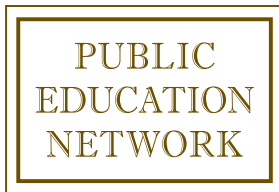


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A JOURNAL OF PUBLIC EDUCATION ADVOCACY

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Public involvement. Public education. Public benefit.

Telling the Story of Public Education in America

At the heart of everything Public Education Network works to achieve is the conviction that Americans must take responsibility for the quality of education delivered in our public schools. But to convince

Americans of the vital importance of their role, we need a compelling story—a narrative that informs and inspires a new national movement to

support high-quality public education for every child. ■ The success and survival of public education is essential to the success and survival of democracy and civil society in America. In fact, just

BY WENDY D. PURIEFOY
PRESIDENT
PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK

as American democracy created public schools, one could say public schools have created America's

democracy. ■ We have all heard the story of Benjamin Franklin being asked what type of government the delegates to the Constitutional

Convention in Philadelphia had given to the American people. His reply, "A Republic, if you can keep it," was based on the premise that keeping the Republic required an educated citizenry capable of governing itself, of making sound decisions, and of restraining its worst impulses.

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Gross Inequities, CONFUSED PRIORITIES

BY LINDA DARLING-HAMMOND



Linda Darling-Hammond, the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Teaching and Teacher Education at Stanford University, is faculty sponsor of the Stanford Teacher Education Program and principal investigator of the School Redesign Network and the Stanford Educational Leadership Institute. She previously served as executive director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, a blue-ribbon panel whose 1996 report, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, led to sweeping policy changes affecting teaching and schooling at all levels of government, and to ongoing reforms in the preparation of teachers.

Unlike other countries, where school funding is central and equal, school funding in the United States is local and unequal. The richest communities in the United States spend at least 10 times more per pupil than the poorest. This disparity exists across the country, contributing to an achievement gap wider than in any other industrialized nation. The result: Many young people in America leave school unable to make a living, unable to pay taxes, unable to become productive members of the community.

California is a case in point, with education policies that punish the poorest students. The state's Proposition 13 has reduced state investment in public education for about 20 years, with current per-pupil school expenditures ranging from a low of \$3,000 to a high of \$20,000. The small community of color where I work has only about half as much money to spend on education as the city of Palo Alto, home to Stanford University. For a disturbing portrait of just how inequitable this local funding structure can be, we need look no further than San Francisco's Luther Burbank School, described in a high-profile equal opportunity lawsuit:

At Luther Burbank School, students cannot take textbooks home for homework in any core subject because their teachers have enough textbooks for use in class only....Some math, science, and other core classes do not have even enough textbooks for all the students in a single class to use during the school day, so some students must share the same one book during class time....For homework, students must take home photocopied pages, with no accompanying text for guidance or

reference, when and if their teachers have enough paper to make homework copies....Luther Burbank is infested with vermin and roaches, and students routinely see mice in their classrooms. One dead rodent has remained, decomposing, in a corner in the gymnasium since the beginning of the school year. The school library is rarely open, has no librarian, and has not recently been updated. Luther Burbank classrooms do not have computers....The school no longer offers any art classes for budgetary reasons. Two of the three bathrooms at Luther Burbank are locked all day, every day.

Sad to say, schools like Luther Burbank can be found in communities across America. Nationwide, schools serving low-income children and students of color have larger classes; fewer well-qualified teachers and counselors; and fewer and lower-quality academic courses, outside activities, computers, libraries, books, and special services. Consequently, the odds that our most disadvantaged young people will drop out of school are very high, and the odds that they will be employed, very low. Indeed, less than half of recent dropouts are likely to find jobs and, if the dropout is African American or Hispanic, the odds are only one in four.

Statistics like these show how completely out of whack our priorities have become. This year, California became one of two states to spend as much on prisons as on higher education. California spends approximately \$22,000 to imprison one inmate for a year, but spends less than \$6,000 a year to educate children in many of its highest-need communities—and \$6,000 does not guarantee a qualified teacher or enough textbooks, thus setting those kids up for the school-to-prison pipeline when they do not become literate and cannot get a job.

But it is not just states that are misguided. The federal government's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, though well intentioned, threatens to make matters worse. While requiring more and more high-stakes testing, NCLB does not require schools to provide adequate or equitable

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Over the years, the expansion and improvement of our democracy and the expansion and improvement of our public schools have been so closely linked that historians have had a hard time distinguishing which has been cause and which has been effect. At first, the right to participate in the political process was the purview of the privileged few—namely, wealthy, white, property-owning men. And, just like the fullness of American citizenship, the finest education was reserved for the children of privilege.

At our best moments, however, we have understood that we cannot have equality in the political process, equal justice under law, or equal opportunity in the marketplace, if we continue to have institutionalized inferiority in our public schools. Half a century ago, that insight became the law of the land with the historic Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, whose 50th anniversary we celebrate this year. *Brown* ruled that the United States could no longer tolerate legislated segregation under the sickly euphemism of “separate but equal” because the schools that African-American children attended were most certainly separate and most definitely not equal. Compared to the schools for white children, schools for black children did not receive the same resources; did not meet the same requirements; and, most important of all, did not afford the same level of respect for the God-given potential of the students they served.

Fifty years later, we are at another pivotal point in American history and, once again, the future of our democracy depends upon our public schools. Once again, we are confronted by the outright failure of most of the schools in our inner cities and in our isolated rural communities. Once again, there is mediocrity in too many schools for too many children across too much of America. Once again, we face the institutionalization of inferiority in our children's education and in their future prospects as learners, as earners, and as citizens.

When it comes to what our young people need to learn, we have to lift our sights and enforce our standards. If we want Americans to compete in an unforgiving global economy, lead in a dangerous world, debate and decide increasingly complex issues, and get along in an increasingly diverse society, then we must have an engaged, responsible public that demands quality and mobilizes resources to educate *all* of America's children.

This brand of public engagement is the very best tool we have to make sure that everyone—voters, elected officials, educators, administrators, parents, and students—is held accountable for education outcomes. To achieve that degree of public engagement, we must motivate and mobilize the American people and, to do that, we need a compelling narrative on the critical importance of getting all Americans involved in public education.

In April 2004, PEN invited leaders from education, business, government, philanthropy, entertainment, and media to participate in a Forum on Public Responsibility for Public Education and discuss ways Americans could translate their concern about public education into concrete action. To inaugurate this first issue of *Connections* in its new format as a journal of education advocacy, we are summarizing some of the conversations that took place at the forum, which was generously funded by MetLife Foundation.

· [president's message] ·

David Dodson, president of Making a Difference in Communities in the South, wants us to make sure the journey of possibility and transformation is open to all people. Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist and George Mason University professor Roger Wilkins shares his family narrative with us to illustrate the power of public education to transform lives, while pointing to challenges this country still faces in closing opportunity gaps for disadvantaged and minority children. Patricia Albjerg Graham, a leading historian of American education at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, takes us through the changes in educational priorities over time, cautioning that the idea that all children can achieve is relatively new. Stanford University professor Linda Darling-Hammond looks at education inequities in greater detail, pointing out that the wealthiest public schools spend at least 10 times more on education than the poorest schools, thus leaving many children inadequately prepared. To illustrate the important influence of Hispanic families in education and in civic participation, Sarita Brown, president of Excelencia in Education and senior fellow at the Pew Hispanic Center, notes that by 2025 a quarter of the country's youth between the ages of 5 and 18 will be Hispanic. *Parade* magazine editor Lee Kravitz challenges us to find the simple things that people can do on behalf of public education. And David Gergen—editor-at-large for *US News and World Report* and director of the Center for Public Leadership at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University—talks with forum participants on how best to channel interest into action.

These discussions had an overarching purpose: to develop a narrative that will inspire all Americans to act on behalf of public education. The nation's demographics have changed. Americans are living longer and having fewer children. Most Americans no longer have children in the public schools. We have to reach out to all Americans and persuade them that good public schools are essential for the health of their communities and for the strength of our nation.

In an economy increasingly polarized between winners and losers, our public schools are our first and best opportunity to even the odds. In an era where the workings of government are increasingly privatized, our public schools are the most visible public institutions. In a society where the wealthiest are walled off in gated communities and the poorest are isolated in ghettos, our public schools—for all their faults and all their shortcomings—are still our best chance to give all children a shot at the American dream. Our public schools have enriched America in the past. With your help, our public schools can do so again.

Wendy D. Puriefoy

Wendy D. Puriefoy
President, Public Education Network



Wendy D. Puriefoy



GROSS INEQUITIES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

resources to meet students' needs. Rather than being helped to improve the education they provide, underfunded schools—already hard hit by budget cuts in the last two years—stand to lose even more money if their students do not score well on tests. Even worse, the incentives NCLB provides schools to boost test scores have begun to exacerbate the current surge in grade retention, and in dropout and push-out rates, for low-income, minority, and special-needs students. If left unchanged, NCLB will deflect resources from teaching and learning into intensive testing of students, ranking of schools, busing, and legal fees. In the next few years, most of the nation's public schools could be labeled "failing" under NCLB's strange criteria—even when student achievement in those schools is high and improving. This could threaten the very foundation of public education and deflect attention from the plight of the most needy schools that require greater investment.

But this does not have to be the case. We can amend NCLB and tie standards for equitable educational opportunity to standards for learning. Test scores should be published alongside indicators of learning opportunities, such as availability of qualified teachers; appropriateness of courses, materials, and equipment; and availability of necessary services. States should be asked to show progress in assuring that, along with the expectation that schools and students meet standards of learning, there is also an equitable opportunity to learn.

We must also revisit accountability under NCLB since the current definition threatens to upend gains made by the standards-based reform movement that began in the early 1990s. Since 1990, virtually all states have created standards for what students should know and be able to do, new curriculum frameworks to guide instruction, and new assessments to test student knowledge. Reform advocates hoped standards would mobilize needed resources for student learning, to include high-quality curriculum, materials, and

assessments tied to standards; more widely available course offerings that reflected the curriculum; more intensive teacher preparation guided by teaching standards; more equal resources for schools; and more readily available safety nets for educationally needy students.

We have seen such reforms in states such as Connecticut, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Vermont, and Washington. However, much of this work threatens to be undone by NCLB as many states, in responding to the limited vision of the federal law, abandon solid assessment systems that evaluated critical thinking and performance and try instead to jump through the many hoops NCLB imposes.

If we really want to leave no child behind, there needs to be a renewed federal commitment to schools in cities and poor rural areas. We need to invest in programs like those that were in place during the 1970s, when we began to close the spending gap and the achievement gap for low-income children. At that time, before budget cuts sliced the federal share of education funding from more than 12 percent to half that level, funds were targeted to needy schools for teacher training and recruitment, and to magnet schools, preschools, after-school programs, and special education support.

While some complain about the ineffectiveness of federal programs, evidence shows that quality preschool programs, effective reading programs, and stronger teacher training made a difference in educational opportunity and achievement for urban and poor rural students. Full funding of federal programs that support high-yield investments—NCLB, Head Start, the special education provisions of IDEA—would go a long way toward helping schools meet the needs of our children and the expectations of our society. ■

Public Schools Have Allies

IN THE FAITH COMMUNITY

BY THE REV. BOB EDGAR

The faith community has played a vital role in American social movements since this country began. In the 1800s, it was instrumental in wiping out slavery. During the 1920s, religious leaders and their congregations backed the passage of child labor laws. During the 1950s and 1960s, the faith community helped bring together people from all walks of life to march and speak out in support of the civil rights movement. However, the full power of the faith community is only now beginning to be tapped to ensure that all children have access to quality public education.

The major faith traditions teach that all people have inherent worth and dignity. In the moderate and progressive faith communities, that belief translates into a moral responsibility to support, strengthen, and reform societal institutions that promote equality, including our public schools. Public education is the primary route for most children—especially children of poverty—into full participation in the economic, political, and community life of this country. Our public schools have been and continue to be avenues to economic opportunity and a cohesive force in a society that is daily becoming more diverse racially, culturally, and religiously.

What can religious leaders and committed congregants do to strengthen public schools? We can honor teachers as role models. We can provide parenting classes to emphasize the special responsibilities of

families to schools and to school-aged children. We can strengthen student learning by supporting after-school and vacation programs.

There are many in the faith community who can speak with authority on the moral imperative of public education and bring a sense of integrity and urgency to the debate and to the action at local, state, and national levels. We need to tap into this committed, talented corps of leaders and volunteers. Every movement can always use more of both.

We also need to pay attention if sectarian interests press beyond the limits of appropriate church-state boundaries, turning our schools into battlegrounds. In such debates, moderate and progressive faith leaders can play a powerful role by speaking out for the academic freedom of teachers and librarians, calling for the broad availability of age-appropriate materials and books in public school libraries, and stressing the importance of comprehensive age-appropriate health education. Similarly, the faith community can insist that the science curriculum present academically sound textbooks and teaching at all levels. There is no inherent conflict between faith and science. Religious faith has nothing to fear from programs that encourage children to read and to imagine, or to see math and science as ways to understand the many wonders of God's world.

Among key values that religion encourages, and that schools can teach, are equity, fairness, and inclusion. The faith community has a responsibility to encourage the use of a curriculum that reflects the role of the many racial and ethnic groups in the history and culture of the United States, and to ensure that differently-abled public school students are placed in classes that meet their needs and are as close as possible to regular classroom settings.



Bob Edgar



CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

Creating a Narrative

FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

“Across America, public schools give students from all backgrounds the chance to become the successful, civic-minded individuals who form the bedrock of thriving communities.”

Sibyl Jacobson
President & CEO
MetLife Foundation

The following remarks are taken from a forum conversation moderated by David Gergen, editor-at-large for US News and World Report and director of the Center for Public Leadership at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

DAVID GERGEN: It's tempting to say we're all doing great work and we're moving ahead and improving things. Many people have put their shoulder to the wheel, but the wheel is not turning fast enough. Are we going to look back one day and say, "Did we really make the kind of breakthroughs we thought we were making?" Is somebody going to stand up one day and say we were wrong about almost everything we thought we were accomplishing?

I'm reminded of what Martin Luther King Jr. said about the word *wait*, that it really means *never*. In an environment where jobs are changing so quickly, are we making improvements fast enough? What's happening in our communities to support quality education for all young people?

WARREN SIMMONS: Communities, while they understand schools, have no idea about school systems. They struggle to create a good school and are totally unaware of how they can organize and mobilize, not just to change an individual school, but also to fundamentally change the system.

We talk about our system as schools. But the system is actually made up of vendors, higher education institutions, unions, central offices, school boards, mayors, city councils, state education departments, federal education departments. Yet, we continue to talk about schools as a singular place that needs to be changed. That keeps communities focused on this or that school and ignoring the fact that we have an obligation as a community to change not just the schools, but also the system that has failed us all.

DAVID GERGEN: How do you get people engaged in changing systems?

WARREN SIMMONS: I think we need to shift the conversation. I've seen promise where talk about changing schools is part of redevelopment. In Chicago, for instance, business developers, the housing authority, the public school system, and community groups have come together to talk about creating a new network of educational opportunities where schools are designed in relationship to housing, recreation, arts, and transportation systems.

This has brought stakeholders and interest groups together in a way that conversation about school change alone has not. The same thing has happened in Birmingham, AL, around the Hope 6 effort. There they are planning school change in the context of a community. I'm seeing more hope as the conversation shifts from what kind of schools we want, to what kind of communities we want, to what kinds of institutions and learning opportunities do we as communities have a responsibility to create. As a result, educators and parents don't feel the task is solely theirs.

WENDY PURIEFOY: We act on the assumption that every community values learning and education. People can be educated in lots of different places. But if the community doesn't hold education as a value, none of those places will be learning places.

The public school is an important public institution at the center of community life; therefore, the public must be knowledgeable about the institution. We need to know what makes for a good education and where it can take place, and we must believe that it can happen. Right now, many people don't believe they can make good education happen in their communities. So Warren's example of Birmingham and Chicago and the work that the Annenberg Institute is doing in those places is illustrative of what is possible.

DAVID GERGEN: Governor Edgar, do you think Chicago is a promising model for the future?

GOV. JIM EDGAR: Anytime I heard about Chicago schools while I was governor, I would get a chill. For so long it was kind of a hopeless situation. But in the mid-'90s, we made some major changes in governance to hold people more responsible. We were able to pinpoint where the buck stops.

DAVID GERGEN: The recent PEN/*Education Week* poll suggests that the public is attentive to education but does not always take action—leaving it up to those more knowledgeable to step forward. What motivates people to act?

GOV. JAMES HUNT: In North Carolina, we built support for public education by tying it to the economy and jobs. Because of the global economy and jobs going to China and India, we can really build powerful support for public education. We haven't had this kind of competition before. For a good part of this century, we've been the dominant power and nobody could really compete with us. Now they can and they are.

So the question is: Are we going to do what it takes so that our people have the knowledge, the creativity, the imagination, and innovation to add so much value that one of our workers is worth six of those in India? Now the only way you can do this is by educating people very well. They have to learn to think for a living.

SUSAN TRAINMAN: The Business Roundtable recently did research on outsourcing to places like India and China. In our poll, 22 percent of the respondents said either they themselves or a close family relative had or was threatened with losing a job because of outsourcing. Now, this is impossible. That would be 25 million people! However, the numbers reflect the high level of anxiety. The Governor's right that there is now an opportunity to help people understand how integral education is to their entire

life. We're at a moment when we can really make a case for education that will be real to people, and we should take advantage of that.

HEDRICK SMITH: It is not so much that people need to be persuaded, but that they need to be directed; they need an action plan, a Bill of Rights for Education. We could take what the public is willing to support and develop a template to measure the performance of anybody in charge of education policy—school boards, governors, mayors, and presidential candidates. It helps to have a yardstick by which to measure performance and around which citizens can rally.

GOV. JAMES HUNT: I want to see us focus on groups that have been left behind. I talk about how great my schools are doing, how much the NAEP scores are going up, and they are. But we haven't talked about what needs to be done to close the achievement gap. This is a marvelous opportunity for a president and for governors. We need political leaders who understand, care, and are willing to work hard to pull people together.

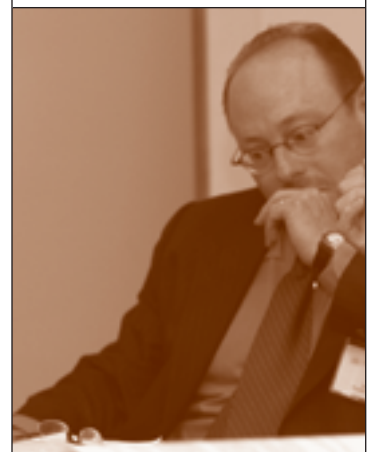
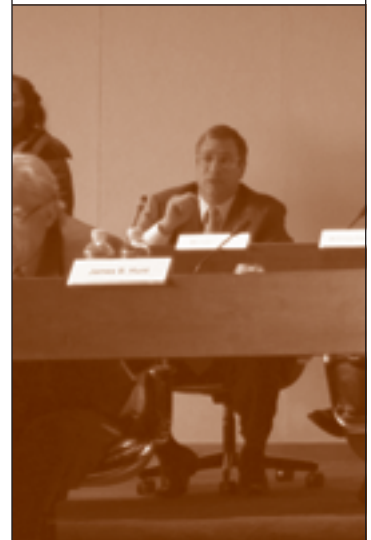
But if that's not happening, let's organize in a different way. Let's get parents, grandparents, principals, teachers, and all the people who work in the schools to be part of a partnership for public education reform. I heard not too long ago that one out of every four families in America has a teacher in it. Business and public employers—think how many of them there are and the power that they have. Then, of course, there's the faith community. A great American partnership, made up of all these groups.

DAVID GERGEN: We've talked about what needs to happen, but *how* does it happen? What strategies will bring the public into the debate and lead it to action?

GOV. JIM EDGAR: There isn't one set strategy. We need to think at the community, state, and national level. We've got to have the media on our side. We



David Gergen



CREATING A NARRATIVE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

need to hone our message, and we need a hook that grabs people. We have to define what we're trying to achieve, what works, what kind of investments are going to produce the results we want to see, and what effect it will have on the lives of young people.

DAVID HORNBECK: In Good Schools Pennsylvania, we established hundreds of small groups of 10 that met on a monthly basis in a church basement or in a schoolroom or in someone's home. We provided them with a nine-unit curriculum and, over a nine-month period, they learned about education in Pennsylvania and how it could be better. Every month, they took several kinds of actions as a consequence of that engagement. We focused on three principal audiences: faith communities, parents, and young people in high school and college.

We hosted a monthly prayer vigil on the steps of the state capitol every month for about 18 months. Then we had at least 100 people a day conduct a vigil for 57 straight days during the 57-day legislative session. I am sure it is the only time in the history of America that the National Council of Churches leadership, representing 50 million constituents and 140,000 congregations, came to Harrisburg.

We got groups in 50 high schools and 23 colleges to focus on issues of social justice. We staged a series of rallies. We decided to make public education the number one issue in the gubernatorial campaign. In four months, we raised \$4.5 million, hired 17 people, and opened nine offices across the state. You can't do this work on an ad hoc basis. Those of us who care about public education must not settle for ad hoc.

MICHELLE FINE: On a small level, we have had unbelievable success in organizing faith communities, CEOs, and actors and actresses around the issue of college in prisons. We take them into the prison and they get to meet the men and women who are the long-termers. They get to see what prison life is like and to see the power of education. One church has

decided that all its parishioners should either go and teach or work in the childcare center or mentor a woman in the year before she is released and then find a church back in her home community to catch her when she arrives. There is nothing like close local work between people who think they are privileged and people who think they are not. We need to imagine the school equivalent of this work and make the boundaries of our public institutions porous.

CAROL GILLIGAN: The ethic of American society and culture is a very individualistic and competitive one. There is not a sense of being responsible for other people's children. And that is part of what interferes with getting things done in schools and communities. Historically, however, there has been a group of people who do take responsibility—women. They do the community work. They do the extraordinary teaching in this country, and for very little money. It is easy to galvanize women teachers. So I don't see how we can talk about a new narrative for school reform without talking about women. Polling data tells us that women are a very powerful voice for education in this country. They can be a leading force for change even though women are stretched thin and, of course, disproportionately live in poverty.

JOE UVA: Whomever we are trying to reach, it's critical that everything gets distilled into a clear, compelling message consistently delivered so that there is no confusion. The answer is not to shame people into involvement, but to celebrate the opportunity for involvement. Going back to Hedrick Smith's yardstick, we need to be clear about what's going to be measured, how it's going to be measured, and what's going to happen with the findings from that measurement.

TERRY PETERSON: Maybe we need a local school information report card. The public would know the number of computers needed, what teachers are paid. Then, you could just add up the results to get a picture of the whole school district.

CELINDA LAKE: I think having different ways of reporting information is a good idea. We know access to information can motivate behavior. One of the most successful get-out-the-vote efforts was a joint effort by the Sierra Club and the Service Employees International Union, where they promised computers to schools in communities that raised voter turnout by 10 percent. In every community in which they made that offer, turnout jumped 10 percent.

Another successful get-out-the-vote effort was a billboard campaign that showed really nice schools with the caption, “These people vote.” It showed really crummy schools with the caption, “These people don’t.” People are trying to make the connection, but I don’t think they are being very well served. Maybe that’s the role of a movement—to connect them better.

DAVID GERGEN: Do we go forward by organizing grassroots groups, or by sending messages through advertising? Or some combination? Does advertising, which requires a lot of money, move people in terms of their actual engagement?

JOHN PODESTA: Look at some public service campaigns and the level of awareness, commitment, support, and involvement they have generated. Advertising is about creating a framework where various interests can operate to accomplish reform. It’s a powerful way to get the message out quickly and establish a baseline of awareness for involvement.

DIANA AVIV: There are so many groups with extremely worthy causes, who are having the exact same conversation. Any public education movement or campaign will compete in the marketplace of appeals and ideas for capturing potential participants.

DAVID GERGEN: So, where do we go from here?

DAVID DODSON: We need an artful, balanced, inviting, inclusive message that frames the case for

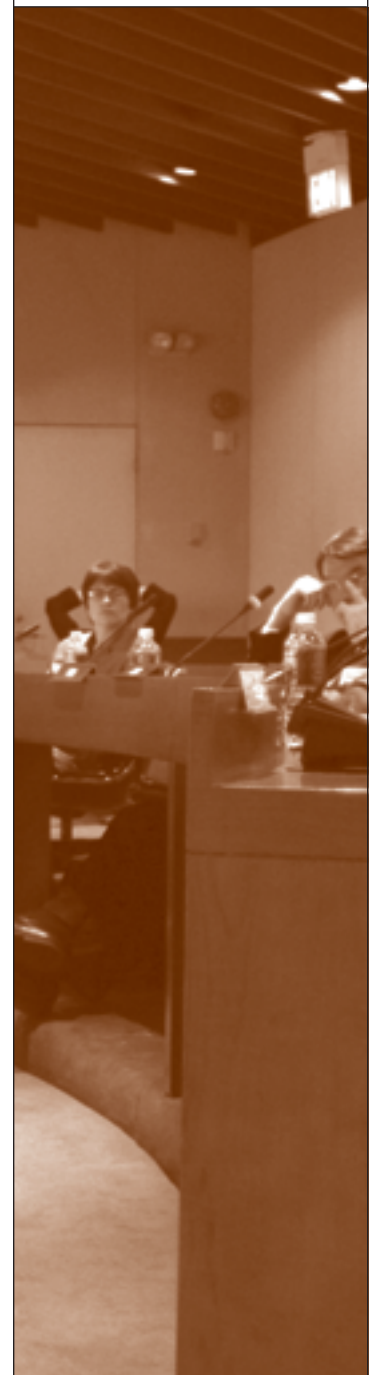
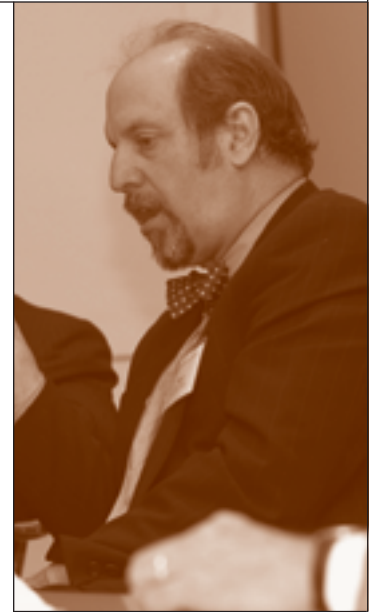
action. It needs to stress hope and possibility about our schools, our children, and our democracy. It needs to be truthful and rest in honest analysis, including a clear understanding of where we have fallen short and the consequences of failing as we go forward.

We need tools that measure school performance and community progress. It is important to describe conditions that Americans of all stripes would agree are intolerable, such as schools where only a third of the bathrooms work, in ways that are visually compelling.

We need to energize local constituencies by sharing what works. We need to pollinate best practices and bring them to scale—a “what works” clearinghouse—to give people a clear way forward for making progress on an issue based on what is known and to improvise to fit local conditions. We need sustainable resources so the work doesn’t struggle and limp along. The Black Belt of Alabama and other impoverished places are developing permanent philanthropic resources for social change.

We need to reach out to under-appreciated constituencies. The incredible energy present in Teach for America, the commitment to constructive service that goes beyond the initial teaching assignment to a deeper life engagement in all matters of governance. How do we learn from, capture, and connect to that? The social entrepreneurship movement, where people are thinking about new ways of getting nonprofit and private organizations engaged in public problem solving. Attaching the community service movement to school reform in a deep way. Engaging the faith community to lay claim to the moral core of the message. Engaging seniors, and re-engaging women in their historic role as civic and social reformers, and connecting them to education reform.

Finally, the work needs intensity and focus. We need concrete outcomes so that we can measure indicators of effective public engagement. ■



Catching Up TO PUBLIC OPINION

BY PATRICIA ALBJERG GRAHAM

Patricia Graham is the Charles Warren Research Professor of the History of Education at Harvard University. Graham served as dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education from 1982 to 1991, and then as president of the Spencer Foundation in Chicago for nine years before returning to Harvard in 2000.

Many public schools in America today are the schools Americans said they wanted 25 to 50 years ago: schools no longer segregated by law, albeit not fully integrated either; schools that recognize the importance of a child's self esteem and provide various forms of counseling; schools that give children with disabilities greater access to classroom life; schools that provide a vibrant academic environment—although there are still far too many schools where intellectual excitement is rare.

Educators delivered what the public wanted, but they delivered years after the fact. So, today, when we talk about wanting all children to achieve, we need to recognize what a radically new idea this is for most educators—and for most of the American public—and we need to recognize that it is going to take time for the school system to deliver.

Over the years, our educational priorities have changed. In the early 1900s, America needed to assimilate a huge influx of immigrant children into the mainstream culture, so educators focused on teaching basic English language skills and on fostering a commitment to, or at least a familiarity with, the concepts of citizenship. Back in those days, only 4 percent of students graduated from high school.

By the 1920s, immigration rates had dropped significantly, and educators turned their attention to the social and psychological development of children. Then came *Brown v. Board of Education* and the focus switched to access to educational opportunities through gifted and talented programs, desegregated

schools, additional funds for school districts with a high percentage of disadvantaged children under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, bilingual education programs, programs for special education students, and the gender equity requirements codified in Title IX.

Preparing immigrants to assume a life in a new country, supporting the social and psychological development of students, and opening doors to children who have been denied access or who need special assistance are all worthy goals. However, with all the attention focused on special programs, little attention was being paid to the academic core. By the late '70s/early '80s, it became clear that our public schools were not doing a very good job academically for a lot of children, and, typically, not doing a very good job for the children who needed good schools the most.

The paradox of American education is that the children who need good schools the least have the best schools, while the children who need good schools the most have the worst schools. So it should come as no surprise that we have not attained the goal of universal academic achievement in the 20 years since *A Nation at Risk* was released. Achievement woes are most acute for children of low-income, minority families who frequently attend the worst schools and live in communities with the least educational resources. Fixing this situation will require fundamental change at all levels of the education system.

But academic achievement, while certainly a good thing, is not the sum total of what we seek for our children. Polling data tells us that parents want their children to have a happy teacher and a positive classroom experience, along with opportunities to achieve. American education has become an amalgam of academic learning and the fostering of child and youth development. Yet making the case for policies that favor both strong academic learning *and* positive social development has been difficult.

To what extent do our public schools have an obligation to pay attention to the values and skills—ingenuity, integrity, inventiveness, teamwork, and respect—that make America great? While the primary obligation of schools must be to academic achievement, what I would call nurturing the wit of young people,

I would argue that schools have an obligation to nurture their character development as well. With the current intense focus on student achievement, support for character development is becoming a much harder sell. Meeting both of those obligations will be the great education challenge of our time. ■

PUBLIC SCHOOLS HAVE ALLIES FROM PAGE 7

The faith community must also remind congregations about the historical role of churches in creating and supporting public schools, and must urge them to build on this heritage by becoming advocates for fair public policy. Congregations can promote efforts to equalize state and local funding and end the present unjust educational disparities between rich and poor.

I know the faith community can once again assume a leadership role in fighting for equality, as it has so many times in the past. We are called to do so at a time when public education is under attack from religious and political groups that have a negative view of public schools and of the goals of public education. This is a critically important moment for those of us in the faith community who support public schools to

speak up. I believe this message, which resonates with national ideals of fairness and equality, will strike a chord with the American public. It is up to us to make that message clearly heard—from the pulpit and in the public square. ■

Bob Edgar is general secretary of the National Council of Churches USA. With 36 Protestant and Orthodox member communions, whose congregants number approximately 50 million, the NCC is a leading expression of the ecumenical movement in the United States. Edgar is a former six-term member of the US House of Representatives from Pennsylvania's Seventh District, and former president of Claremont School of Theology.



Patricia Albjerg Graham



Confronting Myths

ABOUT HISPANICS

BY SARITA E. BROWN



Sarita Brown, president of Excelencia in Education and senior fellow at the Pew Hispanic Center in Washington, DC, has spent more than two decades at prominent national academic and educational institutions and in the highest levels of government working to develop more effective strategies to raise academic achievement and opportunity for low-income and minority students.

Hispanic population growth will be a major factor shaping the American experience in the next quarter century, given the rate of growth and the size of this demographic group. Hispanics are now the largest minority, and by the year 2025, a quarter of the nation's youth between the ages of 5 and 18 will be Hispanic. In some states, this is already the case.

Too often, educators, policymakers, and community leaders fail to recognize the strength of the Hispanic community and its support of public education. Hispanic parents and leaders are already far more involved in education than is perceived. Indeed, some of the biggest barriers to greater Hispanic involvement in public schools rest in common misperceptions about this rapidly growing population.

MYTH #1: Hispanic families do not value education. Many Hispanics come to this country with little formal education. They often have high rates of adult illiteracy and are unprepared to guide their children's educational progress. But all parents want what is best for their children, and Hispanic parents are no exception. A recent poll shows nearly all Hispanic parents (95 percent) believe it is very important for their children to go to college. Over the last 30 years, the high school graduation rate for Hispanics has increased from 48 percent in 1971 to 63 percent in 2001, a gain that is especially significant given the massive increase in the Hispanic population during that time.

The vast majority of Hispanic students (90 percent) attend public schools. Typically, the school, the modes of transportation, the teacher assignments, and the courses required for graduation are "pre-selected" without any input from parents. Given their limited personal experience with the education system, many Hispanic parents lack the information they need to play a more active role in their children's education. The language gap often precludes meaningful interaction with school officials, and parents often assume that school authorities know what is best for their children. What is often perceived as a values gap is, in fact, an information gap.

MYTH #2: Hispanics don't want to learn to speak English. To many Americans, mastery of English is the linchpin of achievement. In a survey conducted by Lake Snell Perry & Associates, voters cited "problems with understanding English" as the primary cause of lower achievement for Hispanic students. According to the US Department of Education, over 4.6 million limited English proficient (LEP) students attend US schools, of which 79 percent speak Spanish as their first language. That said, more than three-quarters of all Hispanic students speak English by the third grade. Nonetheless, many low-income Hispanic immigrants and first-generation parents have few opportunities to learn English.

MYTH #3: Hispanics don't want to participate in civic life. Every year, Hispanics become increasingly more active in their communities. Today, there are nearly 6,000 Hispanic elected officials in the United States. Of these, almost 1,200 are school board members. Regardless of party affiliation, Hispanic elected officials have shown a deep commitment to public education, advocating for increased funding and for closing the achievement gap.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17

Reconstructing the AMERICAN NARRATIVE

BY DAVID DODSON

Movements most commonly associated with American progress—abolition, civil rights, women’s rights, the environment—were all about possibility and transformation. America holds out the promise that everyone can recreate the narrative of the nation—a narrative of possibility and transformation—in their own lives. That is why people immigrate to the United States. However, failure of the narrative drives people away. My ancestors rode the Underground Railroad and went to Canada; they couldn’t see themselves in the American narrative.

I worry that many children living in the Mississippi Delta, in rural Louisiana, in the low country of South Carolina, and in other similar communities don’t see themselves in the nation’s narrative of possibility and transformation.

All people need to see themselves in our national narrative, and public education must be our narrative’s underlying theme. We must go beyond stories of personal exception and focus on structural changes that will give all children an equal chance to become part of the optimism and success that is America. Rather than celebrating the story, more myth than fact, of the hardworking student who emerges from a disadvantaged background to achieve, we must build the structures, public will, and public policies that will facilitate the participation of all children in that narrative.

I believe people are convinced of the power and possibility of the American narrative. But people trying to

build a just, equitable community need tools and opportunities. They need to believe transformation is possible, that there is a pathway from where things are to where they should be. People need to believe they can contribute to the common good, and do so while benefiting themselves.

To build a successful movement for public education, we must come to grips with the inescapable fact that people contribute their greatest effort in pursuit of self-interest. The abstract notion of “the common good” must be redefined as pursuit of self-interest in the context of community. This means a shift from thinking about education as a sales transaction, one where I pay my taxes and get a product in return, to thinking about education as a shared responsibility and partnership, one I support with my interest and my direct involvement. As my interest and involvement in public education increases, so, too, will the benefits to me and to my community.

Engagement activities that bring together people directly affected by public education are critical to that mind shift—all successful social movements have been led by the people most affected. We need a public education movement that is not only *for* the people but *of* and *by* the people. A movement that takes place at the community level. A movement that encourages participation and allows people to experience democracy. Such a movement cannot fail to produce results that will benefit everyone. ■

David L. Dodson is president of MDC, Inc., a non-profit advancing the South through research and programs that expand economic opportunity, reduce poverty, and build inclusive communities. Dodson directs projects to strengthen public schools and community colleges, address rural economic decline, create new philanthropic structures, and build multiracial leadership for civic change.



David Dodson



At the Core: Issues of RACE AND OPPORTUNITY

BY ROGER WILKINS

Roger Wilkins is the Clarence J. Robinson Professor of History and American Culture at George Mason University, a position he has held since 1988. He has also served as a member of the board of education in Washington, DC, and as a trustee of the University of the District of Columbia.

My family history is a testament to the democratic process and to the power of public education.

My father was born in St. Louis almost one hundred years ago. His grandparents, my great-grandparents, began life as slaves in Mississippi. Shortly after my father was born, his mother died and he and his brother and sister went to live with an aunt in St. Paul, MN, where they were educated in the public schools and then at the state university.

My father's sister died at university as a student, but his brother went on to become a famous civil rights leader, and my father, who sadly died when he was only 35, became a fine journalist. I am the father of three exceptional children, two of whom contribute substantially to this country. My youngest, a junior at Yale, is just preparing to make her mark.

While the workings of this democracy and the considerable impact of public education on families like mine are part of this nation's narrative, we cannot begin to frame the story until we face the horrendous problems in our system of public education and the way we fail the poorest and least-respected children and families. When we talk about who these families are, we cannot dance around the issue of race.

Fifty years after *Brown*, you can still go to areas in the long shadow of the US Capitol and see schools that are a disgrace. That's not by chance. The disabling of black people has been a part of the public policy of this country for most of our history.

At the beginning of the 18th century, in the Northern Neck of Virginia, there was a man named King Carter who became the archetype of a slave-owning disabled. Every time Carter—who owned more slaves than anybody else in the colonies—received a new shipment of Africans, he would look for the strongest and most spirited and then lop off an ear or a finger or toe. This practice, called “seasoning,” was designed to establish the subservience of slaves to Carter's will. The institution of slavery itself was disabling, reducing slaves to the status of work animals.

After the Civil War, the practice of disabling continued. Southerners passed Black Codes, or Jim Crow Laws, to return the newly freed people to slavery. Then followed the terrorism perpetrated on black people by the Ku Klux Klan and other such groups. Finally, in the 20th century, segregation became the mechanism that disabled black people. Segregation was not simply about keeping black people off in a different place; it was designed to be an all-out assault on the spirit of black people, convincing us that we had no higher calling than to serve or amuse our “betters.” I know. I was born into segregation.

My first educational experience was in a one-room segregated schoolhouse in Kansas City. As I grew up, I was exposed to an American culture that systematically abused black people. Brutal denials of economic and educational opportunities, all-white movies, newspapers that didn't report on black people—all were parts of a culture that said: Be small. Be black. Be behind. Close your mouth.

And it succeeded. It hurt me. It made me small. It made me less effective. It made me tense. It took a hell of a lot to get to where I am today. It took years to repair the damage. And the unforgivable shame of it all is that we are still doing similar harm to kids all over this country.

We absolutely cannot allow our kids to be disabled before they can even stand on their own. And public education is the only system we have that is capable of giving them access to the kind of future we all envision for our children. Public education is our most powerful tool in the struggle to achieve equity for poor kids, for disadvantaged kids, and for minority kids who have not only been shortchanged, but systematically deprived of their right to equal opportunity.

The damage has rolled on down through generations. As we construct our narrative, we cannot repeat the mistakes of previous efforts. Many Americans believe in improving education, but they are not willing to acknowledge, let alone tackle, the challenge of ensuring equity for those who have long been denied opportunity. Too often in recent years, we have claimed progress without acknowledging that we are

still failing to address issues of race and opportunity in public education. Maybe it's because we're afraid to talk about race. Maybe we think that somehow we've advanced beyond conversations about second-class citizens and integrating schools just because we're celebrating the 50th anniversary of a court case whose decision we have yet to honor. Have we earned the right to celebrate progress? Certainly. Does that mean we can move on to the next issue? Absolutely not!

If we're going to make real change, positive change, for *all* kids, we've got to acknowledge the issue of race. We've got to tackle it head on. We have to make sure it is a fundamental marker of our success. We cannot claim victory until all children have equal opportunity. This must be at the forefront of our consciousness and a central theme of our narrative. ■

CONFRONTING MYTHS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

Despite major gains in high school graduation rates, Hispanic students still lag well behind white and African-American students in many key measures of school success, to include graduation rates and scores on national standardized assessments. The problems are apparent as early as fourth grade, when Hispanic students begin to lag behind their white peers in mathematics, geography, and history proficiency. By high school, Hispanic dropout rates are 3.5 times higher than whites and 2.5 times higher than blacks. While an emerging focus on high school education shows promise for stemming the flow of Hispanic students leaving school without graduating, the unique needs of Hispanic students must be addressed within a larger context.

We need to know more about what kinds of supports are most effective in helping Hispanic parents make good decisions about their children's education. We

must work to make best practice everyday practice. We need greater public awareness about the complexities of standards-based reform initiatives and issues surrounding the use of high-stakes tests for students with limited facility in English. We must engage the Hispanic community and work cooperatively on issues such as closing the achievement gap, improving services for English language learners, recruiting more minority teachers, and promoting high expectations for students of all backgrounds.

Many of these issues extend far beyond the Hispanic community, but that only emphasizes the need to connect with this large and growing constituency. Hispanics have demonstrated their willingness to go to enormous lengths to find opportunities to make life better for their families. We must harness their dedication and optimism to improve our public schools. ■



Roger Wilkins



Messages That MOVE PEOPLE

BY LEE KRAVITZ



Lee Kravitz is a nationally recognized expert on young people and education. He is also editor-in-chief and senior vice president of *Parade*, the Sunday magazine distributed by 335 newspapers throughout the United States. With more than 75 million readers, *Parade* is the world's largest circulation magazine.

Recently, I listened to my 7-year-old son read Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech, which he was trying to memorize. He struggled with some of the words but he took to heart the message of fairness, of hope, of dreams.

Each of us has an innate instinct to better our lives, our families, our communities, our nation, and our world. We communicate this desire through stories, through narrative. There are lots of different stories told in many different ways, but it is the stories that reach people emotionally that move them to action.

Parade ran an education story that got an incredible response from our readership—a story about Greg Mortensen, a young man who has spent the last 10 years building schools in Pakistan in areas occupied by the Taliban and Al Qaeda. He builds schools that educate girls as well as boys, an approach greeted with condemnation by the radical mullahs. But each new school draws praise from the Pakistani communities that are working with the Bozeman, MT, native because the schools he is creating are enriching the life of every child and every family they touch.

We featured Greg's story on the cover of *Parade* under the title "What We Can Learn from a Man Who Fights Terror and Builds Nations One School at a Time." The week after that story ran, 14,000 letters came pouring in. We received \$1 million in unsolicited donations from all across the political spectrum, and from all across the faith community: Muslims,

Jews, Christians, everybody. This story carried such a powerful message of hope—that one person *can* make a difference, that bad situations *can* change, that most people want many of the same things for their families. It reminds us that education can change societies from within. And it reminds us that stories and narratives are powerful tools for bringing people together and getting things done.

As I see it, we need to tell a story about public education in America that is about real people and the families who benefit from it. We need to tell a story about what our communities are doing to make education work. We need to describe things people are doing to make a difference. We need to put the *public* at the center of the public education story and we need to show why public education is *our* responsibility.

It's not hard to figure out how to touch people's hearts through storytelling. Just imagine the words: *freedom, jobs, security*. Then imagine the phrase *a quality education for all*. Education is our strength, our hope. It touches every aspect of all our lives and makes all of our dreams possible. That's really what this story is all about. ■

FORUM ON PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

In April 2004, Public Education Network invited a broad range of visionaries—elected officials, CEOs, foundation presidents, civic leaders, journalists, scholars, religious leaders, entertainment talent and executives, and advertising executives—to participate in a Forum on Public Responsibility for Public Education and create a narrative to inspire Americans to support public education and take responsibility for the strength and vitality of this critical democratic institution. The articles in this inaugural edition of *Connections, a Journal of Public Education Advocacy* are drawn from the conversations that took place during the forum.

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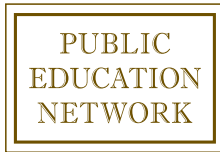
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Public involvement. Public education. Public benefit.

Public Education Network (PEN) is a national association of local education funds (LEFs) and individuals working to advance public school reform in low-income communities across our country.

PEN seeks to build public demand and mobilize resources for quality public education for all children through a national constituency of organizations and individuals. PEN believes community engagement is the missing ingredient in school reform, and that the level of public involvement ultimately determines the quality of education provided by public schools.

Serving 11.5 million students in 18,000 schools, PEN and its LEF members are helping communities adopt action plans for quality public education in 34 states and the District of Columbia.

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