

Renewing our Schools,
Securing our Future



A Report on:

Redesigning Schools for the 21st Century: Promising Innovations

December 10, 2004 – New York, New York

PARTICIPANTS

Task Force Members:

- Co-Chair Philip Murphy, Senior Director, Goldman Sachs Group, Inc.
- Co-Chair Janet Napolitano, Governor, State of Arizona
- Co-Chair Roger Wilkins, Robinson Professor of History and American Culture, George Mason University
- John Buchanan, Former member of Congress, State of Alabama
- Louis Caldera, President, University of New Mexico and former Secretary of the Army
- Judith McHale, President and Chief Executive Officer, Discovery Communications, Inc.
- Margaret McKenna, President, Lesley University
- Delia Pompa, Principal, DMP Associates and former Director, Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs
- James Pughsley, Superintendent, Charlotte-Mecklenberg Public Schools, Charlotte, NC
- Wendy Puriefoy, President, Public Education Network
- Chauncey Veatch, National Teacher of the Year, Coachella Valley High School, Thermal, CA

Special Guest:

- Arthur Levine, President, Teachers College, Columbia University

Panelists:

- Geoffrey Canada, President and CEO, Harlem Children's Zone
- Cecilia Cunningham, Executive Director, Middle College National Consortium
- Gerry House, President and CEO, Institute for Student Achievement
- David Levin, Superintendent, KIPP Academy
- Norma Morales, Principal, Bronx International High School
- Douglas Wood, Executive Director, National Academy for Excellent Teaching

Student Perspectives:

- Rosie Stadnik, Bard High School Early College
- Nicholas Ugboode, Bard High School Early College

INTRODUCTION

Redesigning Schools for the 21st Century: Promising Innovations, was the last in a series of six public education forums organized by the *Renewing our Schools, Securing our Future* National Task Force on Public Education. This forum took place on December 10, 2004 at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City and was attended by approximately 180 people. Participating Task Force members heard from distinguished panelists, who shared their experiences of working with students and teachers in New York and focused particularly on smaller learning communities, the middle/early college high school model, charter schools, community involvement, professional development of high-school teachers and other innovations designed to boost student achievement. This event provided a forum for local and state leaders, education advocates, parents, students, and community members to discuss New York's efforts to redesign schools, especially those at the secondary level, to better meet the needs of students.

To coincide with this forum, the Task Force commissioned a paper by Hilary Pennington of Jobs for the Future. The paper, titled *Fast Track to College: Increasing Postsecondary Success for All Students*, offers a number of ways to create stronger links between high school and postsecondary education. Pennington proposes three innovative alternatives to the traditional high-school senior year: an academic head start on college; an accelerated career/technical college; and a gap year, or college in the community. The author outlines how each of these alternatives will "increase the number of students who complete postsecondary credentials, reduce the time it takes them to do so, and eliminate disparities in educational attainment by race and income by the end of the decade." To read this paper in its entirety, visit www.americanprogress.org/schools or http://www.ourfuture.org/issues_and_campaigns/education/NY_fasttrack.cfm.

REDESIGNING SCHOOLS

Too many middle schools and high schools today are falling far short of ensuring that students are ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century. According to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, only 67 of every 100 students who enroll in the 9th grade graduate from high school within four years. In a society where a high-school diploma is the bare minimum -- and often is not enough -- for securing a decent job, this is unacceptable. Moreover, many of those who do earn a diploma leave high school without the skills necessary to succeed at the next level. According to the American Diploma Project, 53 percent of college students take at least one remedial English or math class as undergraduates.

We must ensure that students are graduating from high school with the knowledge they need to earn a postsecondary credential and that high schools and postsecondary institutions are working

together to ensure that students do not drop out of the educational pipeline. Many of the innovative programs showcased at this forum are making significant progress toward that goal. In particular, they have found success through redesigning large schools into smaller learning communities, establishing charter schools that incorporate extended learning time and stronger parental involvement, and creating early/middle college high schools, which are located on college campuses and allow students to earn an associate's degree along with their high-school diploma.

WELCOME

Teachers College President Arthur Levine welcomed the Task Force and panelists to Columbia University and discussed the importance of developing a progressive agenda for education in the United States. In light of the many profound changes in demography and technology, education is increasingly important for the U.S. in its quest to maintain its position as an economic and democratic power. Despite this, education has diminished as an electoral priority. Voters ranked education second in importance among all issues in 2000, but education fell to fifth place among all issues rated by voters in the 2004 presidential election.

In a rapidly evolving world, some groups resist change and instead focus on holding onto their lives as they know them, Levine said. Others react to the changes by trying to determine how best to move society toward the future and help individuals benefit from the changes. Levine called upon the Task Force, panelists and the public to take opportunities such as today's forum to create and advance a progressive agenda for education. In the last year, Teachers College has renewed its focus on the achievement gap, or the disparity in the quality of the education system, the set of expectations, and the subsequent outcomes between the nation's most affluent students and their low-income peers. Levine urged the group assembled to direct their attention to that issue as well.

PRESENTATION HIGHLIGHTS

Participants in this forum discussed efforts and models for organizing secondary level education and analyzed New York's successes and challenges. Panelists described local initiatives to redesign schools, with a particular focus on smaller learning communities, the early/middle college high school model, professional development, and charter schools.

Geoffrey Canada, President and CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), discussed the profound and long-term influence that the educational system and the local community exert on children's lives. He noted that children in some neighborhoods are predisposed to fail as a result of the low-quality local schools and the hostile environment in which they live. Harlem is a place where the odds are stacked against children, and the failures of the education system stand at the heart of that. Noting his own experience of growing up in a high-poverty neighborhood with a low-performing local school, he said he has seen "kids' lives destroyed because they live in a neighborhood where they have no chance." He acknowledged that a few exceptional children do manage to succeed despite living in such surroundings but that the infrequency of these cases is both saddening and a statement on the massive number of students for whom the system fails.

These realizations have inspired Canada in his work at HCZ. Through HCZ, he has identified four key components critical to improving the lives of children. First, parents and community

members must be made aware that a child's education starts from conception, rather than from the day he or she enters kindergarten. All children should arrive at kindergarten equipped with the foundation for learning. Second, schools should give children who are academically underperforming a chance to catch up to their more advantaged peers by extending the school day and/or school year. Children who are academically behind are trying to catch a moving target, and they need to put in extra time and effort to do so. Third, it is critical to build programs that are of a sufficient scale to affect a large number of children. "We are not losing our kids in groups of tens or twenties," Canada said. "We're losing them in the tens of thousands." Finally, teachers should use test results to pinpoint their students' strengths and weakness and should tailor the curriculum accordingly. Too often, test results are not incorporated into a feedback loop that adds value to the educational system. He concluded by emphasizing that the community must bring talent and resources into the school system to assault the myth that not all students can learn.

Dr. Cecilia Cunningham, Executive Director of the Middle College National Consortium, spoke of the key components to succeeding with high-school students and discussed how the middle/early college high-school model addresses these issues. Middle/early college high schools are secondary institutions located on college campuses and typically enable students to graduate with some college credit, or even an associate's degree, in four or five years. A teacher for 35 years and a principal for 22 of those, Cunningham noted that her experiences at Middle College Charter High School (MCCHS) at LaGuardia Community College have proven to her that the middle/early college high school model can succeed even for students who have a history of academically underperforming. At MCCHS, for example, 97% of students enter the school with either the lowest or second-lowest ratings on the state English language arts assessment, as compared to 70% of students in New York City overall. Despite this, the school boasts a drop-out rate that is only one-third the citywide average, and 96% of MCCHS graduates go on to college. She attributed the success of MCCHS and other middle college high schools partially to their location on a community college campus and partly to their linking high school with experiences of the world beyond secondary education. These serve as a tangible link to postsecondary education and an important motivator for students to finish high school.

Cunningham identified three important student needs that must be met in order for them to succeed: access to and long-term relationships with their teachers, leadership experiences, and real-life work or school experiences in which they can ground their expectations about the future. "Adolescents need to experience the future now in order to sustain their efforts now," Cunningham said. Teachers, on the other hand, need longer class periods, a reduced student load, professional development on a sustained basis, and greater control of the hiring and learning processes. She noted that the Gates Foundation has been a big proponent of the early college high school model and is partnering with other organizations to fund the opening of 150 such schools over the next several years.

Cunningham pointed out that students at MCCHS at LaGuardia have a pass rate in their college courses that exceeds the average at universities across the nation. She attributed the school's success among historically underserved students to the school's intensive focus on literacy, which addresses the entering students' low skill levels, and to teachers' instilling motivation in their students by linking their work with real-world experiences. She concluded by noting that

the standards-based education movement has placed greater demands on students but that these higher expectations must be accompanied by increased levels of school support, including the resource of time. She called for policymakers to change the provisions of the No Child Left Behind act that penalize schools for allowing students to attend high school for five years. Rather than acting as an ivory tower, the upper years of high school should combine high school, work, and college experiences to motivate students to earn both a high-school degree and a postsecondary credential, Cunningham said.

Dr. Gerry House, Director of the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA), shared with the audience information about the institute's work in partnering with districts to redesign and reform underperforming high schools. ISA, which was established 14 years ago and has been in the business of school redesign for four years, is currently working with 12 New York City schools and has received a Gates Foundation grant to open ten small schools in the city within three years. ISA's work in New York involves both converting existing high schools into smaller learning communities and helping design new high schools.

House noted that the structure and size of a school are key levers in improving student achievement. Converting large, failing high schools into smaller learning communities enables greater personalization of the learning process, stronger and deeper student-teacher relationships, and increased sharing of responsibility among groups of teachers for student outcomes. Small schools allow for more intellectual rigor in that teachers can demand more of their students when they are in a setting where they are able to give more support to them. She noted, however, that although creating a small learning community is a necessary condition for success, it alone is not sufficient.

House shared seven principles that are central to ISA's work: academic rigor with a focus on literacy skills, dedicated teachers, distributed counseling (i.e. all teachers act as counselors and advisors to students), extended learning, parent involvement, professional development and coaching for teachers, and continuous organizational improvement. Schools must continually review data to determine whether their efforts are effective. The main challenges schools face in improving student performance are the low-level skills with which students enter high school, the entrenched negative culture existing in conversion schools, and the difficulty of finding space to house students appropriately. While it is preliminary to rely too much on test scores to gauge the success of students in these redesigned schools, House noted that promising indicators include the 92% attendance rate at ISA partner schools, as compared to the 80% attendance rate at schools that serve comparable populations. House closed by sharing the anecdotal evidence of students saying that they "can't hide" or misbehave at small schools because teachers know them and work as a team to hold them accountable for their actions and that they appreciate this.

David Levin, Superintendent of KIPP Academy in New York and co-founder of KIPP nationwide, spoke of the importance of motivation and of tailoring school to the needs and learning styles of today's students. Levin started as an educator in the Teach for America program in Houston in the early 1990s. After his initial challenges, he began using innovative methods to motivate his students. His success resulted in the opening of KIPP Academy in Houston in 1995. KIPP now operates 38 schools nationwide. By 2007, nearly 30,000 students will attend a KIPP school. KIPP schools have received national recognition for achieving high

levels of student performance, despite the fact that only one-third of KIPP students enter school performing at or above grade level. Levin attributed the poor academic performance of many students to their lack of motivation, rather than an inherent inability to learn. Teachers, parents and schools should take some responsibility for reaching out to students and turning them on to learning. “We’re losing the marketing war in education,” Levin said, noting that he refers to KIPP as “education for the hip-hop generation.”

Levin identified five keys to student success: effective school leadership, extended learning time, parental involvement, community support and what he termed “the casino lesson.” He noted that schools can learn something from casinos, where the atmosphere is so attractive and people are so engaged that they lose track of time. He also pointed out that schools should teach both academics and character issues. Levin closed by reemphasizing the importance of instilling an internal drive in students and of teachers viewing themselves as lifelong learners, noting that KIPP has modified the conventional wisdom of “All children can learn” and adopted the phrase “All of us will learn” as the KIPP motto.

Norma Morales, Principal of Bronx International High School, discussed the importance of teachers, principals and school size in fostering student achievement. Bronx International High School was born out of a failing high school that was redesigned and opened in 2001 with the goal of meeting the unique needs of adolescent immigrants who have been living in the U.S. for four years or less. In the three years since opening, Bronx International has increased its graduation rate by 300 percent, with more than 250 students earning their diplomas last year. The school has a 94% attendance rate. Bronx International students took the Regents Examination last year for the first time, with 96% passing U.S. history, 85% passing the global section, 85% passing the living environment section, 78% passing math, and, for the first time, a majority passing the language portion as well.

Morales attributed the improvement in part to the size of the school and in part to the dedication of teachers. Bronx International is smaller than most high schools, allowing teachers to develop stronger relationships with their students. Morales said that students most need smart teachers who are willing to go the extra mile for them. A former social worker turned principal, Morales views everyone as an individual and seeks to develop relationships with all her teachers. As a principal, she treats her teachers as her class and employs a leadership style that results in teachers modeling behavior that they hope to see in their students. For example, if teachers want their students to work in groups, the teachers themselves must work as a group. Or, if teachers want students to view one another as resources, teachers should treat their colleagues as resources. Morales also emphasized the importance of weekly professional development meetings among teachers. These meetings allow teachers to share best practices and are part of her overall strategy to empower teachers to feel like leaders who can reach their potential in the classroom.

Dr. Douglas Wood, Executive Director of the National Academy for Excellent Teaching (NAET), spoke of his organization’s work with New York City high schools to create a professional development model for high-school teachers who serve underperforming students. Founded over a year ago and currently working with 13 small schools in the Bronx, NAET is guided by six overarching goals:

- Strengthening the pedagogical knowledge of teachers
- Increasing content area literacy
- Enhancing the understanding of and appreciation for diversity
- Supporting sustainable professional development
- Strengthening the leadership skills of school principals
- Reinventing the practitioner-teacher relationship for professional development

Wood pointed out that General Electric spends nearly \$1 billion annually on professional development, noting that investments in people generate significant returns. As elements of effective professional development, NAET supports coaching, intensive weekly internal professional development for advisors and the formulation of goals and work plans for professional growth. Professional development should be geared toward promoting excellent teaching, which is marked by students and teachers working together to create a safe learning environment where students can take intellectual risks and have a voice, teachers engaging students in meaningful activities linked to the world beyond school, and schools and teachers working toward reflective practices to assess student and teacher outcomes. He also emphasized the importance of organizational capacity, defined as the existence of institutional resources, systems, structures and personnel that enable policies to succeed. Wood's long-term goal is to work his organization out of a job by ensuring that all schools have effective professional development programs internally.

TASK FORCE AND PANELIST DIALOGUE

Panelists and Task Force members then entered into a dialogue on writing, leadership, unions, charter schools, technology, the achievement gap, organizational capacity and community/cultural issues. Below is a synopsis of the discussion that ensued.

Writing

Panelists were asked to comment on the importance of incorporating writing into the curriculum. House noted that writing is critical because it serves as a proxy for how young people will perform in college and noted that ISA incorporates writing as a focus across disciplines in its redesigned schools. Good writing indicates not only mastery of English skills but also the ability to think critically. Morales noted that both written and oral skills are important for English Language Learners. Teachers of all subjects must incorporate best practices around both of these areas in order to ensure that students are able to read and speak English proficiently.

Leadership

Panelists were asked to discuss the importance of leadership in achieving positive student outcomes. Cunningham noted that leadership among high-school students is about responsibility for oneself and for others. She identified travel as a prime chance for students to expand their view of the world and to exhibit leadership skills. Opportunities for leadership must be incorporated into school redesign.

Unions and Charter Schools

Panelists were asked to comment on why they chose to establish charter schools and how the local teachers' union has responded to the small-school and charter-school movement within the

New York City system. Canada pointed out that even as he started a charter school, his organization has continued to work with public schools in the area. One reason he chose to start a charter school was to prove that his methods could succeed with children who share similar demographic and environmental backgrounds with those who attend regular public schools. Cunningham added that the union is a key partner in all reform efforts. While most teachers are committed enough to work the longer hours required under some reform efforts, they should be rewarded financially for their dedication. Teachers cannot be expected to work from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. without receiving pay commensurate to their efforts.

Technology

Panelists were asked to comment on the potential for technology to improve student learning, particularly in rural areas and places facing teacher shortages. Levin responded that technology is important but that nothing can substitute for teacher quality. Technology is useless without the right teacher to instruct students on how to use it. In terms of large-scale investments and reforms, he believed that high-quality teachers should be the focus. Cunningham echoed Levin's sentiments regarding teacher quality. She also noted that it is important to ensure equity in access to technology.

The Achievement Gap

Panelists were asked to discuss the issue of how to best educate children in a world in which power is increasingly shared among a diverse group of people, yet students of some income and racial groups still face more challenges than their peers. House stated that expectations for educational achievement should not differ by income group or racial/ethnic status. All students should be expected to learn, and academic rigor in high school is crucial. Levin seconded those comments, noting that instilling motivation and other character traits is a critical component in promoting achievement among all, but that many schools shy away from those difficult areas.

Organizational Capacity

Panelists were asked to speak to the topic of organizational capacity. Wood noted that none of the goals for improving student achievement can be achieved in a vacuum. Any policy recommendations must take into account the appropriate structures, personnel and finances that are necessary to support the attainment of organizational goals. This is particularly important for federal policymakers to consider when they are creating an agenda that will be implemented at the state and local level.

Toxic Environments

Panelists were asked to comment on the cultural and environmental pressures facing children today. Canada said that youth today grow up in environments that encourage them to get involved in sex, drugs and criminal activities. Kids receive a constant message to do bad things, and are told by their peers that they have "sold out" if they seek to achieve. Schools must put forth an equally aggressive message on the importance of character and of education in preparing students for the future.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Rosie Stadnik and Nicholas Ugbove shared their experiences in attending Bard High School Early College (BHSEC) in New York. BHSEC, which opened more than three years ago, is a public high school in Lower Manhattan founded on the premise that many high-school students are actually ready for college-level work. Students graduate with both a high-school diploma and an Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences from Bard College. Class sizes are lower than in most high schools, and BHSEC offers a wide range of courses. Both students were very positive in their assessments of their experiences at BHSEC, depicting the school as a place where “everybody wants to learn” and students are “encouraged to think for themselves.”

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

To gain additional insight into New York’s experiences with redesigning schools, Task Force members and panelists turned to the audience for their comments. The highlights of this discussion follow.

Arts

Several members of the audience commented on the power of the arts and extracurricular activities for engaging students.

K-12 and Postsecondary Linkages

Today, a gap exists between what occurs in high school and what occurs in college. Greater linkages between the K-12 system and postsecondary education need to be established, and funding for both areas should fall under a single umbrella.

Teacher Preparation

The U.S. is facing a critical shortage of teachers. The Task Force needs to find ways to bring talented people into urban schools and ensure that they are equipped with the skills to deal with the unique challenges of students there.

Special Education

Special education should be thought of as one element of school reform, and separate resources should be devoted to this area.

School Leadership

Principals and superintendents are important, but No Child Left Behind rarely mentions them. High-quality principals are also linked to professional development in that effective development only occurs with guidance, support and funding from principals.

Partnerships

Partnerships between schools, businesses, non-profits and the community allow educators to achieve far more than they might in isolation. Partners serve the important purpose of bringing additional resources to schools. One audience member suggested partnerships with faith communities.

Language

The global economy, on the one hand, increasingly demands that students attain fluency in multiple languages. But students in today's schools are having difficulty mastering English. One audience member asked how schools are able to balance these two demands. Levin responded that most KIPP students already speak a language other than English at home, so learning English is the primary focus of language instruction in the classroom. House noted that most students at redesigned high schools study a second language. Veatch emphasized that teachers must meet the student where they are in terms of language competency. They should focus on learning English, but never do so at the expense of their own language.

Difficulty of School Reform

One audience member discussed the difficulty of achieving systemic change and asked panelists for any gems of wisdom in implementing change effectively. Canada acknowledged that changing a school system is tough. He noted also that opening a new school is complicated but that it is even more challenging to manage one on an ongoing basis. Despite the difficulty, school improvement initiatives must be undertaken because other community reforms are useless without an effective school system.

