). Examples of this type of assessment include comprehension tests and anecdotal records. Summative assessments, such as standardized tests, measure how a student is progressing in his or her effort to meet the overall grade level standards. This type of assessment helps to determine the effectiveness of instruction and a student’s overall level of achievement (California Department of Education, 1998).

**REORGANIZING FOR LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT**

In recent years, professional associations at the national level and state policy makers have directed the development of standards for students and
schools. Such responsibility had previously been entrusted to districts and individual schools; however, concerns over poor performance led to more centralized efforts to reform curriculum and instruction (Massell, Kirst, & Hoppe, 1997). A key product of these efforts are new state accountability systems that typically include content standards and curriculum frameworks that specify what students should be taught, performance standards that detail acceptable levels of performance, and standardized assessments for measuring performance (Cohen, 1995).

Along with accountability systems, many states and districts have adopted more decentralized styles of management. Reform efforts focused on decentralization stem from expectations that releasing schools from centralized control will enable them to make decisions that better serve the needs of their students (Wohlstetter & Mohrman, 1993). Although individual schools are held accountable for reaching state standards, they are at the same time provided with decision-making authority in the areas of budget, personnel, and curriculum and instruction.

With new standards and the focus on decentralization, schools face several challenges: They must adopt curricula and implement instructional practices that align with state standards. Furthermore, individual schools must meet state and district expectations about student achievement. In this time of increased accountability and decentralization, how can schools be organized to support effective reading practices?

ELEMENTS OF HIGH-PERFORMANCE SCHOOLS

Research on school governance and organization has largely focused on decentralization efforts in large, urban school districts such as Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Philadelphia. Across many of the studies has emerged a common set of elements associated with high performance in schools (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2001).

1. High-performance schools have an active, living vision focused on teaching and learning that is coordinated with district and state standards for student performance.
2. High-performance schools have decision-making authority to create meaningful change in teaching and learning.
3. High-performance schools distribute power and leadership broadly throughout the school organization by creating networks of decision-making teams.
4. In high-performance schools, the development of knowledge and skills is an ongoing process oriented toward building a schoolwide capacity for change,
creating a professional learning community, and developing a shared knowledge base.

5. High-performance schools have multiple mechanisms for collecting information related to school priorities and for communicating information to all school stakeholders.

6. High-performance schools use both monetary and nonmonetary rewards to acknowledge individual and group progress toward school goals.

7. High-performance schools cultivate resources from outside the school through involvement in professional networks and through entrepreneurial activity.

The research suggests that these elements assist schools in restructuring classroom practice and bringing about significant improvement in student achievement. How does knowledge about literacy instruction fit in with these organizational elements? The following section discusses how schools can apply the research and theory identified earlier to support literacy achievement.

SCHOOLWIDE ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

A vision focused on teaching and learning. Studies of decentralization suggest that high-performance schools are likely to (a) have a vision that is aligned with state accountability systems, (b) use that vision to direct curriculum and instruction decisions, and (c) revisit the vision periodically to ensure its relevance to school operations (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Odden & Busch, 1998; Sebring, Bryk, & Easton, 1995). When the school vision is active and living, the teachers can more easily develop common and consistent curricular and instructional goals (Robertson, Wohlstetter, & Mohrman, 1995). Briggs and Wohlstetter (2001) further emphasize the importance of a school vision that is locally defined and connected to the specific needs of the student population. Thus, a vision can help promote a student-centered learning climate within the school.

In their report, *Beating the Odds in Teaching All Children to Read*, Taylor et al. (1999) concluded that schools that were most effective with reading achievement demonstrated an active commitment to reading. The schools considered reading a priority, and teachers spent large amounts of time on reading instruction. These schools included a commitment to reading in their school vision. As schools dedicated to literacy reform develop their vision, they must incorporate shared beliefs about reading curriculum and instruction that are aligned with state accountability systems. The unified vision, moreover, can provide a foundation on which to build a comprehensive and
coherent schoolwide reading program. Teachers and administrators should work toward common beliefs about how students learn to read and what types of instructional techniques are most effective in promoting reading achievement for their students. The appropriate balance between phonics instruction and meaningful reading, as discussed earlier, would likely be a critical piece of the conversation about school vision.

In the absence of a common vision, the research expectations for students become muddled and ineffective. In an investigation of reading curriculum, Allington (1991) identified a mismatch between the regular classroom curriculum, on one hand, and remedial and special education curriculum, on the other. Teachers made instructional decisions based on professional development activities and their individual belief systems. The mismatch across regular, remedial, and special education led to conflicting instructional methods and expectations about performance that caused confusion and frustration for students, especially those who received different kinds of educational services. A unified school vision focused on teaching and learning can help schools develop consistency across classrooms and grade levels in their approach to literacy.

Decision-making authority. Many studies of school governance and organization stress the need for decision-making authority at the school, particularly in areas that affect teaching and learning. When schools have at least some authority to control how money is spent, who is hired, and how students are taught, reform processes are more likely to be successful; stakeholders are motivated to engage in change. Smylie, Lazarus, and Brownlee-Conyers (1996) concluded, moreover, that in schools where teachers were able to participate actively in decisions about curriculum and instruction, reading achievement scores significantly improved.

Although long-term research in urban school districts like Chicago has recently linked school autonomy to higher student achievement (Bryk, Thum, Easton, & Luppescu, 1998), the studies stress that autonomy alone is not sufficient for high performance. For schools to use their autonomy productively, they must emphasize high-quality learning in their vision, be knowledgeable about decision making, and work collectively toward goals.

In the area of reading, there are many decisions that seem important for local stakeholders to control. As mentioned earlier, Taylor et al. (1999) found that effective schools spent large amounts of instructional time on reading. Certainly, it would be important for schools to have the authority to control the amount of instructional time spent on reading. Beyond that, it seems important for schools to have the authority to decide:
• whether the school can set aside a common, schoolwide block period for reading instruction;
• how students within classrooms should be grouped for reading instruction;
• whether school staff, including administrators and office staff, can be deployed to lead reading groups to lower teacher-student ratios.

Other types of important decision-making authority relate directly to curriculum issues. Past research on literacy emphasizes the importance of appropriate curriculum tailored to each student’s reading development level. Teachers must have the resources—assessments and programs—to address students’ needs. For instance, although state accountability systems generally mandate achievement tests, decisions about how to diagnose student reading levels and monitor student progress are critical components of school-level autonomy. Which tests should be used, and how often should students be assessed? Another area of decision-making authority relates to the choice of curriculum. As noted earlier, there are commercial programs, software, and activities already developed that schools can decide to “import.” In addition, there likely will be instances when schools decide to empower a group of teacher leaders to “home-grow,” or develop, their own curricular approach targeted specifically at the needs of their student population. The balance between homegrown and imported curriculum is a key decision for school-level participants and one that has been somewhat problematic for some schools, particularly those that try to invent most of the curriculum on their own (Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001).

Distribution of power and leadership. Research on site-based managed schools, including charter schools and other public schools, suggests that high-performance schools disperse power broadly throughout the school organization by creating networks of decision-making teams. Such schools make concerted efforts to distribute power beyond the principal or a single council to involve many stakeholders in decision-making groups (Sebring et al., 1995; Wohlstetter & Mohrman, 1993). In high-performance schools, the committee structure is developed to reflect the school’s priorities. Consequently, schools that include literacy achievement in their vision statements would likely have a literacy committee or a curriculum committee with literacy as a priority area.

According to Briggs and Wohlstetter (2001), high-performance schools are characterized by continuous improvement; thus, there is a constant need to monitor, assess, and fine-tune school initiatives. Not surprisingly, high-performance schools often have stand-alone assessment committees. In the area of literacy, the importance of diagnostic reading tests and tests for monitoring
student progress suggest that the selection, pilot testing, and adoption of such tests would be a key area of decision making for a schoolwide assessment committee. Briggs and Wohlstetter (2001) also emphasized the importance of decision-making authority with respect to professional development. When schools have the authority to design learning opportunities that complement reform efforts, professional development enhances the schools’ capacity for change, creates a community of professionals who value learning, and develops shared knowledge.

As suggested earlier, the various decision-making groups offer a mechanism for building support and “buy-in” for school reform efforts. Consequently, schools should redesign their decision-making structures in ways that distribute power throughout the school. If parents are knowledgeable about their school’s approach to reading, the parent community will be better able to become actively engaged in supporting school goals by, for example, encouraging independent reading at home. In high-performance schools, governance councils often include parents as well as administrators and teachers. In a similar vein, Taylor et al. (1999) found that schools with effective reading programs reported having governance councils and committees in which parents, teachers, and school staff collectively made decisions. Such shared leadership seems to foster a sense of collective responsibility for the success of the school.

**Development of knowledge and skills.** High-performance schools select professional development activities that directly address their students’ needs and correspond with the particular reform agenda of the school. Students’ needs, moreover, are particularly complex in urban areas with students that are both culturally and linguistically diverse. It is therefore critical that professional development for teachers include how students’ cultural and linguistic differences relate to reading acquisition and academic performance (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Farr, 1991).

In schools where literacy achievement is a priority, the research is clear about the kinds of knowledge and skills teachers and others working with students must possess. Skill areas including phonics and comprehension are important across all grade levels. As noted earlier, the research concludes that comprehension should be part of an early literacy program as well as a skill stressed in the upper grades. In a similar vein, phonics instruction, according to past studies, should not be limited to the early grades. Teachers must be knowledgeable about the appropriate curriculum and effective instructional strategies that can be used to enhance these skills. In schools that deploy administrative staff and parents to teach reading to small groups, all participants need training in these skill areas. Consequently, many professional
development activities will likely be schoolwide and aimed at a variety of stakeholders.

In addition, there will likely be a need for professional development aimed at specific populations. For instance, teachers need skills to work effectively as instructors using direct instruction to teach students phonics as well as training to be effective as facilitators, encouraging learning through student interactions. Similarly, parents likely need special training to work with their children at home. What are some engaging rhyming games or silly songs parents can employ to help children with phonemic awareness? What kinds of questions should parents ask when students are reading aloud to check on comprehension? Can the child predict what will happen next? Can the child summarize or retell the story?

Recent research in the area of professional development suggests that schools need to design professional development opportunities suited to the particular career levels of the school’s teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 1995). In urban areas, large populations of uncredentialed teachers further complicate the need for diversification. In *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, Snow et al. (1998) recommended that local education authorities and teacher education programs should give teachers support and skills throughout their careers, especially during their early entry into the profession, to ensure that they are well prepared to carry out their mission in preventing reading difficulties in young children. (p. 331)

However, we also know from research in the area of professional development that experienced teachers also need training opportunities but at a more advanced level and perhaps in a different format from entry-level teachers (Leithwood, 1992; Reiman & Theis-Sprinthall, 1993; Wubbels, Brekelmans, & Creton, 1993).

In addition to knowledge about the key components involved in reading, teachers must be trained in instructional strategies shown to be effective in developing successful readers. The research stresses the importance of small group instruction, for instance, and the importance of direct instruction for teaching phonics (see Snow et al., 1998, for further references to promising classroom practices). Comprehensive professional development initiatives would include both.

Finally, the research on high-performance schools suggests that participants receive considerable training in areas not specifically related to curriculum and instruction but related to the management of the school through a decentralized structure. Briggs and Wohlstetter (2001), for instance, recommended that all stakeholders participating in decision making receive pro-
Professional development to boost their interpersonal skills—how to run meetings, how to bring a group to consensus, and so on—and management skills like budgeting and conducting job interviews.

In sum, schools restructuring for literacy achievement will need to devote considerable time to professional development for all school-level participants, not only teachers. Professional development, moreover, will need to become an integral part of school operations rather than just an add-on. To achieve high performance, professional development will also need to be ongoing. This is perhaps especially relevant to schools trying to change how reading is taught, because prior research concluded that although the ideology about reading changed frequently over the last century, instructional practice and curriculum have been less dynamic. (Allington, 1994; Hoffman et al., 1998; Johnston et al., 1998; Samuels, 1996; Stahl, 1999).

Collecting and communicating information. Across several studies of high-performance schools, researchers have identified the need for collecting information related to school priorities and for communicating information to stakeholders within the school and to the surrounding community. High-performance schools collect information related to school operations and performance as well as information pertaining to school goals. Furthermore, data collected are used to make thoughtful and informed choices about teaching and learning. The dissemination of information occurs both formally and informally across the school and out to the community (Wohlstetter & Mohrman, 1993).

In their study of effective schools, Taylor et al. (1999) found that successful schools used some sort of systematic assessment to gather information about student performance. These assessments were “curriculum-based, classroom assessments intended to provide information for monitoring individual student progress and to shape individual and classroom (and occasionally schoolwide) curricular and instructional decisions; they were not external, accountability-focused assessments” (p. 25). In addition, the data collected from the assessments were shared with teachers and the principal. According to the researchers, the public sharing of data led to internal accountability. Furthermore, teachers and staff used performance data to “identify specific strategies to help struggling readers, to provide support in the implementation of strategies, and to align major school events and celebrations around the meeting of schoolwide goals” (p. 26). The effective schools in the Taylor et al. study collected and disseminated information related to their school vision of learning and teaching. This information provided opportunities to transform practice and improve student achievement.
For reading reform programs to be successful, schools must also develop effective means of communication. The school vision and the reading program must be communicated to all stakeholders: staff, teachers, parents, and students. The school community must understand the reading program and the goals of the school. So, for example, the school newsletter may have a regular curriculum column in which the principal describes for parents the kinds of teaching and learning strategies the school is employing to boost literacy achievement. In addition, regularly scheduled parent meetings can be used to communicate literacy-specific information. Back-to-school nights, which typically occur at the start of the school year, can include an introduction to how the school teaches reading, and as parents visit their children’s classrooms, they can hear how individual teachers work to support the school’s approach to reading.

In addition, the school must collect information about goal progress and student achievement. Assessments must be designed that measure the effectiveness of instruction and curriculum. In addition, classroom reading assessments must be administered appropriately and routinely. For teachers to provide instruction tailored to student needs, they must also monitor student progress. Moreover, information about overall school progress must be communicated to all stakeholders. Dedicating a bulletin board in the front hall of the school for displaying overall school progress over time and in relation to other similar schools is a fairly common practice in high-performing schools. Finally, it is important for schools to have a customer-service orientation. How satisfied are parents with the school’s reading program? In what ways have their children benefited? Many high-performance schools administer annual parent satisfaction surveys to ascertain this type of information and share the data, along with school performance data, through public reporting events as well as in written form through school newsletters.

Financial issues: rewards and resources. Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1993) stressed that reform requires extra and sustained effort from teachers, administrators, and staff. Incentives, they conclude, are critical to ensure sustainability and ultimately complete implementation of reforms. Rewards can be used to acknowledge individual and group efforts as well as to recognize improvements in teaching and learning. Briggs and Wohlstetter (2001) also suggested that traditional intrinsic rewards may not be sufficient to motivate and reinforce teachers engaging in large schoolwide reform efforts. As schools and teachers work to reform reading instruction, the issue of rewards must be considered. Odden and Busch (1998) proposed that when rewards are part of a well-designed system, they send the message that results are
important and help schools define their focus. Schools engaging in literacy reform should link rewards to their vision and achievement of school goals. Rewards should also be connected to professional development—administrators and teachers need to be rewarded for acquiring knowledge and skills that can better enable the school to achieve its goals. If literacy achievement is a school priority, teachers who pursue professional development to learn how writing activities can develop comprehension skills ought to be rewarded for their efforts, whereas teachers who pursue professional development for individual gain should perhaps be discouraged.

Last, the research on high-performance schools suggests the importance of additional resources such as grants or contributions from community organizations. High-performance schools use outside resources to focus specific innovations and efforts (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Oftentimes, teacher leaders with specific interests or expertise direct the effort to procure more resources through grant development. Educational resources, such as national teacher networks or networks associated with particular reform efforts, provide needed support and professional development. For instance, schools that adopt commercially available programs gain not only the curriculum and instruction guidance from the program but access to a network of schools across the country that are employing the program. In addition, community organizations such as newspapers, universities, and businesses can help schools disseminate information, assist with technology, and provide additional training. As schools and teachers attempt to reform reading programs, support from outside resources can provide opportunities to connect with the community and experiment with new educational approaches. It is essential that these new opportunities correspond with and support the school’s shared vision of teaching and learning. When the school is focused on reading reform, outside resources should also be dedicated to enhancing achievement. For example, rather than applying for a general technology grant, school administrators might develop a grant aimed at how technology can be used in the classroom to teach reading. When school resources are dedicated to several different, unconnected interests, schools struggle to stay focused on their vision and goals.

**CONCLUSION**

This article highlights the importance of integrating effective curriculum and instructional practices with effective governance and management structures. School organization must support quality instruction. Past research
suggests that high-performing schools begin with a shared vision about
learning and teaching that unifies stakeholders and guides instructional deci-
sions. Thus, we argue that reading program reforms will be more effective
when members of each school’s community take collective responsibility for
success. Decisions about management, professional development, curriculum,
and instruction must reflect the school’s vision of reform. Furthermore,
teachers, administrators, parents, and community members should be empow-
ered to take active roles in the reform process. For decades, educators have
struggled to find solutions to the problem of low reading achievement. The
history of reading reform has witnessed debates about the effectiveness of
different types of instructional strategies and curriculum approaches. To
move beyond policy talk, schools will need to create their visions based on
effective classroom practices and collectively organize to accomplish the
goal of literacy achievement.

REFERENCES

Adams, M. J. (1990). Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print. Cambridge, MA:
Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
K. A. Renninger (Eds.), Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4. Child psychology in practice
ity. In E. H. Hiebert (Ed.), Literacy for a diverse society: Perspectives, practices, and poli-
cies. New York: Teachers College Press.
Allington, R. L. (1994). The schools we have. The schools we need. The Reading Teacher, 48,
14-29.
Washington, DC: Author.
readers: The report of the commission on reading. Washington, DC: National Institute of
Education.
Au, K. H., & Asam, C. L. (1996). Improving the literacy achievement of low-economy students
diversity backgrounds. In M. F. Graves, B. Taylor, & P. van den Broek (Eds.), The first r:
Every child’s right to read (pp. 199-221). New York: Teachers College Press.
King, & W. Hayman (Eds.), Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base.
Albany: State University of New York Press.
difference in early work recognition and developmental spelling? Reading Research Quar-
terly, 26, 49-66.


THE IMPACT OF EMERGING MARKET-BASED PUBLIC POLICY ON URBAN SCHOOLS AND A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

CAROLYN S. RIDENOUR  
THOMAS J. LASLEY, II  
University of Dayton  
WILLIAM L. BAINBRIDGE  
SchoolMatch

Education is being transformed at a rapid pace because of a variety of political and social forces. One of those forces is an increased emphasis on market-based policy and practice. School reform advocates in general and political conservatives in particular see the market approach as one that can and will positively affect educational practices. Ridenour, Lasley, and Bainbridge examine the efficacy of the market approach as it has been evidenced in the development of charter schools and choice options. The authors conclude that the rate of change needs to be managed to protect students and that strategic partnerships must be created to ensure more collaboration between those with conflicting views. Whereas business benefits from competition, education requires a type of “coop-petition” to ensure that all students are provided an adequate education.

Whether research has served the best interests of urban schools is debatable, but no doubt exists that research on urban schools has proliferated. However, during the past two decades educational researchers have switched their focus, moving away from studies of opportunity, equity, and the racial resegregation of urban schools and toward studies of excellence. The excellence movement, which began with research on the characteristics of effective and ineffective schools, now focuses more particularly on creating uniform academic standards, substantially increasing reading and math requirements, and using market approaches to enhance competition. University voices have been “surprisingly silent” regarding urban education (Orfield, 1996). That silence has occurred for different reasons. Most notably, though, acquiescence by the academy through the 1970s and 1980s was attributed by Orfield (1996) to the fact that the “research community and most research funders … follow rather than challenge political cycles” (p. 341).
Two political worlds currently invoke striking contrasts: The wider social world continues to aspire to racial and social justice; the narrower classroom world focuses on a discourse of academic excellence. The tensions between social justice and academic rigor are not new. Indeed, they have dominated much of the past 100 years in debates between the progressivists who embrace Dewey and traditionalists and reform advocates who resonate with writers such as E.D. Hirsch. We examine the tensions from a particular framework that addresses the following questions: Given current public policy initiatives related to urban schools, who benefits, who suffers, and what are the political and social complications?

We argue, first, that public education is intended to serve the public good. Second, we discuss the underlying shift from public policy based on democratic principles to a public policy based on market assumptions. Third, we substantiate our claim that the most disadvantaged students and families will be left behind if a market-based policy shift takes place without appropriate public policy safeguards. In the fourth and final section, we draw conclusions from these discussions and suggest implications for policy makers to consider. The dramatic shifts in the politics of urban schools become apparent only by looking at attacks on traditional governance structures and the rise of the market.

THE ALLURE OF THE MARKET

During the 1990s, market force advocates began to emerge on the political scene and demanded changes in the policies and practices of urban schools. The market approach has historical roots. Adam Smith argued against monopolies as a mechanism for providing service; Rose and Milton Friedman (1980) then modernized the concept, suggesting that economic competition could and should influence both school efficiency and effectiveness. Indeed, the Friedmans argued for a voucher plan that “would give parents at all income levels freedom to choose the schools their children attend” (p. 188). Few educators or educational critics questioned the fact that urban schools were struggling to succeed in the 1990s. The issue was whether market force remedies offered an appropriate palliative. The public apprehension and uncertainties with choice became evident in the 2000 elections as voters largely rejected choice initiatives around the country but embraced a presidential candidate who ran on a strong market-oriented educational agenda. Once elected, President Bush proffered vouchers and competition as a strategy to improve failing schools. Federal funds, he proposed, would be allocated...
to parents of children in failing schools where lack of adequate improvement is evidenced after 3 years. Choice advocates bemoaned the long lead time (action would not be likely for 5 or 6 years); opponents of vouchers maintained their opposition but perceived only a flimsy threat. For both groups, implementing widespread choice retains its uncertain future; however, the many forms of choice, including most notably charter schools and vouchers, continue to expand across the political and educational landscape (see Figure 1 and Table 1 for data on the rapid expansion of charter schools).

Charter schools first emerged in Minnesota in 1992. Advocates envisioned in charters a way to reform public schools while still keeping them public. The movement started slowly, but by the turn of the century, charter schools were evident in almost every state and most urban centers. Once an educational anomaly, by 2000 they were almost normative within urban education. Even liberal politicians embraced charters. Former President Clinton called for expanding them in his 1997 state of the union speech. Political candidates across the political spectrum embraced the charter solution as a necessary way to solve the public school educational problem.

The research on the effectiveness of charters is still quite mixed (Gardner, 2000). Though advocates readily justify the charter school expansion with a substantial body of research (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000), those who question the charter solution as the answer quickly proffer their own evidence,
questioning whether charters really make the difference that advocates claim (Gardner, 2000). The safest conclusion is likely that success within charters is situational—some succeed, some fail. Advocates assert that therein lies a critical element to the efficacy of the charter concept. When regular public schools fail, they continue to do business. When charter schools fail, they are closed, and clearly some are closed each year (Berman, Nelson, Ericson, Perry, & Silverman, 1998); of 2,150 charters, 86 had closed by December 2000 (Bowman, 2001) (see Table 2).

The choice phenomenon is complex and political. Choice advocates argue that by creating competition and giving parents options, strong schools will thrive; weak schools will be forced to change or close. But, for the market approaches to work, certain conditions must be evidenced. Robenstine (2001) wrote,

> The success of school choice policy is highly dependent on individual consumers being first able to act and then, second, actually acting in the ways expected by those who conceived and formulated the policy. The greater the deviation from expected behavior, the greater the likelihood of policy failure. Though in the school choice debate there is some attention paid to whether parents actually act in the ways school choice proponents presume parents will act, [the critical question is] . . . whether all parents are even able to act in the ways presumed. If the answer is “no,” this deficiency would indicate forcefully that unregulated school choice educational policy has a very low probability of achieving its stated goal: improving the educational experiences for and raising the achievement levels of all students, especially those from minority and/or low socioeconomic backgrounds. (pp. 56-57)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Charter Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992-1993</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-1994</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-1995</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-1996</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996-1997</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-1998</td>
<td>712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-1999</td>
<td>1,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>1,689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>2,069</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Center for Education Reform (www.edreform.com).
Throughout much of the past decade, research on choice has proliferated. Interestingly, those who tacitly advocate for choice as public policy have conducted much of that research. Howell, Wolf, Peterson, and Campbell (2001) and others have conducted studies in urban areas such as New York City; Washington, DC; Dayton, Ohio; and Cleveland, Ohio, in an effort to illustrate the power of choice. Throughout the country, business leaders have put big dollars behind the ideology. Literally millions of dollars have been devoted to the choice experiment. The findings, though, on whether choice results in better schools remain highly mixed, especially with regard to enhancing student achievement. Parent satisfaction with choice initiatives is clear. Few researchers question the fact that parents in choice environments are more satisfied with the schools their children attend. Some evidence suggests that African American students may benefit from choice environments (Howell et al., 2001), but other critics claim that the way in which choice researchers combined data sets may have confounded the results (Carnoy, 2001).

### TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Openings</th>
<th>Closures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Center for Education Reform (www.edreform.com).
If quantitative researchers debate what the data suggest, those engaged in qualitative studies of choice environments are equally cautious in finding clear direction for policy makers. Fiske and Ladd (2000) compellingly argued, for example, that voucher-like practices present some real dilemmas that necessitate close scrutiny if choice is to become a matter of public policy. Using New Zealand’s choice experiment as an example, the authors highlight the potential “adverse selection” problems associated with choice initiatives. Two of the Fiske and Ladd (2000) findings appear especially relevant.

Thus, what started out at the beginning of the decade as a system of parental choice has rapidly become a system in which schools play a significant role in choosing their students. By limiting the schools available to students who do not fit the enrollment criteria of popular schools, such choice has an adverse effect on disadvantaged students. (p. 283)

The problems of schools serving concentrations of disadvantaged students will not be solved by school autonomy and parental choice. To the contrary, reforms of this type exacerbate the problem of such schools. (p. 287)

Especially problematic, as evidenced in the Fiske and Ladd research, is the fact that some students lack adult advocates and those students are “adversely selected” to attend what ultimately may become inferior schools. Of course, voucher advocates claim that this result could be mitigated by adjusting the system (e.g., create larger voucher amounts for those most at risk and most difficult to educate), but Fiske and Ladd (2000) noted that attaching differential dollar amounts to individual students raises additional practical, ethical, and political problems. From a practical point of view, it is difficult to determine a measure of educational disadvantage that can be applied fairly to individual students. Presumably, the appropriate measure of disadvantage is some complicated combination of parental income, parental educational level (especially of the mother), living conditions, and ethnicity. Gathering such information for each student would be a formidable, if not impossible, task. (pp. 302-303)

That public education can continue to serve the public good if governed by the invisible hand of the market is questionable: Such a shift means that those most at risk have the most to lose; it also means a kind of Baskin-Robbins approach to education, with a multitude of “vendors” offering education but few who are compelled to look beyond self-interest to the broader public good. When families are customers and self-interest a desired end, the value for the common good fades.
PUBLIC EDUCATION: A PUBLIC, NOT PRIVATE GOOD

Market assumptions foster a view that public education is a private good (Labaree, 2000). Choosing a good school for one’s children is an activity in which one responds to a market just as one would in purchasing other goods and services. It is a self-interested endeavor. Yet, two possible purposes of public education, according to Labaree, are democratic equality (producing competent citizens who can make valid judgments about democratic life and who have a common set of social experiences) and social efficiency (basically producing a productive workforce). Both of these goals stabilize the common good, according to Labaree. He claimed that they are strikingly similar in that they both see education as a public good. The nature of a public good is that it affects everyone in the community: You can’t escape it, even if you want to . . . everyone gains if a public school system produces competent citizens and productive workers, and everyone loses if it fails to do so. That includes people who do not have children in public school. (p. 32)

A third possible purpose is social mobility, which is the lens of the individual “consumer” of education. Schools exist not because of their benefits to the common world of all of us but because of what they can do for each individual personally: “Educational credentials give individuals an advantage over competitors, and that advantage pays off handsomely, helping some to get ahead and others to stay ahead” (p. 32). This purpose relies on sorting and selecting out certain students over others. This view establishes education as a private good within the broader context of the public good. In essence, schooling serves a private good but nonetheless remains dedicated to the common public welfare.

Halchin (1999) conceptually differentiated education from other institutions that putatively serve the public good. She cited the work of Gutmann (1987) and Henig (1994) in claiming,

Education is not the same as public safety, garbage collection, road construction and maintenance, and the regulation of food and drugs. These functions and activities make life safer, convenient, and more pleasant. But they are not essential to the functioning of democracy. Education sustains democracy by producing an educated citizenry equipped to participate in self-government.” (p. 20)

As a result, public policy must be structured to mitigate threats to the common good and foster practices that ensure a democratic way of life that embraces equality and fairness. In Fiske and Ladd’s (2000) words, “The basic
forces unleashed by parental choice—including the tendency to judge school quality by the mix of a school’s student body—are likely to push systems toward greater ethnic and socioeconomic polarization under almost any circumstance” (p. 305).

To prevent polarization and fragmentation, contemporary public policy initiatives require a set of core values that reinforce and sustain the notion that schools exist to ensure the common good and that education for all is best achieved when education is removed from the marketplace. The rationale for the removal is simple: Whereas businesses seek to maximize personal and corporate profits, schools focus on securing the public good and fostering equity. In the words of Finkelstein and Grubb (2000), “Proponents of equity have everything to fear from . . . market-like mechanisms” (p. 623). Whereas one business failure leads to a competitor’s win; in education, the costs of failure compromise the social fabric because failure erodes the fundamental capacity for equity and mitigates the emergence of a common vision of what it means to be a productive and knowledgeable adult in a democratic society.

School choice is viewed as a legitimate way that parents as consumers can act on behalf of their own children even to the neglect of the common good. Parents, critics suggest, have a right to seek what is best for their children even at the risk of compromising an educational system oriented to the public good. Halchin (1999) warned against an abating sense of the common good:

This education reform [choice] assure[s] parents that it is permissible to focus on one’s own interests to the exclusion of the community’s interests. The intended targets of information about charter schools could lose sight of government’s overall responsibility to promote the public good or could overlook their own role in the community and the neighborhood school. In short, the consumer mindset might suppress civic impulses. (p. 31)

Kozol (1992), who is well known for his social justice emphasis and his criticism of what he described as boutique charter schools, was even more disparaging in his criticism of choice: “Choice will fragmentize ambition, so that the individual parent will be forced to claw and scramble for the good of her kid and her kid only, at whatever cost to everybody else” (p. 92). That cost, according to Maran (2000), will have serious consequences for public schools. In her words, “Private school vouchers [represent] an insidiously seductive scheme to siphon much-needed public funds from desperately underfunded public schools” (p. 290).

The marketplace is not concerned with equity or stability. Yet, state systems of compulsory education must be if the interests of all constituents are to be protected (Gardner, 2000). The public policy consequences of market
force educational practices would seem to be clear: If the only stakeholders are the parents of children in schools, then others will become disengaged from schooling and those with children not in public schools will increasingly disengage from public schools. The practical outcomes seem even more problematic: No longer would there be a common understanding of and broad-based citizen focus on schools. Furthermore, without such focus, it is likely that not all children would receive the education they deserve if inequitable practices persist.

Education as a public good is the foundation of schooling in the United States. School choice, in the form of vouchers and charters, transforms education into a private good. According to Halchin (1999), “As a market-based education system, charter schools present education as a consumer good, parents as consumers, and students as commodities. The fragmentation of the school system, the weakening of the common school ethos, and explicit messages encouraging parents to shop around all challenge views of education as a public good” (p. 24). The inevitable winners (the privileged or skilled choosers) and losers (the disconnected choosers) of this shift from public to private good are clearer when we examine more closely the move from a democratic base to a market base for public school policy.

A MOVE FROM DEMOCRATIC THEORY TO MARKET THEORY

Urban schools are faced with many complex challenges. Some believe that market forces will help meet those challenges. Unequal access to good education underlies one argument in favor of school choice and the use of market approaches (Carnoy, 2001). Whereas the affluent have always had the power and the capital to choose the neighborhood in which they live, the poor have not. Housing patterns thus predetermine schooling patterns—the zip-code approach to predicting student achievement. Although there are some excellent teachers in poor schools (Sanders, 2001), the opportunities available to those in poor neighborhoods are vastly different from those available to the wealthy. Some believe that vouchers, charters, and choice will help poor families access better education because they will create more options. Finkelstein and Grubb (2000) asserted, however, “in the U.S., [those focused on reform have found that] it is easier to expand the quantity rather than the quality of education” (p. 612). Rather than ameliorating the serious challenges facing urban schools, policies on school choice can place urban school communities at risk—weakening faith-based schools, diminishing the capacity of urban schools to serve the least advantaged students (immediately and long-term),
and undermining the morale of urban teachers. Furthermore, low-income parents may lack the background or time to make essential school choices.

When the theory base moves from housing to schools, the object of parents’ choices move, too. The market-based educational approach works only if parents exercise choice consistent with the way predicted by those who conceived the policy. One assumption is that “informed” parents will choose schools and that the schools will exhibit the highest academic quality or at least strive to accomplish that goal. Unfortunately, this is not always the case even with more sophisticated parents. Henig (1996) found that parents in Montgomery County, Maryland, chose schools with higher student-teacher ratios, not what one would expect if pure market theory and informed consumers were at play, because parents tended to select schools where more of their own ethnic group members were enrolled. In essence, parents may become consumers but they may not be skilled educational choosers.

Not all parents are inclined or capable of becoming informed and judicious consumers in the education marketplace, a prominent problem highlighted by Fiske and Ladd (2000). Indeed, the parents who emerge as beneficiaries of market systems are likely those who know how to choose more selective schools (the privileged/skilled chooser) because of substantial personal experiences with schools and social capital. To a lesser extent, the semi-skilled chooser, who has some knowledge but who is less able to discern hype from fact, may experience subtle personal benefits (see Robenstine, 2001). But a third group (the disconnected chooser) is unable to critically examine and compare a wide range of schools. For this group, it is not a lack of interest; it is more often an absence of knowledge. The question is whether the benefits to the privileged/skilled choosers are worth the social costs to either the less well-prepared choosers or to those who are socially disconnected.

The options from which parents choose may not substantially differ educationally as much as they differ socioeconomically or in terms of parental interest in education. For example, many magnet school programs, though differently labeled, are not dissimilar. When differences are invisible, it is unlikely that parents make their choice on the basis of some aspect of the school that would benefit their children’s learning. Furthermore, parents appear to be more inclined to choose based on convenience and social demographics rather than relevant academic characteristics that might benefit their children (Elmore & Fuller, 1996). These bases for school choice may be similar to the bases for housing choices; both are limited by circumstances, not all of which are under parental control, including inequity, lack of fairness, and unequal opportunity. For example, information that would seem to be essential for informed choices all too often simply is not available to parents.
Recall that market theory posits that families must be free to act and able to choose a school based on the design of social policy: Better schools will flourish; poorer schools will be forced to improve or will close. Competition underlies the benefits of choice. The theory requires that the bureaucracy in school organizations will be trumped by the energy pressured by the market, and schools will be, as a result, more efficient. The market, according to pro-market libertarians and those with strong business interests, will drive out the bad and reinforce the good. One of the spurious assumptions made by market-oriented reformers is that competition produces quality—as anyone who has flown recently knows, this simply is not true. It also is questionable as an educational reform strategy, as has been evidenced in both New Zealand (Fiske & Ladd, 2000) and England (Finkelstein & Grubb, 2000).

Market theorists assume the imperative of an ongoing quest for the balance of supply and demand, and experiments in school choice suggest possibilities on both sides, the demand side and the supply side (Elmore & Fuller, 1996). In appealing to parents (the demand side), choice promoters project its benefits: Parents (especially the poor) will have rights to control their children’s education, they will be more involved, and their children will benefit when there is a greater match between what the children need and the choices that parents make to fill those needs. Market approaches work best when more sophisticated consumers (privileged, skilled choosers) have a selection between a multitude of strong providers (Finkelstein & Grubb, 2000). The problem, of course, is that most poor parents are not privileged, skilled choosers, and most providers in poor neighborhoods are not strong.

Whether high-quality alternative schools will be available (the supply side) for the urban poor cannot be assured through current reforms. Furthermore, assuming that those who access programs possess the requisite sophistication to understand the choices is even more problematic. Elmore and Fuller (1996) suggested that the policy community must necessarily turn its attention to the supply side, or the capacity of schools to respond to increased choice. They stated,

Since parents and students with the least social capital seem also to be the ones who are least likely to engage in active choice, there are few demand-side incentives in choice programs for educators to engage in the deliberate design of programs that appeal to, and work well for, the most disadvantaged students. So, it seems unlikely that choice, by itself, will stimulate creativity and improvement in the development of new, more effective educational programs. The problem seems to lie in the fact that the designers of choice programs have focused most of their attention, in all but a few cases, on demand-side issues, such as who gets to choose and how choices will be coordinated rather than on
crucial supply-side details, such as how schools and classrooms actually differ. (p. 197)

Much more attention to establishing viable schooling alternatives needs to be paid if market approaches are to have any opportunity to succeed and redound to the favor of all children. The focus must be on quality, not quantity. In Elmore and Fuller’s (1996) words,

In the absence of serious progress on this front [creating more alternatives], it is unlikely that choice will do anything other than simply move high achievers around from one school to another, mistaking the effect of concentrating strong and motivated students for an effect of the school or the choice system. (p. 200)

Another danger, of course, is that if market choices expand too rapidly, the traditional public schools will be weakened to the point that the government cannot guarantee space for a child if a “choice” school fails. Such a governmental guarantee is essential within a compulsory educational system. Many who oppose choice as a false and empty solution to failing urban schools call for massive investments in existing public schools. Their bottom line is that all children must have access to high-performing schools and excellent teachers and that all students need options if choice schools fail (Fiske & Ladd, 2000).

LOSERS AND WINNERS IN MARKET-DRIVEN SCHOOLS

A universal program of school competition is based on a premise of winners and losers and ultimately of forcing losers out of business. In this section, we argue that those students most in need, not the schools they attend, will be the “losers” if market approaches are implemented on a widespread basis. Furthermore, race, class, ethnic, and geographic differences likely separate choosers and “nonchoosers” among parents in urban schools. These differences likely separate the winners and losers as well. Unhesitatingly, Wells (1996) asked,

What will happen to these children in an educational free market predicated on the existence of both winners and losers? Who will advocate for them? Who will respond to their sense of injustice or their need for the security and cultural familiarity of a neighborhood school? These are important policy questions. In a truly deregulated system, there is no guarantee and no safety net for these students. (p. 48)
The explanatory power of market theory belies any potential universal benefit. Because there are necessarily winners and losers in any competition, what is to become of the so-called “losers”? If choice emerges as established public policy, Americans would be establishing a system that not only expects but also accepts tacitly the fact that some will be left behind. Of course, some might argue that even those left behind might be better off because choice will create options, but the New Zealand experience belies this reality. Fiske and Ladd (2000) wrote,

We do not have the systematic test score data needed to determine which schools have improved the quality of their academic offerings under Tomorrow’s Schools and which have not. Given the fact that the most desirable schools are now in an enhanced position to attract the brightest students and to tailor high-powered academic programs to them, we must presume that the academic levels of some schools have risen under Tomorrow’s Schools. However, we can confidently say that schools that have lost enrollment and that have taken on a greater concentration of dysfunctional students as a result of Tomorrow’s Schools are worse off than they were before. Thus, whatever the benefits to some institutions and some students, the Tomorrow’s Schools reforms have not produced a rising tide that raises all boats and increases the overall quality of the entire system. (pp. 306-307)

Studies to date of voluntary programs suggest that substantial differences exist between parents who choose and parents who do not choose their child’s schools, and those differences are important. Choosers take several forms but share a concern for their children and a desire for something better. The nonchoosers are more likely to be poor, minority, and less actively involved in their children’s education (Elmore & Fuller, 1996). Several explanations for this circumstance are possible. For example, nonchoosers might be expressing a choice by not choosing, defining their own cultural beliefs in this way (Elmore & Fuller, 1996). Just as some suburban schools choose not to be included in choice programs (Ridenour & St. John, in press), so too some families, as a matter of principle, make the decision not to be involved in making a choice. Nonchoosers may also feel that they do not know how to make a choice; they may not perceive that they possess the ability or knowledge to even know how to engage the system.

If one justifies choice strictly on the grounds of a market theory, it would follow that all parents, despite their social class, deserve the right to choose their children’s schools and that all parents possess the knowledge to make choices. As we discussed earlier, even if the first “right” is granted, the assumption that follows it is highly questionable. Interestingly, middle-
upper-class communities have not welcomed choice initiatives (Lee, Croninger, & Smith, 1996; Ridenour & St. John, in press; Zernike, 2000). A recent The New York Times article tells the story of a suburban community on Long Island that actively resisted charter schools. Local citizens attempted to prevent them because their schools were “good enough” (Zernike, 2000). Implied in the “good enough” observation is a clear satisfaction with schools as they are currently constituted. Thus, choice emerges as a situational dynamic, evident in some communities, unnecessary or nonexistent in others.

In the privately funded scholarship program in Dayton, suburban school districts initially signed on as participants to receive choice students but prior to implementation, backed away from the commitment. Choice programs such as privately funded vouchers and charter schools have been relegated to urban communities; understandably, school choice is a reform solution for failing schools. That urban communities are the settings for choice establishes a first layer of social sorting. Indeed, studies that have been conducted on school choice so far bear this out (see Fiske & Ladd, 2000) and suggest that stratification by race, class, ethnicity, and religion is likely to be more prevalent in social environments with policies mandating choice. In essence, choice may exacerbate socioeconomic apartheid to an even greater degree than already occurs in urban communities.

During the 1970s, in an effort to reduce segregation (and respond to court-ordered desegregation directives), magnet schools were established in many American cities. Thematically based magnet schools were designed to attract parents and their children of different social and racial backgrounds to attend the same schools. Unique identities were developed to entice students to enroll. Rather than deeply conceptualized thematic curriculums, magnet schools were mostly a practical response to laws mandating desegregation (Henig, 1996).

The success of magnet schools, like other reforms, is still not clear. What is evident, though, is that White families avoid schools with predominantly Black students enrolled (Saporito & Lareau, 1999). In America, a “marked preference of White families to avoid Black schools” exists, and this behavior could exacerbate segregation rather than reduce racial isolation. Choices are shaped by social factors. White families were most likely to choose schools with low numbers of minorities (Henig, 1996). Elmore and Fuller (1996) found similar data in their research. Black families did not show the same pattern of preference by race. Some of the social results regarding race may be cultural in origin. For example, in London, a difference existed in the schools that were selected by the wealthy as opposed to those schools that attracted
the working class (Brighouse, 2000). Thus, although markets did not cause racial segregation of schools in England and Wales, they failed to lead to desegregation (Gorard & Fitz, 2000).

A social sorting effect is likely to result from choice (Ridenour & St. John, in press; Sykes, Plank, & Arsen, 2000). Wells (1996) found that Black, inner-city high school students who chose not to opt for transferring to a predominantly White suburban school came from families in which parents were less well educated and were employed at lower paying jobs than were similar students who choose to move to the same suburban schools. She also found that students who remained in the inner-city school were choosing a culture familiar and comfortable to them. They minimized the importance of differences in school quality:

This is not a portrait of self-maximizing families who carefully evaluated their options and their long-term goals and decided that a city school would better serve their needs than a county school. Offering these students the choice of higher-status schools did not free them from a habitus of fear and insecurity in a world that places them at the bottom of the social structure. (p. 35)

What seems to be clear is that charters and choice are impacting education. Furthermore, the rapid expansion of the choice and charter movement before the consequences are known represents a real threat to government guarantees of quality education for all students. In Fiske and Ladd’s (2000) words,

There is a big difference between a few charter schools operating on the fringe of a public school system and a whole system of self-governing schools functioning in a competitive environment. When there are just a few charter schools, the government can be assured that if a school does not meet the needs of a particular child, that child will have a guaranteed place in a traditional public school, over which the government has direct operational control. Such a guarantee would seem to be important in a system of compulsory education. (p. 297)

Who is left behind and how to achieve educational equity are questions that are relevant to practical issues such as housing patterns and public policy concerns relative to sustaining our democratic way of life. Thoughtful researchers, after having spent much time studying this question, seem far from hopeful that answers are apparent. Witte (2000), in drawing conclusions from several years of study of Milwaukee’s voucher experiment, questions whether resources would go to the neediest schools given widespread choice:
If the [dramatic change in urban schools] requires a universal voucher program, I believe it will backfire for poor districts. The money will simply go elsewhere and once it is being routinely spent in the suburbs and selective inner-city schools, it will never be retrieved. If most of the money ends up in the suburbs or private schools, and inner-city students cannot follow the money, what is the incentive to improve inner-city schools? (p. 208)

CONCLUSIONS

Many of the urban problems of today are the result of pernicious policy mandates from the past. Desegregation (and its concomitant busing strategy) was well intentioned. Regrettably, it resulted in the dismantling of many urban school districts. Those now embracing market-based approaches can neither prove that choice works nor disprove assertions that it will negatively affect the common good. Given that uncertainty, public policy changes should be measured and limited but always structured to ensure the integrity of a system of public schools that provide real educational guarantees for all students. In the words of Fiske and Ladd (2000), educational policy makers have an obligation to “first do no harm.” They also have an obligation to protect the learners and improve learning conditions. Such a goal can only be achieved if policymakers consider two strategies. First, state governmental leaders need to manage the rate of change so that those most in need of help by the creation of improved schools are not those most hurt if the experiment fails. Expanding options without working to strengthen existing schools compromises the common good because it potentially limits necessary government guarantees. School systems in states such as Ohio now require an advocacy group that takes into account the needs of the most impoverished children and ensures educational stability for them.

The real opportunity rests in trying to determine how best to serve those most in need. In New Zealand, equity requires significant government expenditures to offset the overwhelming disadvantages faced by schools serving at-risk students. If we fail to find a similar balance, choice will not be enough. Exercising choice, though creating pockets of opportunity, will more likely continue to force those most in need to move restlessly from one provider to another. That outcome is not good for a person’s health care, and it is equally pernicious for education.

To ensure that the public’s interests are protected, educational policy that manages reform for schools with high percentages of children from disadvantaged homes is imperative. In that regard, a second policy perspective should be considered for areas with concentrated poverty: Create strategic
partnerships to ensure a more collaborative relationship between those with conflicting ideologies. This can best be assured by studying carefully the effects of change and investing in new models of cooperation between those arguing for choice and those representing the current system. New models will not emerge without debate or confrontation, but the outcomes should be ones that create viable and stable educational options for students of all socioeconomic classes.

REFERENCES


REVISITING PARADIGMS IN BLACK EDUCATION
Community Control and African-Centered Schools

D. CRYSTAL BYNDLOSS
University of North Carolina

This article is drawn from a larger case study analysis of Black mobilization around community control of schools in New York City and Black support of African American immersion schools in Milwaukee. The study examines how sociopolitical context influenced the two Black urban school districts to pursue school reform models that used persistent segregation as the centerpiece for reform. The study reveals that using an all-Black setting as a foundation for school reform presents challenges that can threaten the intended reform. It is concluded that despite potential challenges, if residential patterns and demographic changes continue to undermine integration efforts, then racially relevant alternatives that build on tenets of Black nationalism and Afrocentricity will find a broader audience in urban school districts eager to find remedies to address the problems associated with persistent segregation.

The ongoing debate linking school choice to increased segregation presents the opportune time to examine how the political shift toward such school reforms will affect urban schools. Critics predict that school choice will promote racial stratification rather than improve schools through competition, whereas opponents are suspicious of the voucher movement’s capacity to reduce the states’ and federal government’s responsibility to equalize resources across racial, class, and geographical boundaries. The potential pitfalls associated with choice are significant for Black youth who rely almost exclusively on public schools to meet their educational needs.

Historically, Black children have experienced segregation and White resistance to quality education. This nationwide resistance by school districts engaged in various legal and illegal practices has taken the form of “White flight” to suburban areas, “tracking” systems within schools, “intact busing” policies, and the outright violation of desegregation laws. Arbitrary Black

AUTHOR’S NOTE: Thank you to Frank Brown at the University of North Carolina School of Education and Nicky Sheats for their comments on earlier drafts.
school closures and the creation of separate schools for White and Black children also undermined efforts to promote desegregation. (See Cecelski, 1994; Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000; Walker, 1996; Weinberg, 1977.)

In some districts, Black frustration with segregation led to the implementation of models that use segregation as a foundation for school reform. These reform models, including those that build on tenets of Black nationalism and Afrocentricity, move Black communities away from the pursuit of integration, reflecting a paradigm shift in how Black communities seek to educate their children by attending segregated schools. In this period when choice is being championed by some and cautioned against by others for its potential to exacerbate segregation, it is useful to explore the paradigm shift from an integration-only model to models that use segregated schooling as the centerpiece of innovative reform for Black children.

This article focuses on prior events to secure community control of segregated public schools in New York City beginning in 1966 and efforts to secure African American immersion schools in Milwaukee in the late 1980s. This article focuses on efforts to implement these two reforms and does not offer an evaluation of the specific initiatives. The objective is to explore how local conditions influenced members of two communities to use Black school control and a Black curriculum to remedy the deleterious effects associated with segregated schools governed under White control. This article also examines the sociopolitical forces that drive communities to launch reform that appears to contradict the Black community’s longstanding integration effort. The study provides new insight into the political reality of persistent school segregation and may be used to make predictions about alternative reform measures in communities that grow frustrated with limited options to desegregate and improve urban schools.

THE ROLE OF CONTEXT

In 1971, Newby and Tyack argued that the goal of attaining power through education had led to “apparent contradictions” in how Blacks sought to educate members of their community (p. 193). In 2001, the authors’ conclusion remains true: “Much of Black educational history seems not so much as an evolving linear narrative as a sociology of oppression in which debates over means recur within a common context of victimization” (p. 193). The framework of oppression, upheld by persistent segregation, continues to influence Black demands for new educational models to provide effective education. The authors could have predicted that changing historical, social, and political conditions would necessitate yet another paradigm shift as the nation
prepared itself for a return to the pre-\textit{Brown v. Board of Education} (1954) situation.

Almost 20 years later, scholars continued to discuss the connection between education and context. Lowe and Kantor (1989) argued that although “in the 20th century social and political history are inextricably linked,” scholars in the historical subdivisions had yet to successfully combine the two (p. 3). Consequently, they maintained that several studies documenting school politics in the 1960s and 1970s failed to connect Blacks' demands for meaningful participation in school governance to the larger struggle for political and economic power within society. Furthermore, they claimed, by not connecting Black school reform efforts to the larger context of national Black (and White) mobilization aimed at redistributing political and economic power in society, the history of education has not been adequately analyzed.

To understand the motivation that propels urban school reform, we must begin with the understanding that educational institutions do not exist in a vacuum; urban school reform efforts require understanding the political context in which schools operate. In bringing the issue of context to the forefront of her work, Anyon (1997) documented how a confluence of sociopolitical factors—including years of residential segregation, economic trends that weakened city infrastructures, and Black political isolation from federal and state policy apparatuses—promoted ghetto schooling in New Jersey. Anyon’s research helped to establish the role that context plays in promoting the political, racial, and economic isolation that characterize minority-populated urban ghetto schools operating on the periphery of mainstream society.

Building on approaches that attempt to examine systematically the link between schools and the larger environment in which they operate provides critical insight into how sociopolitical environments, including historical precedents and existing legal arrangements, shape educational policy. Equally important, this approach demonstrates how the dynamics that drive demands for school reform are not solely educational. Reform efforts are also grounded in and shaped by historical, social, and political contexts.

\textbf{WHY THESE CASES?}

The cases chosen for review share sufficient similarities to make them useful to analyze. Each case is an alternative school-based response to Black frustration associated with failure of the 1954 Supreme Court ruling \textit{Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas} to effectively desegregate public schools. The reform efforts were designed to address students’ failure in racially segregated urban schools. In New York City, increasing discourag-
ment over Black students’ failure and inhospitable climates within schools motivated Black parents to mobilize and demand administrative control of their neighborhood schools. Racially segregated schools had created similar problems in Milwaukee in the 1980s. Rapid “White flight,” suburbanization, and economic restructuring had a negative impact on urban residents. Consequently, the schools in the inner core of the city were segregated, predominantly Black, and poor. In response to these conditions, Blacks attempted to curb schools’ failure by targeting the system’s most academically vulnerable students.

Second, both empowerment strategies were designed to work within, as opposed to outside of, existing public school systems and focused on making school personnel accountable to the community. Accountability was to be reached by addressing race and class tensions that promoted ineffective relationships between minority communities and school professionals. The community control model of the 1960s in New York City insisted that parents play a meaningful role in school governance, teachers respond to parent concerns, and the curriculum be broadened to include the contributions of non-Whites. The African American immersion schools in Milwaukee were designed to give Black students a Black community–centered curriculum. This was to be achieved by requiring teachers to acquire academic credits in African American studies to support the proposed curriculum and by increasing the level of parent participation in the schools.

Third, these alternative models were controversial and the public’s response to these reform efforts in the form of institutional and popular support influenced the course of the reforms. When the Black community sounded the call for community control, the demand was viewed in militant terms even though Black parents sought the same governance vehicle that White suburban parents shared. This reform required a support base capable of absorbing and countering the many challenges faced. The proposal for an Afrocentric academy was also viewed as radical even though Milwaukee’s reformers were responding to the education system’s own data, which revealed that the system was failing its minority students. Similarly, this reform effort required a strong support base that could match challenges to this effort.

Finally, the political activities in support of both reform measures in New York City and Milwaukee transformed social relations and educational arrangements in these two school districts. In New York City, the creation of three experimental demonstration school districts changed the way in which school governance was run. In addition, the community’s demand for total control transformed once-uninvolved parents into parent-activists eager to expose and address issues of power and control within the city’s educational institutions. In Milwaukee, the school board’s endorsement of the Black
academy proposal resulted in the creation of two African-centered schools, one elementary school, and one middle school. Within the middle school, a governing body was created that offered parents a leadership role in the school’s decision-making arena.

Despite similarities, the differences between the two reform efforts in New York City and Milwaukee are compelling. This comparative account demonstrates how over 30 years the intersection of racial and urban school politics has influenced diverse school reform efforts that seek to secure quality education for the nation’s low-income minority students enrolled in urban schools.

METHOD

Data for this article were taken from a larger comparative historical study that examined the political struggles surrounding the community control of schools movement in New York City in the late 1960s and the efforts to implement African American immersion schools in Milwaukee in the late 1980s. The study was designed with two goals in mind: to provide a description of the chain of events and to address the political strategies used by the actors in each case. Determining the chronology of events required the use of data drawn from mainstream and local Black community newspapers serving the two cities, activists’ references, archival materials, school district documentation, scholarly research and popular accounts of the cases, and position papers published in direct response to these reform efforts. Videotaped recordings of the events and transcripts of conferences structured around these cases were also used to supplement the historical record.

In addition, between 1996 and 1998 the researcher conducted a series of in-depth interviews. In New York City, preliminary contact through introductory letters was established with individuals actively involved in the respective schools. The snowball sampling technique was used to yield additional interviewees. The names of potential interviewees were also gathered from the secondary sources mentioned above and from previously recorded interviews conducted by others and the author (see Byndloss, 1999).

Access to the Milwaukee public school was gained through individuals who directed the African American immersion schools evaluation project. Visits to the middle school in November 1997 yielded the names of school staff and supporters willing to be interviewed in person or by telephone. Interviews were also solicited by approaching parents and community supporters at a monthly meeting of the middle school’s local governing body.
In total, 44 hour-long face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with individuals engaged in the efforts in New York City (Harlem and Brooklyn) and Milwaukee. Interviewees include parents, school staff, community activists, and leaders in both cities. Eighteen interviews were conducted for the New York City case. These interviews consisted of 1 Black journalist, 4 Black former teachers, 1 Black parent-activist, 1 Puerto Rican parent-activist, 7 Black community activists, 1 White former teacher-community activist, 2 White former Ford Foundation employees, and 1 White former mayoral aide.

Twenty-six interviews were conducted for the Milwaukee case. These interviews consisted of 5 Black community activists (including 1 pastor), 3 Black parents, 6 Black teachers, 2 retired Black educator-activists, 1 Black principal, 2 Black former school board members, 1 Black former superintendent, 1 Black Milwaukee Public School (MPS) employee, 2 Black community representatives to the middle school governing body, 1 Black community journalist, and 2 Black scholars knowledgeable about the Milwaukee case. With the interviewees’ permission, the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Tapes and transcripts remain in the author’s possession.

**THE CASES**

**THE PARENTS’ MOVEMENT IN HARLEM**

As the impact of the *Brown* (1954) ruling resonated throughout the nation, New York City was no exception. The Black community had placed its hopes and energies in the promise of school integration and expected significant results. School integration was promising given the problems of overcrowding and inadequate facilities, academic failure, and poor teacher performance. Minority parents turned to integration with great anticipation and had high hopes that integration would solve the problems of overcrowding and limited resources in the public schools.

By the 1966-1967 academic year, it was evident that busing minority children to surrounding White schools was not always feasible nor an adequate solution. Students bused to White schools were ostracized and the practice of “intact busing” ensured that Black students remained segregated within the host schools. In 1966, as integration remained an elusive ideal, New York City introduced the intermediate schools plan. City officials guaranteed that
the new intermediate schools would address overcrowding, and through voluntary integration, the schools would be desegregated. The first intermediate school scheduled to open would be located in Harlem. However, when city officials would not provide specifics about the new school’s programs, parents began to doubt their intentions. Parents objected to the use of the $5-million building that, though fully air conditioned, was windowless, lacked natural lighting, and brought to mind the image of a prison. In addition, parents knew that voluntary efforts to integrate schools in Central Harlem would prove fruitless, regardless of the fact that the school was located near the Triborough Bridge, which could be used to quickly bus White students from Queens and the Bronx to Harlem. Their fears were realized when White parents refused to send their children to the school. Parents remained dissatisfied when it became clear that the city would attempt to integrate the school by minority status: half Black and half Puerto Rican. Parents were disappointed to learn that the city planned to maintain racial segregation. At best, the attempt to integrate the intermediate school without the inclusion of White participation appeared disingenuous.

Frustrated by the events surrounding the integration of the Intermediate School 201 Complex (IS 201) in Harlem, an Ad Hoc Parents Council was formed. The council consisted of community members with strong ties to various antipoverty organizations such as Massive Economic Neighborhood Development (MEND), the Community Association of the East Harlem Triangle, and the United Block Association in East Harlem.

Preston R. Wilcox, then an assistant professor of social work at Columbia University, was also a member of the group. Wilcox served as a consultant to many antipoverty organizations and would later serve as advisor to the Parent/Community Negotiating Committee of IS 201 and as consultant to the Ad Hoc People’s Board of Education. In his 1966 position paper “One View and A Proposal” (1966a), he detailed his proposal for the creation of a School-Community Committee, and in “To Be Black and To Be Successful” (1966b), he developed his ideas for community control of schools. Wilcox (1966a) was concerned about students left behind in segregated schools “even if the best conceivable school desegregation program should be implemented” (p. 13). In addition, Wilcox (1966a) was convinced that “one can be Black (or White or Puerto Rican), reside and attend school in an enforced ghetto, and still be successfully educated to the limits of his potentialities” (p. 13). To achieve success in ghetto schools, Wilcox argued that ghetto communities should be given access to decision-making power in local schools.

The Ad Hoc Parents Council, an informal committee of IS 201 parents, embraced Wilcox’s plan and presented it in meetings attended by the
superintendent and other city officials. The Ad Hoc group wanted to focus attention on securing accountability in the segregated neighborhood schools after busing White students into the community proved not to be a viable option. In more specific terms, the group sought a voice in the staff selection process, the determination of the curriculum, and the evaluation of education in the school (Jones, 1968a). Parents also sought a Black or Puerto Rican principal to head IS 201. This criterion was important to parents who were frustrated by the lack of Blacks in positions of school leadership. Parents envisioned a principal who would be a member of the minority community and who would act as a role model for students in Harlem. However, city officials did not eagerly embrace the plans outlined in Wilcox’s School-Community Committee proposal. Furthermore, the board selected Stanley Lisser, a White principal for IS 201. Protest activities followed, and parents were able to keep the school closed until the fall even though it was originally scheduled to open in late spring. Throughout the summer, meetings were initiated between city officials and community members elected as a negotiating team.

On September 17, 1966, the superintendent and the negotiating team agreed that a community education council would make decisions about school personnel, program, fiscal, and evaluation matters affecting IS 201. According to one source, those present at the meeting agreed that a minority appointment should be made even though it was clear that the superintendent might violate discrimination laws if he attempted to appoint a minority hire (Jones, 1968a). When the chosen principal, Stanley Lisser, voluntarily resigned from the post, Beryl Banfield, the school’s Black assistant principal, was selected to take the helm. However, Banfield also declined the offer, which complicated matters, and the union’s dissatisfaction with Banfield’s appointment was also an issue. To the disappointment of the negotiating team and the community, on September 21, 1966, the school opened with Lisser reinstated as principal.

Hostility between the community, the teachers union, the board of education, and city leaders threatened to engulf IS 201 in the fall of 1966. In particular, teachers union officials grew impatient with the community’s increasing demand for involvement in school administrative matters. The visible support of Stokely Carmichael, the Black Panthers, and other nationalist groups convinced skeptics that the community’s demands were being driven by outsiders not directly involved in the case. Yet, as discussed elsewhere, parent-activists in New York City were committed to making the school system in general, and school personnel in particular, accountable to the community (Byndloss, 1999). In Wilcox’s community control plan, activists saw a path
toward empowerment for low-income communities of color by giving community members decision-making authority. Further along in the struggle, Black educators viewed community control as a tool for making accessible teaching and administrative job opportunities previously closed to people of color.

The negotiating team’s interest in securing opportunities to grant parents power grew when the board of education released a report in October 1966 implying that characteristics inherent to the minority community were responsible for Black and Puerto Rican failure in the city’s schools (Edgell, 1998). The report drew fire from the negotiating team and began to spark mobilization elsewhere in New York City as disenfranchised Black and Puerto Rican parents, community leaders, and educational activists sought to change how the public school system engaged minority communities. Community members were distrustful of the city’s school system, which was severely overcrowded, antagonistic to minority parental concerns, slow to integrate, rife with student failure and discipline problems, and suffering from poor community relations.

Although members of the IS 201 negotiating team continued to suggest ways that the Black and Puerto Rican community could gain and exercise power in the schools, the city’s liberal Republican mayor, John Lindsay, approached his former colleague, Ford Foundation president McGeorge Bundy, for assistance. Lindsay, a critic of the board of education, believed that Bundy, newly appointed to lead the Ford Foundation, might be able to support a vehicle that would promote the ideal of “participatory democracy” and address the issue of increased Black parental involvement in the schools. In July 1967, the Ford Foundation funded three experimental demonstration districts in two of the city’s five boroughs. The demonstration districts were located in East Harlem (and included IS 201); in Two Bridges, located on the Lower East Side of Manhattan; and in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, located in Brooklyn.

The events surrounding IS 201 in Harlem served as a catalyst in provoking a series of confrontations between the minority community and the city’s educational bureaucracy. As minority frustration intensified near the end of 1966, New York City bore witness to increased protest activities, including the formation of the grassroots Ad Hoc Board of Education of the People of the City of New York (AHPB), commonly known as the People’s Board of Education. By the fall of 1967, the experiment in community control exploded in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville section of Brooklyn when the community board attempted to transfer 19 school personnel from the demonstration district. This effort led to a series of teacher strikes that paralyzed the city’s schools for 5 weeks.
THE POLICY MAKERS’ DILEMMA IN MILWAUKEE

In 1988, a special resolution addressing the needs of African American males in the MPS system was submitted to the MPS Board of Directors. The resolution, which called for the creation of a task force to examine the life of Black males in the city’s school district, was prompted by national and local discussions suggesting that Black males were an at-risk population due to drug use and high mortality rates associated with gang violence. Discussions on the topic of the “endangered Black male,” in concert with statistics describing Black male academic failure, prompted school administrators to examine alternative strategies to address these problems. With the attention of Black researchers focused on the bleak situation facing urban Black males, interest in how to remedy this situation gained a level of legitimacy. Local education leaders, including school board members, began to voice concern about the dismal statistics and evidence of trends being reflected within the city schools.

In May 1990, the board-approved African American Male Task Force submitted sobering findings affecting Black males in Milwaukee schools. The data revealed that during the 1989-1990 academic year, African American males, comprising roughly 28% of the district school population, represented 50% of the students suspended system-wide (African American Male Task Force Report, 1990). Furthermore, during the 1986-1987 academic year, Milwaukee’s Black high school students had an average grade point average (GPA) of 1.46 (the equivalent of a “D”), and of 5,716 Black males, fewer than 20% had a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher. Two percent had a cumulative GPA between 3.0 and 4.0, and 17% had a cumulative GPA between 2.0 and 2.9.

In addition to its findings, the African American Male Task Force made 23 recommendations to the board of school directors. The far-reaching and comprehensive recommendations were organized in two phases: Phase I called for immediate implementation and Phase II involved longer-range implementations. The recommendations also emphasized a “moral and civic imperative” to enhance life for Black males (African American Male Task Force Report, 1990, p. 1). The endorsement of an all-male African American Immersion Academy received the most attention, and the report’s 22 other recommendations covering various strategies and initiatives to strengthen Black male achievement were lost.

The task force anticipated resistance to the controversial proposal for a Black all-male academy and, prior to making its final recommendation to the school board, sought the support of the recently hired Black superintendent, Robert Peterkin. As expected, not everyone agreed with the concept of the
academies or the appropriateness of proposing the academies during a period in MPS growth when student enrollment rose to more than 100,000 pupils in 130 schools. The district was also undergoing a K-12 curriculum review, the professional development program was being revamped, and 10 new schools would be opening including the nation’s first arts-oriented Waldorf School.

Locally, the main opposition to the academy proposal came from three of six White school board members who argued that such an initiative implied that the MPS had abandoned the district’s Black males by further isolating them racially. The White board members argued that approval of the recommendation would isolate students racially who needed to be prepared for life in the mainstream. Objectors believed that the goals of the MPS system should be to improve the school district’s existing 19 racially identifiable schools rather than to foster the segregation that already existed by creating additional racially identifiable schools. In addition, ethical concerns were raised by board member Doris Stacy, a longtime integrationist, who stated, “It’s educationally unsound, it’s morally wrong. . . . To isolate students by race in America in 1990 is morally wrong” (Johnson, 1990, p. 1).

At the national level, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal and Education Defense Fund expressed concern that such a proposal would turn the Brown judgment on its head. The organization’s objection hinged on the perceived damaging effects of the reintroduction of race- and sex-based segregation as a legitimate structure for public school education. The perceived retreat from the Brown decision prohibited the national organization from offering its support for the academy proposal. The organization proposed that the immersion academies be abandoned in exchange for channeling energies into making schools accountable to students under the traditional system.

Issues of gender discrimination led the National Organization of Women’s Legal Defense and Education Fund to oppose the academy proposal (see Truely, 1992). Denying admission to girls placed the schools in direct violation of Title IX of the Federal Education Amendments of 1972 that bars sex bias in academic and/or extracurricular activities at schools that receive federal funds. In addition, the organization was concerned that by focusing on males, the school system would send the erroneous message that female students did not suffer similar problems as their male counterparts when in fact the task force report revealed that Black females were achieving only marginally better than their Black male counterparts.

Sociologist Charles V. Willie, a national school integration specialist, raised objections regarding cross-gender effects in the classroom and the potentially harmful consequences of fulfilling pathologies inherent in any
system that promotes segregation. According to Willie, isolating students because of their ‘‘alleged maladaptive behavior’ is a way of stigmatizing them as inferior, dangerous, or unworthy of being in the company of others’’ (Willie, 1991, pp. 239-240).

In April 1990, the superintendent met with the executive boards of the two legal organizations to design an initiative that would avoid a legal challenge without diluting the program to the extent that it became similar to the school system’s other magnet programs. At the very least, the superintendent and school board were aware that they might be breaking the law as related to Title IX. One Black former board member who supported the proposal recalls that because the all-male academy was sure to initiate a lawsuit, much of the school board debate centered on the question,

‘‘Do we spend the time fighting the lawsuit, or do we get the school open?’’ I never will forget that . . . I mean, it was very hard to lose [the all-male academy] like that, but that’s what we came down to. And again it gets into the politics of it. What do you do? It wasn’t about ‘‘Did the kids need it?’’ It wasn’t about ‘‘Were we in fact losing African American males?’’ None of that really mattered when you came down to it. It was, ‘‘Were we going to be sued or not?’’

Joyce Mallory, the board’s Black vice president and one of the proposal’s strongest advocates, was careful not to antagonize her White colleagues on the board. She had to convince other board members that the academy proposal could be successful in addressing Black students’ needs. Mallory reminded the board that it had supported other innovative high-achieving programs, including the public school system’s French, German, and Spanish immersion schools. Furthermore, the board had to address poor educational outcomes for Black males. For those concerned about creating an additional all-Black school, a compromise was suggested: The board could place the Black male program in majority Black schools so as not to further segregate. On September 26, 1990, the following proposal passed with a 5-to-3 vote:

That the administration establish pilot African American immersion schools at elementary- and middle-school levels; that these schools adhere to the district’s nondiscriminatory policy on admission; that these schools be recruited from schools which are currently racially identifiable; that these schools provide an Afrocentric curriculum; that activities address the emotional, social, developmental, and academic needs of the African American male student. (MPS School Board Transcript, September 30, 1990, p. 33)
On gaining board approval, the district’s desegregation attorney attempted to meet the criteria for the African American immersion schools program as approved while also designing a program that was acceptable to all parties involved, including the district office, the teachers union, and the legal branches of two civil rights organizations. The attorney suggested implementing the program in one elementary and one middle school, both preserved as all-Black by a desegregation plan created in the 1970s. This would satisfy the board’s requirement to implement the African American immersion program in existing racially identifiable schools so as not to further segregate. In addition, the program would be open to all students, regardless of race or gender, with an emphasis on Black male students.

Although Superintendent Peterkin did not advocate an all-Black teaching staff for these programs, the racial composition of the teaching staff was an issue. He was aware that hiring a teaching staff that was more reflective of the Black community might appeal to parents. However, the union contract allowed for no more than 23% minority teachers per school building. Considering the nature of the academy and its goals, the superintendent fought to increase the percentage of Black teachers in the African American immersion schools, but the Milwaukee Teachers’ Education Association resisted. Union leaders expressed concern that the organization might be characterized as employing racist staff assignment practices if only Black teachers were sent to the two specialty schools. In the early 1970s, the union was charged with sending inexperienced Black teachers to Black schools and by 1972-1973, the data revealed that “73% of Black secondary teachers and 80% of Black elementary school teachers had been assigned to schools which had more than 80% Black pupil enrollment” (Stolee, 1993, p. 237). The union did not want to relive these criticisms. It is also plausible that the union resisted the increase because it feared the potential loss of positions for White teachers if only Black teachers were assigned to the specialty schools. (Later, a source of contention would be who held responsibility for funding the 18 credit hours in African American studies that teachers would be required to gain to remain on staff in the schools.)

The African American immersion schools Implementation Committee decided that the program would be placed in 2 of 19 racially identified schools, located a few blocks apart in the Black Harambee District. The elementary school opened in the fall of 1991, and the middle school opened in the fall of 1992.
IMPLEMENTING REFORM IN RACIALLY DIVIDED CONTEXTS

The political climate of the 1960s set the context for activism in New York. Activity associated with the civil rights and Black Power movements supported Black demands to gain autonomy from the White power structure. Yet, factors specific to the New York context pushed the movement for community control of schools into a confrontational direction. The combination of segregated schools, poor academic achievement among minority students, poor community relations, and practices that restricted minority employment and advancement within the school system frustrated Blacks and encouraged their demand that the city’s educational bureaucracy be made accountable to the communities served. Community control provided an opportunity for grassroots activists to exert political power within their own communities, and the Ford Foundation’s financial support gave the demonstration project political legitimacy. However, securing full institutional support for community control was difficult to achieve. Conflicting political and economic interests placed parent-activists and the White-controlled educational bureaucracy at odds. Parents were distrustful of city leaders and the educational system, and both refused to cede power to minority communities. The struggle for power led to a volatile confrontation that pitted members of the Black and Puerto Rican communities against the educational establishment.

In Milwaukee during the 1980s, economic decline, “White flight,” and suburbanization contributed to a political context characterized by concentrated segregation and racial isolation. The MPSs reflected this crisis, which led Black leaders to propose solutions that included the creation of an autonomous Black school district (see Bell, 1989). When the idea of the Black academy was proposed by a school board-appointed task force, the concept found a strong advocate in the Black vice president of the board of school directors and the Black superintendent. Blacks were now in key leadership roles that allowed them to pursue proposals that could directly benefit the Black community. However, the initial all-male academy proposal divided the school board and threatened to land board members in court. The all-male component of the proposal was viewed as gender-biased, and the race-based nature of the proposal was viewed by some as a retreat to segregation. Program placement was also constrained by a desegregation order, an existing legal arrangement that preserved a certain number of racially identifiable schools. Advocates of the proposal decided against pursuing a lawsuit that would be time-consuming and that might jeopardize the proposal. Instead, reformers made a conscious effort to modify the proposal so that it would fit within the existing MPS and legal framework. Reformers deliberately dropped the gender criteria, opened enrollment to all racial groups, and offered to place the
program in two of the existing racially identifiable (i.e., segregated) schools. Reformers felt certain that White students would not likely apply to enroll in these schools that were racially segregated and spatially isolated within the inner core of the Black Harambee District. The likelihood that White teachers would apply to teach in these schools was also slim. The proposal was presented as a rational and legitimate alternative to the traditional segregated system that had been proven ineffective. The refusal to confront and alienate led to the use of accommodating policymaking strategies.

CONCLUSION

As the 50th anniversary of the Brown decision approaches, urban school districts continue to search for solutions to the segregation problem. The cases profiled in this article demonstrate that although there is no consensus regarding how to successfully desegregate the nation’s schools, solutions that use the all-Black setting as a foundation for reform present their own challenges. As witnessed in New York City, efforts that attempt to redistribute power by challenging the existing educational establishment can provoke a major confrontation. On the other hand, efforts that use segregated communities and schools as a centerpiece for reform are controversial and become vulnerable to political and legal challenges that threaten such proposals. In both scenarios, the African American community continues to be disadvantaged by the American political system.

However, as residential patterns and demographic changes continue to challenge policymakers’ effort to integrate schools, it is possible that racially relevant alternatives like community control and African-centered academies will find a broader audience in urban schools. In the event that choice initiatives take hold and school integration is left to private interests, it is likely that reduced incentives will be unsuccessful in motivating state and federal governments to enforce equal education for all children. Rather, implementing models similar to those experienced in New York City and Milwaukee may grow in Black communities. In the foreseeable future at least, improved education for most Black children will need to take place within the context of strong community influence. As demonstrated in this study and elsewhere (Byndloss, 1994, 1999), reformers must bear in mind that local conditions play an important role in shaping the need for reform, and sociopolitical contexts are critical in facilitating or constraining the successful implementation of alternative models in Black communities. The feasibility of successfully pursuing a particular model will depend on the
context in which it is being proposed. Thus, one reform model may not be suitable for all communities. Perhaps community control administrated through neighborhood schools would be successful in one context, charter schools using the African-centered academy model may succeed in another setting, and other reform strategies may work in other settings. Future research should examine whether community control and Afrocentric academies are variants of the same ideological strategy. Which ever models are chosen, Black communities must be at the forefront of the movement to maximize schooling for their children given the political and economic realities discussed above.

NOTES

1. Note that the Brown decision referred to the effects of enforced or de jure segregation. The African American immersion schools were conceived in response to de facto segregation.

2. Interview with author, June 16, 1997.

3. Board Director Cullen resigned on August 29, 1990. His position was not filled until April 1991. Hence, there was no vote representing his district, District 2.

REFERENCES


Milwaukee Public Schools, Board of Directors. (1990, September 26). Transcript of meeting. Milwaukee, WI.


Wilcox, P. R. (1966b, March 1). *To be Black and to be successful. A summary statement*. Unpublished manuscript.


Urban teachers unions, as mature institutions, face three dilemmas. First, they struggle to maintain their ranks through an active role in the preparation/recruitment of new teachers while raising standards (limiting supply) and thus raising demand and salaries. Second, unions seek to become a more powerful national voice for teachers (by attempting to merge the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association while serving the local district needs of their membership. And finally, and most complexly, unions strive to preserve large, monopolistic public education while being aware of the need to reform, restructure, and even privatize schools to drive improvement.

America’s teachers unions, particularly those in the larger cities, have reached maturity as institutions, moving from being disorganized, radical dissidents outside the traditional top-down, management-dominated bureaucracies, to becoming critical actors in the life of the city and the school systems in which they operate. The struggle for recognition—for the ability and right collectively to negotiate contracts and for professional legitimacy—was long and difficult (Conley & Cooper, 1991; Etzioni, 1969; Kerchner & Mitchell, 1988; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1985; Urban, 1982).

The new strength of the union is grounded, as Hrebenar (1997) explained, in a “well-defined membership, regular funding, a permanent staff, and most importantly, knowledge to operate within a political system” (p. 8). And operate teachers unions do. Wirt and Kirst (1997) wrote that no other group has had “increased influence on education policy in recent decades as much as have teachers. The timid rabbits of 30 years ago are today’s ravening tigers in the jungle of school systems” (p. 181).

But now that these unions are well-established “adults” in the public school community, they face a whole new set of dilemmas, which are the
subject of this article. How do unions strive to take their place in the urban political landscape; to protect public education from critics who seek to privatize (or voucherize) schooling; to organize themselves effectively at national, state, and local levels to help to reform urban education; and to play a role in preparing, certifying, and recruiting replacements and “passing the torch” to a new generation of teachers who are less interested in “worker rights” and collective action? We suggest that mature organizations, which are part of their political and social environment, are forced to make tough, pain-wrenching decisions and trade-offs as they seek to accommodate themselves while maintaining their identities and integrity as associations.

Although teachers began forming unions and engaging in collective bargaining about 40 years ago (in the late 1960s), long after private sector employees (who gained the right to bargain collectively as a result of the Wagner Act of 1935), public school teachers have made up for lost time, now becoming a dominant force in both private and public sector labor relations. As Cooper (2000) explained,

> In less than half a century, teachers have risen from underpaid, undervalued “semiprofessionals” to powerful voices in education, becoming key leaders within the larger labor movement and prime movers in regional and national politics. To a large degree, this emergence from obscurity to prominence and transition from exploited, sympathy-invoking martyrs to respected agents at the bargaining table and in the halls of government [is] the result of the unionization of teachers—a phenomenon in virtually every developed nation on earth. (p. 240)

This article examines the problems of mature institutions that have successfully fought for recognition and legitimacy and that must now use their standing, power, and resources in effective ways or watch the urban school systems and their unions disintegrate. What are the key dilemmas and trade-offs of being an urban teachers union today? What can we learn about school labor relations by analyzing these dilemmas and how practical union leaders deal with them?

**DILEMMA 1: BETTER TEACHERS, FEWER TEACHERS, ENOUGH TEACHERS**

By raising standards for licensure and closing loopholes that permit districts to hire unlicensed teachers on an emergency basis or as long-term substitutes, professional regulatory bodies will create pressure for states to increase
salaries to attract a sufficient supply of teachers with the requisite credentials. (Ballou & Podgursky, 2000, p. 78)

The first dilemma confronted by many groups or professions is how to ensure a steady supply of quality, trained (and licensed) practitioners while limiting the supply to help drive up pay, maintain quality, and bolster prestige. Doctors looked to Abraham Flexner, trained at Johns Hopkins University, who was dispatched to evaluate the nation’s medical schools in the early 20th century. His recommendations led to the closing of scores of low-quality medical schools, thus simultaneously reducing the supply of physicians while eliminating substandard preparation programs and increasing the economic well-being of those physicians who could meet the new, tougher standards. Sound familiar?

Teachers and their unions, likewise, have long sought to organize themselves as a profession with greater control over teacher training, access, and certification, just as groups such as the American Medical Association (AMA) and American Bar Association (ABA) license doctors and lawyers. In part, this drive to control access comes from the centuries-long teachers’ desire to be recognized as a true profession—one in which teachers license teachers, as doctors certify doctors.

And, in part, unions realize that like doctors, teachers should control the number of teachers certified—limit the market—and thus drive up salaries and benefits. As Ballou and Podgursky (2000) explained, “By limiting the number of practitioners, licensing boards restrict competition and put upward pressure on salaries. This is a strategy that has been followed successfully by many professions, the most notable (and widely emulated) being physicians” (p. 77).

Here is the dilemma and trade-off. Although raising standards and increasing the pay for, and prestige of, qualified teachers are noble aims for unions to pursue, the net effect in the cities is often to exacerbate teacher shortages and to drive interested teacher candidates into other fields or into the suburbs. Higher standards for training and licensure usually increase the time and costs involved and thus “discourages many individuals of ability from pursuing teaching careers, offsetting whatever limited gains might be achieved by reforming the curriculum of teachers education programs” (Ballou & Podgursky, 2000, pp. 83-84). And cities are the worst hit because the procedures for applying to teach in places like New York City and Los Angeles are protracted and dehumanizing; the pay is better in the suburbs; and because higher standards increase the cost (and often the debt) of trainees, the pressure to find another profession or a better location may drive teachers away.
In their desperation to “cover the classes,” cities often offer emergency certificates or hire full-time substitute teachers who are untrained in the field (just being “warm and vertical” qualifies), having exactly the opposite effect than intended. In a recent visit to an urban middle school, I was told that 10 out of the 14 new teachers hired for 2001 had “no training and no preparation” (not even “alternative route” licensing through groups like Teach for America that at least offer candidates a student teaching experience with mentoring and support). Of the 14, 2 resigned after two weeks and 6 others fell by the wayside during the year, mostly, they explained, because these neophytes had no experience with African American, urban kids and knew nothing about classroom management and control. The new teachers were simply driven out of the classroom and profession, and the teachers’ union stood helplessly by.

Thus, teachers unions in cities get caught in the middle of this first dilemma: They want better-trained new colleagues, and they might in some abstract, economic sense prefer a teacher shortage but only if it drives up salaries and does not mean that veteran teachers are teaching more students in overcrowded classrooms at the same pay level. The most noticeable effect of teacher shortages may not be better pay but may result in larger class sizes.

The teachers unions have been active in those associations and groups that oversee teacher preparation. For example, the membership of the National Council of Accrediting Teacher Education’s (NCATE’s) board of directors is majority representatives from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA). Observers explain that “if teacher education programs are required to obtain accreditation from NCATE, we can expect that unions will use their influence within this organization to reduce the number of accredited programs” and thus the number of certified teachers, all under the guise of better preparation (Ballou & Podgursky, 2000, p. 78).

In addition, the data on whether teachers trained in NCATE-approved institutions are better off are troubling, if not downright discouraging. As shown in Table 1, between 1994 and 1997, graduates from NCATE-approved institutions were no better off in their attitudes, pay, or ambition than non-NCATE school graduates.

Trade-offs between more or fewer teachers, better or less well-trained teachers, and a mounting teacher shortage are discouraging, and urban teachers unions are caught in the middle. As Murnane, Singer, and Willett (1991) found,

In a society with abundant opportunity for talented college graduates and a tradition of labor market mobility, it will never be possible to persuade 2 million
Public rhetoric that implies personal failure when a teacher leaves the classroom after successfully teaching for a number of years may deter many from ever setting foot in a classroom. (p. 42)

It is little wonder then that urban teacher unions are confused about the dilemmas: between the best way to increase their union ranks, how and where to recruit new teachers, and how to become a sought-after, well-paid profession with high entry-level standards—the trade-off confronted by doctors a century ago.

**HANDLING THE TRADE-OFF**

Thus, a great challenge for urban unions in the near future is where to find good, well-prepared colleagues when higher teacher training standards will (a) increase preparation costs (Education Testing Service, 1999; Rottenberg, 1962), (b) deter some interested candidates from selecting teaching, and (c) create a bifurcated work force of some highly trained, fully-certified teachers working alongside “warm bodies” given jobs when shortages of qualified candidates appear. Yet, teacher unions, mainly at the national and state levels, continue to increase their power in those agencies that now accredit teachers (e.g., NCATE) while being aware that urban districts are already struggling to find adequate staff.

---

**TABLE 1**

Comparing NCATE and Non-NCATE Trained Teachers, 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Accredited by NCATE</th>
<th>Not Accredited by NCATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applied for a teaching job</td>
<td>92.0%</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Certainly” or “probably” would become a teacher</td>
<td>80.2%</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to spend full career as teacher</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste of time to do a good job sometimes</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours per week spent on after-school teacher preparation</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holds nonteaching moonlighting job</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received a teacher job offer after applying</td>
<td>82.0%</td>
<td>84.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean teaching salary (1993-1994)</td>
<td>$19,843</td>
<td>$20,076</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, 1993 to 1994 (Ballou & Podgursky, 2000).

**NOTE:** NCATE = National Council of Accrediting Teacher Education.
The net effect of this trade-off is that good teachers are becoming an endangered species in many large cities, as the Vietnam War generation is retiring (teachers in their late 50s) and younger teachers are drawn to the suburbs or other fields. Although the United States produces more than enough certified teachers in the 1,300 or so teacher training programs, many never teach or shy away from applying as new professionals in the city schools. Unions realize the importance of replenishing the teacher ranks and thus their ranks. We are approaching in New York City a balance between active teachers, who number 80,000 in the United Federation of Teachers, and retired teachers, who are nearly 55,000 in number. As life expectancies grow and teachers retire earlier, we could foresee a time when there are as many union member retirees as there are active teachers.

Unions have talked about the shortages, particularly in the specialized fields of science, mathematics, bilingual education, and special education. And unions have supported efforts to recruit. But, as national, state, and local associations, the challenge of replacing and re-energizing the work force in education will become more and more critical. As unions, the need to “pass the torch” to the next generation of teachers becomes critical. Younger teachers—who grew up without having witnessed the classic struggle of workers to gain the right to be recognized as a union and to bargain collectively—may not appreciate what life would be like without good salaries, benefits, and working conditions.

DILEMMA 2: LOCAL UNIONISM, NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Urban teachers unions, as they mature, struggle to find an organizational structure and affiliations that are appropriate to accomplish two conflicting missions: First, these teacher associations have to meet the local and particular needs of nearly 14,000 school systems in 50 states and the District of Columbia, servicing the so-called “local bargaining unit.” But, at the same time, state and national policies and programs deeply affect local schools, encouraging teachers unions to band together across districts, states, and the nation to increase their collective, corporate power. Urban teachers unions are the most exposed because from their ranks come the leaders of the state and national unions, and urban unions are most engaged in state and national issues.

To complicate matters, teacher ranks are divided between the NEA, with 2.2 million members, and the AFT, with more than 900,000 members. It was
no great surprise, then, in the late 1990s that the NEA and AFT leadership—local, state, and national—decided to call a merger vote to unify the associations and to allow teachers to speak “with one voice” on national, state, and local issues (Cooper, 1991b, 1998).

Although Bob Chase (1998), president of the NEA, and Sandra Feldman, head of the AFT, both strongly supported a merger of their two associations, the initiative failed by a landslide vote, as the move to merge culminated in New Orleans on July 4, 1998. The 10,000 delegates of the NEA’s Representative Assembly, the largest democratic deliberative body in the world, rejected the proposed merger with the AFT (4,091 voted in favor and 5,624 voted against)—whereas a 67% pro-merger vote was needed to ratify the change in the NEA’s constitution. Two weeks later, however, the AFT voted by 97% in support of the merger. But, without the consent of both national unions, no consolidation could occur.

The dilemma, then, is how to create a powerful force for teachers nationally, through a merger of the NEA and AFT, while remaining local, small, and responsive to the bargaining and political needs of teachers who work for local school districts. That the NEA delegates voted resoundingly against a nationwide merger testifies to the trade-off between localism and nationalism, a willingness to give up big union power for local needs and concerns. The big urban unions, mostly members of the AFT, saw the advantages of trading off localist views for a national presence; the NEA representatives took the opposite trade-off, as their membership is mainly small town and rural.

**OBSTACLES TO AN NEA-AFT MERGER**

Given these prevailing reasons to merge the NEA and AFT—the fulfillment of the unions’ mission, the end of a costly rivalry, a need to be a national political player, and the perceived threat of privatization for the future of public education as we know it—why did this merger effort fail? What can we learn about the trade-offs in the teachers union movement in the United States and its future from this failure of the NEA to vote for unification?

*Two cultures, two organizations.* An important reason for the failure of the merger was the nature of the two unions themselves: their origins, histories, cultures, and structures. First, the NEA is much older, beginning in 1857 as a broad-based professional education association including superintendents, principals, and teachers. The AFT was founded in 1916 by urban, ethnic-Jewish, left-wing, pro-democratic activists, who later established ties to the
labor movement. The NEA was popular in conservative rural communities and small towns and had traditionally seen itself as a “professional association”—doubting the wisdom of teachers becoming unionists.

As such, the NEA is highly democratic, with many councils and representative bodies, including the 10,000-member Representative Assembly, whereas the AFT, like most unions, is more centrally controlled, often using the hand vote (although the NEA insists on the secret ballot to preserve delegate autonomy) to make key decisions. The governance styles of the two organizations are dramatically different, again something that must be worked out in a merger.

Second, as a union, the AFT representing the urban centers advocated strikes, whereas the NEA, until the 1960s, traditionally opposed work stoppages as “unprofessional” for education. Although the NEA was moderate, the AFT was more militant. The NEA believed that teachers should stand on the moral “high ground” as advocates for children; the AFT was committed to forcing society to accept the importance of teachers through lobbying, strikes, and other direct political, collective actions.

*Bottom-up localists, not top-down nationalists.* Teachers, too, find it hard to accept a national approach. After all, for many, the genius of American education has always been its local roots, local support, and local commitment. The concept of an enormous Big Brother (or Sister) union is alien. Furthermore, teachers in many states and communities have little or no experience with the labor movement or the AFT. The very idea of joining the AFL-CIO is as distant as it is shocking to them.

Most teachers think “local” when they consider themselves and their jobs. Although many recognize the important role of their state governments in funding and regulating education, they are also accustomed to receiving directives and resources from locally elected public boards of education. Local is simple and direct. The state is knowable but removed. The national (federal) government in education appears to the average teacher as a multi-layered bureaucracy far removed from schools and classrooms. Adjusting to being a member of the national labor movement will take time and patience to allow teachers to become comfortable in their relationship with a single, large, national organization.

*Gradualism, not radicalism.* Teachers, by their nature, are conservative gradualists when it comes to changing their jobs and affiliations. The leadership of the NEA and AFT seemed to forget that the typical American teacher is still a 47-year-old woman with a husband and children, who prefers to see things happen slowly and carefully, with many ample opportunities to test
and check. Jumping from a comfortable, local, secure status to being a contributor to a national mega-union is foreign and risky for some, and irrelevant and unimportant to others.

Bob Chase, Mary H. Futrell, and Keith Geiger, the current and past NEA presidents, should study the history of collective bargaining within the NEA. It took 10 years, great patience, and strong leadership from Michigan-trained union organizer Terry Herndon, executive director of the NEA from 1971 to 1984, to bring many teachers to a significant level of militancy before they would demand the right to bargain collectively and to go out on strike when school boards refused to bargain an acceptable contract. A move from a highly decentralized professional association to a united, militant union took time, and a national NEA-AFT merger will also require years of work and development.

Living professionalism, not unionism. Finally, although teachers in many communities are union members, they still see themselves and their work as primarily professional—helping children to learn and grow. And the process of teaching children has not really changed much compared to the ways that manufacturing was transformed through mass production, the assembly line, and now the Information Age of robots and digitalization. Teaching remains highly interpersonal, individualistic, and human. Most attempts to modernize teaching have failed—television, programmed learning, teaching machines, distance learning, and now computers hardly penetrate the daily classroom lessons of the nation’s 47 million public school children.

Whereas the Industrial Revolution altered the workplace forever, the classroom remains a setting where adults help children to grow, learn, and mature—and although the lingo has changed, the process has not. So, when the NEA attempted to convince teachers that a big national union would benefit them, many teachers asked, “How?” Besides fighting for better pay and a greater say in district, state, and national politics, most teachers work in semi-isolated classrooms and think little about the bigger picture, except when the union calls a meeting. Thus, teachers and their unions began, and still remain, a fundamentally local phenomenon; mergers will likely occur from the local and state levels first, before the big merger of the national AFT and NEA, creating the largest public sector union in the United States.

Mergers have begun locally in recent years. Grassroot test cases in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Los Angeles, and San Francisco may well demonstrate the merit of mergers from the bottom up. When combined with continued perceived threats to public education posed by the privatization of education (e.g., more vouchers, contracting out, and new free-market experiments), teachers nationally may well decide to close ranks to enhance their collective
voice, buttress their political power, and fight shoulder-to-shoulder to save jobs and the public school system as they know it. Hence, pressures for an NEA-AFT merger in the 21st century will come from both greater external pressures and more successful internal cooperative experiments—together convincing teachers that big mergers, big unions, and big power are necessary to fight off serious threats to use privatization to restructure public schools.

In all societies with free labor unions (see Cooper, 1991a), teachers groups must determine what role they will play in schools and governmental institutions. As U.S. education moved from being primarily local to state-controlled, and now from being state to ever more national in scope, the unions have struggled to fit into this new political and power arrangement. Note that teacher pensions, for example, are state-based, making it difficult for teachers to transfer their work and skills to another state without losing their vesting and having to start over in the new retirement system. Mobility, when limited, decreases the opportunity to transport one’s skills across state lines without penalty.

Collective bargaining was granted to teachers under state labor legislation, except in those states with “right to work” laws, where local boards determined whether to recognize teachers as a bargaining unit or to allow no bargaining. But, as the two great teachers’ associations, the NEA and the AFT, grew in size and importance, they attempted to cooperate, pooling their power and membership, leading to a full campaign officially to merge into “one voice for teachers” in the United States.

DILEMMA 3:
DEFENDING SCHOOLS, REFORMING SCHOOLS

Perhaps the greatest current dilemma for organized labor in education, particularly in urban settings, is how to support the hegemony of the public schools against forces that work to privatize, decentralize, or disassemble the “system,” while carefully helping to reform and restructure schools to make them more effective—and thus able to survive as effective organizations. The ability of public monopolies to produce acceptable goods and services is not very good, as the breakup of the Soviet Union testifies. For, although all monopolies struggle to remain up to date, efficient, and effective, public monopolies are particularly prone to sluggishness, overregulation (just look at the mountain of rules controlling the conduct of special education), and ineffectiveness—and urban public schools are no different.
In strategic terms, urban union leaders walk a fine line between resisting change, thus endangering the future of the enterprise, and allowing schools to be restructured in such a way (privatization) that unionization will disintegrate and disappear. Similar changes have already occurred in the manufacturing and services sector, where the percentage of unionized workers has declined from 41% in 1955 to 11% in 2000, as big manufacturing has declined or moved overseas to be replaced by smaller, more competitive, innovative, white-collar companies and dot-coms that have not been readily unionized.

One can already see massive efforts to break up the public school hegemony over education, wherein 89% of children attend public schools, and to replace the “one best system” with many smaller units (charter schools, private schools, voucher-supported schools, home schooling), which will ultimately “deunionize” the workforce in education, as it has done in the private work sector. Urban school teachers unions are the strongest, largest, and most powerful; they are also the most vulnerable to the effects of privatization and de-unionizing, for already we hear about “charter districts,” where the entire district and all its schools are operated by small foundations and trusts, and the need for a central board of education disappears.

What if Cleveland or Milwaukee “outsourced” the entire district (as Hartford, Connecticut did for a few years), pulling government out of the school business, except for providing the tax funds and general oversight (much as it does in medicine and trucking)? It would not be long before the unions would decline and even disappear, because it would be difficult to unionize 1,200 separate charter or quasi-private schools in New York City, for example, rather than to deal with the city’s public schools as a single, mammoth bargaining unit.

And with whom would urban teachers bargain, as the city passes control over to individual school trustees? The restructuring of school systems would change the relationship between management and labor, and the unions would have to adjust or disappear. What too would happen if teachers opened and ran their own schools, as is the case with some charter schools? Then teachers would become the owners and managers of their enterprise and could hardly bargain with themselves. Already, we see the AFT taking a particular interest in charter schools (see the Nelson, Muir, & Drown, 2000, study of state charter school finance systems released by the AFT Educational Foundation and funded by the U.S. Department of Education).

The trade-offs are already obvious, as urban teachers unions seek to maintain their power and influence while not appearing to block needed changes and reforms. In New York City, between October 2000 and June 2001, the giant United Federation of Teachers (AFL-CIO) has worked without a
contract, being unable to “bring management back to the bargaining table.” The union stalled during the fall and winter, hoping that the state would be forced to fund New York City schools to the tune of $1 billion because of a pending equity suit (*Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. State of New York*, 2001) and that Mayor Giuliani would leave office to join the new Bush Administration in Washington, turning the mayor’s office over to a more supportive Democratic deputy mayor.

The mayor and the city are working to obtain “buybacks” from the union in exchange for higher salaries. This approach worked effectively with the Council of Administrators and Supervisors, which gave up tenure and building seniority and agreed to work a 12-month year in exchange for a 30% raise (because they had worked for 5 years without a contract or raise). Now in mediation, the sides are working to resolve the UFT union dilemma of how to grab a big raise and better benefits (to prevent teachers from fleeing the city for the suburbs) and how to participate in new union requirements designed to improve school activities and student achievement.

As Greenhouse (2001) wrote,

> The union representing 80,000 public school teachers has signaled that it would agree to more work and some form of merit pay—two items that Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has insisted on. But there remains one big obstacle to a settlement: the price tag. (p. 41)

The local union president, Randi Weingarten, indicated that a 20%-plus raise over 2 years is “on the table,” costing the city $1 billion per year in new dollars on top of the $11 billion already committed. A business-backed watchdog group, the Citizens Budget Commission, responded that “if you accept a settle of that magnitude, you have to have lots of confidence it will go a long way toward improving education” (Greenhouse, 2001, p. 41).

**More results, more money.** Already, a group of civic and business leaders is offering an annual $2,000 bonus for teachers in 47 schools in Brooklyn that showed improvement over last year on standardized test scores. And in 40 low-performing schools (those called Schools Under Registration Review), teachers are receiving a 15% higher salary (“battle pay,” as the military called it), but these teachers will work 40 minutes more each day and will be receiving a week of extra training before the school year begins.

Would the UFT be willing to trade tenure, a longer workday and/or year, merit pay, and greater accountability—all reforms designed to improve school productivity and student achievement—for more pay and better benefits? And would the union agree to individual merit rewards, whereby some
outstanding teachers would receive a bonus while less productive ones in the same school would not? Observers note some willingness of UFT leader Weingarten to entice schoolwide bonuses for real improvement, although the mayor’s advisers dislike rewarding weak or uncommitted teachers in productive schools—those riding the coattails of their colleagues.

This mini-case example depicts the great dilemma for all unions: how to look out for the bread-and-butter and professional needs of members while not appearing to stunt reform (e.g., merit pay for school and individual improvement, more contact hours with students, longer workdays and years).

More time, more work, same money. Another case is exemplary. New York’s Yonkers Public Schools hired a new, African American superintendent, André Hornsby from Houston, who tried to radically restructure the working arrangement of teachers and the use of time for students. Beginning in the fall of 1999, block scheduling was initiated in eight Yonkers public schools, whereby instructional periods changed from the traditional 45-minute period to 90-minute “blocks.” Rather than classes meeting daily, students and teachers met every other day (A/B schedules) for extended periods of time. Students and teachers attended half of their classes one day and the other half the next day.

As a result of this schedule, each teacher had to teach three blocks of 90 minutes in contrast to five periods of 45 minutes, as in the past. Although union officials agreed that a longer instructional period was beneficial, they publicly resisted the change because it resulted in an extra 45 minutes of teaching time daily with no adjustment in pay. This arrangement, they claimed, was a violation of their contract and what has been traditionally known as “past practice.” And these dramatic changes were made with no consultation or discussion with teachers or their union.

So, on October 1, 1999, the Yonkers Federation of Teachers (YFT) declared a strike, as reported in the union newspaper the Yonkers Teacher: “It is clear that the teachers stand together in this time of crisis, and it would be a tragic mistake for anyone to assume that we can be divided” (Yonkers Federation of Teachers, 1999b, p. 1). Another article stated,

The YFT’s 2,100 members are incensed with Superintendent Hornsby’s decision to drastically change the way classes are scheduled in four middle schools, four high schools, and two alternative schools. His move to introduce block scheduling, with no input from parents, teachers, and community members, and no planning, is nothing short of educational malpractice. (Yonkers Federation of Teachers, 1999a, p. 3)
The lateness of suggesting the new class scheduling time was a special irritant to the union, reinforcing the belief that reform was being rammed down their throats.

The superintendent’s decision to unilaterally implement block scheduling for most classes, under the guise of so-called reform, has thrown the start of the school year into chaos. Teachers only received their new schedules the day before school began—with no time to plan or even revise lesson plans. (Yonkers Federation of Teachers, 1999a, p. 3)

The timing also could not have been worse: The mayor, a Republican, was up for reelection. The union president, Steve Frey, was a respected Democrat who was a key leader in the local labor council. The strike lasted for 3 days, with a 6-day loss of pay under the New York State Public Employment Relations Act (the Taylor Law), costing union members a total deduction of $5 million from their salaries. In addition, a judge levied a $50,000 fine, the highest in state history, against the Yonkers Federation of Teachers. And for 18 months, the union lost its “agency shop,” whereby the school system no longer deducted union dues from the paychecks of teachers, requiring the union itself to collect dues individually from members.

Lesson learned: Urban unions, when riled, can still inflict damage and pain. As the local newspaper wrote, “André Hornsby’s my-way-or-the-highway-management approach may have to be altered after the 3-day teachers’ strike gave the schools chief a lesson in the strength of New York unions as parents, teachers, and politicians said yesterday” (Martinez, 1999, p. 1). When the smoke settled, the Yonkers school board fired the superintendent, even though the block scheduling had already been postponed.

Again, the teachers union found itself in a dilemma: Does the organization resist a major change in school programming and organization, even though Hornsby had made significant improvement in results (test scores) in his previous school district? Or do they give up their role in education decision making and go along with the superintendent? How do they resolve their dilemma of representing teachers’ interests versus accepting a major education change?

The outcome of a strike can dramatically alter policy and rearrange the power base within the school system. According to Wirt and Kirst (1997), the overall impact of increased union power, as shown in the Yonkers strike, can lead (a) to the breakdown of the unitary command structure and its replacement with a bilateral bargaining system, (b) to the introduction of new participants in the decision-making process, (c) to the locus of decision making moving from central offices to locations outside the school system, (d) to the
broadening of the scope of issues that fall into the labor relations arena, and
(e) to the changing of the managerial role of the administrators.

THE GREAT UNION CHALLENGES

These three dilemmas—teacher supply control or more teachers and lower pay, local union structure or a national merger, and defending schools or reforming them—all lead to an uncertain future. If the private sector is any indicator, the reform of working arrangements can have profound effects on teachers unions’ ability to survive. The following four Rs may point the way for urban teachers unions:

1. **Regenerating public education**: How to maintain their unions as viable organizations while upgrading the quality of the services (education) that teachers offer. Teachers face the problem of being both an adversary in the management-labor relationship and a defender of the enterprise, joining superintendents and school boards in extolling the educational program and seeking additional funds. Yet, teachers unions are constantly blamed for stonewalling key reforms and preventing the level of restructuring necessary for school regeneration, as the Yonkers case indicated. Finding ways of working to improve the system, taking risks, and being cooperative may work, although making profound changes in urban schools may make teacher unionism unworkable. As Poole (1999) explained, having a “legitimate voice in policy construction might enable teachers, through their unions, to assume a proactive, professional role in education reform” (p. 708). But what is legitimate? And what do unions do if they see that major restructuring may put the union itself at risk?

2. **Reorganizing the union structure**: How to arrange the union as an organization to strengthen its hand in policy making and control. Unions, particularly in urban metropolitan areas, have provided leadership in restructuring the association, including recent attempts to merge the two great teachers unions, the AFT and NEA, at local, state, and federal levels. A recent (1998) failure of a major attempt to merge the AFT and NEA points to the deep divisions between teachers from these two associations. Yet, over time the two unions may have to merge to give the new organization greater power while it continues to serve the local and state needs of teachers.

3. **Recruiting and training new teachers (members)**: How urban unions can compete with rich suburbs in finding qualified new teachers. The role of unions in determining the training of teachers, their licensing, and induction has increased—although traditional economic theory has argued that unions attempt to suppress the supply of labor to increase demand and raise wages.
This theory hardly holds true in the cities, where unions face declining membership, the result of massive teacher retirements and teachers finding jobs in wealthier suburbs, compounded by the difficulty of recruiting new teachers (who are licensed and prepared). Refreshing the supply of teachers is critical, and unions should begin to be proactive, supporting and helping to find and socialize a new generation of quality teachers.

4. Reforming urban schools and battling privatization: How urban unions balance the need to improve city schools while combating pressures to outsource school functions, create new charter schools, and even experiment with vouchers. The fourth R—reforming—is perhaps the most complex, as unions should seek to be an active part of the school reformation without supporting their own extinction because unionizing hundreds of small charter or voucher schools, or even “charter districts,” could destroy the root of the unions movement in education.

Susan Moore Johnson (2001) has considered the future of unions and collective bargaining in American schools. She saw three options, as we do: status quo, death of collective bargaining, and what she called “reform bargaining,” around the four Rs above. Kerchner, Koppich, and Weeres (1997) argued for the third option, in part by bargaining a slim, minimal central contract and a set of mutually acceptable “compacts” at each school, to parallel the rise of site-based management, decision making, and budgeting. But, again, there is a dilemma: If each school, through chartering or “compacts,” becomes a self-governing, independent unit, would the centralized union continue to make sense? Is site-based management just another, less obvious way of de-unionizing American education?

We are not so sanguine that urban unions will survive the long haul. Because unless educators and politicians can work together to change schools, with some union support, urban schools will continue to struggle and fail. And, in restructuring the system, the teachers unions may find themselves defending a hopeless situation. Or, conversely, as Susan Moore Johnson contended, reform is possible within the same system, if teachers, administrators, school boards, and politicians can work together. She optimistically wrote,

Learning new approaches to collaboration, changing ingrained attitudes about one’s adversaries, and reconsidering beliefs about what is possible all call for courage, imagination, and resolve. Changing central office procedures, building capacity for decision making in the schools, preparing expert teachers to assume advisory roles, and developing principals’ confidence as educational leaders all take time, a tolerance for failure, and a determination to get things
The work is sure hard, but the stakes are high, and reform bargaining still offers the best promise for success. (p. 44)

REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

WILLIAM L. BAINBRIDGE currently serves as president and CEO of SchoolMatch and as a Distinguished Research Professor at the University of Dayton. He is the former superintendent of three school districts in Ohio and Virginia and former assistant to the Ohio superintendent of public instruction. He has been featured on NBC’s “Today Show,” ABC’s “Good Morning America,” CNN, National Public Radio, CBS radio, and more than 400 national and local television and radio programs.

D. CRYSTAL BYNDLOSS is a research associate at Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. She received her Ph.D. in sociology from Harvard University and held a 2-year postdoctoral fellowship at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she continued her research on community mobilization and Black school politics.

BRUCE S. COOPER is professor and vice chair of the Division of Administration, Policy, and Urban Education at the Fordham University Graduate School of Education.

THOMAS J. LASLEY, II, dean, School of Education and Allied Professions, University of Dayton, teaches courses in teaching effectiveness and school cultural dynamics. He is author or coauthor of several books including, most recently, Effective Teaching (2000), published by McGraw-Hill.

MARIE-ELENA LIOTTA is the assistant superintendent for instruction and curriculum for the Yonkers Public Schools in New York and an advanced doctoral student at Fordham University.

COURTNEY L. MALLOY is an advanced Ph.D. student and assistant director of the Center on Educational Governance at the University of Southern California. Her research interests include professional development, organizational learning, and reward and incentive systems in public schools.

TIMOTHY E. MORSE is an assistant professor at the University of Southern Mississippi–Gulf Coast, where he teaches in the preservice special education
teacher preparation program. His research interests include curriculum development, instructional design, and technology applications in special education.

PEDRO A. NOGUERA is the Judith K. Dimon Professor of Communities and Schools at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. His research focuses on the ways in which schools respond to social and economic forces within the urban environment. He has engaged in collaborative research with several large, urban school districts, and he has published and lectured on topics such as youth violence, race relations within schools, and secondary issues resulting from desegregation in public schools. His articles on these topics have appeared in several leading research journals and edited volumes.

CAROLYN S. RIDENOUR, professor of educational administration at the University of Dayton, teaches educational research courses and participates in research on urban school choice and life in Marianist schools. She is the coauthor of *Qualitative-Quantiative Research Methodology* and has published in numerous journals (until 1998, as Carolyn R. Benz).

PRISCILLA WOHLSTETTER is Diane and MacDonald Becket Professor in Educational Governance at the University of Southern California’s (USC’s) Rossier School of Education, where she also directs USC’s Center on Educational Governance. Her research focuses on the policy and politics of education reform. Dr. Wohlstetter’s recent publications are in the areas of charter schools, professional development, school-based management, and school networks.