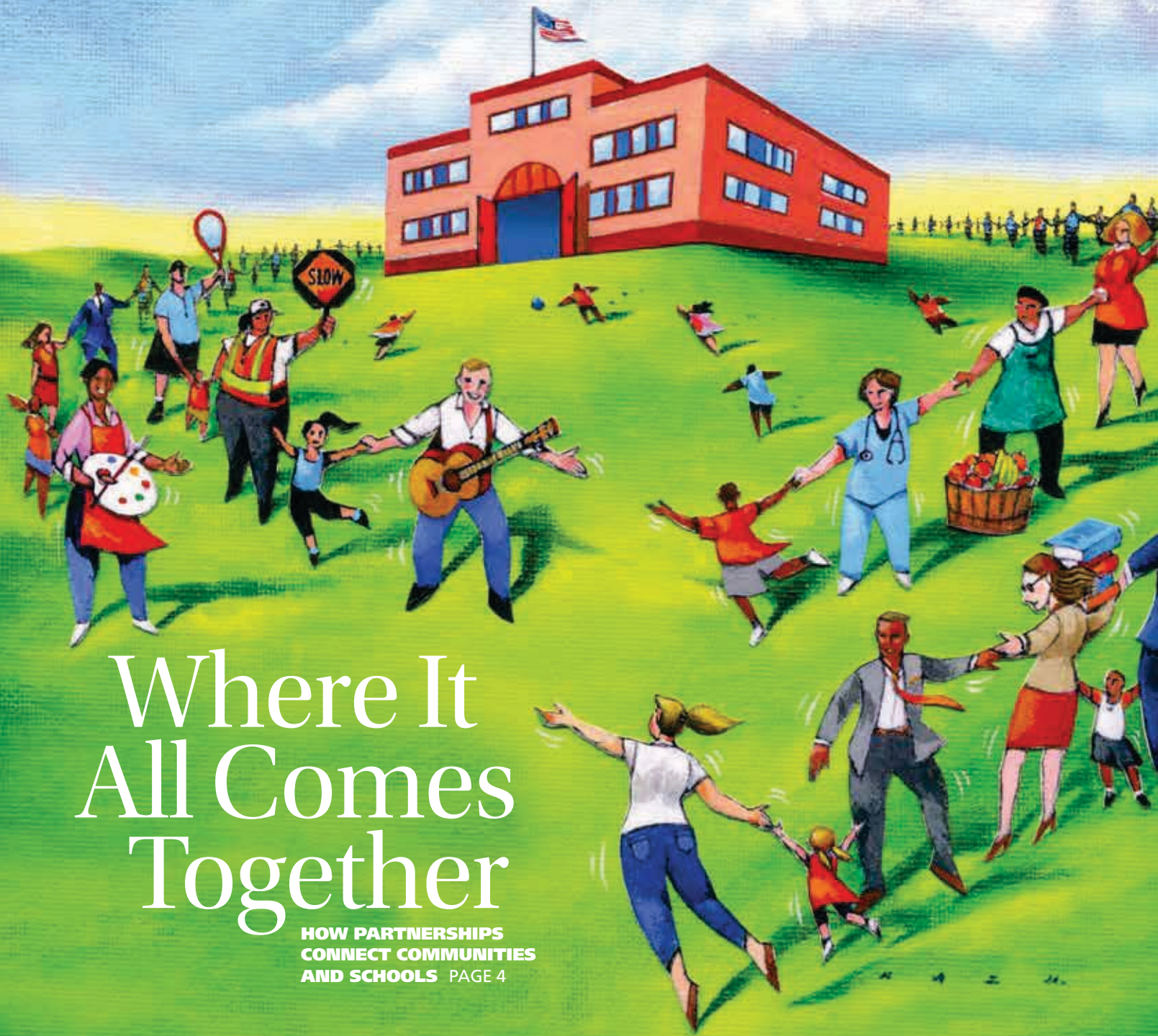




AMERICAN Educator

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND IDEAS



Where It All Comes Together

HOW PARTNERSHIPS
CONNECT COMMUNITIES
AND SCHOOLS PAGE 4

12

**Austin's Community
Schools**

18

**Powerful Partnerships in
Saint Paul**

28

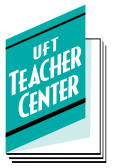
**Bilingual Education:
An American Tradition**

33

**Do Students Remember
What They Learn?**

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THE AFT'S 18TH ANNUAL**

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Promise



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Schools at the Center of Communities

RANDI WEINGARTEN, AFT President

ONE OUT OF FIVE CHILDREN in the United States lives in poverty today, according to the latest Kids Count report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. That number has climbed steadily over the past few years, despite claims that our nation is recovering from the Great Recession.

In our public school system, the rate is even higher—one in two students is poor. What that means is that teachers, like Sonya Romero in Albuquerque, New Mexico, have become first responders to the stress, exhaustion, and hardship these kids face, day in and day out.

Meanwhile, this school year is starting with widespread teacher shortages, and teachers are feeling more strained than ever before. Nearly three-quarters of educators find their work stressful, while 96 percent are physically and emotionally exhausted at the end of the day, according to a recent survey from the AFT and the Badass Teachers Association.

“When my students first come in my door in the morning,” says Sonya, who has taught kindergarten for 19 years, “the first thing I do is an inventory of immediate needs: Did you eat? Are you clean? A big part of my job is making them feel safe. The job of teacher has expanded to counselor, therapist, doctor, parent, attorney.”

Teachers like Sonya want to help kids, but they know they can’t do it alone. Which is why, in school districts across the country, AFT affiliates and their partners are bringing together the resources of our communities to help raise up all children—and give them and their families the supports and resources they need to succeed.

The community school strategy—using the neighborhood public school to weave together community partners to provide all the services and supports students and their families need—has proven incredibly effective in helping to mitigate inequity and poverty.

Here’s what happens at community schools: educators, school leaders, parents, businesses, faith-based organizations, higher education institutions, public agencies, and community groups determine—together—how to fill their community’s needs, from child care services and dental clinics, to counseling, English language instruction, family engagement opportunities, legal assistance, and housing services. The aim is to provide coordinated supports to give students,

The community school strategy has proven incredibly effective in helping to mitigate inequity and poverty.

parents, and teachers the tools to teach, learn, and grow. As a result, community schools become centers of the community.

There are 5,000 community schools in the United States today, serving more than 150 localities. Community schools in Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, and many other cities (including Austin, Texas, as outlined in this issue) have boasted extraordinary success, with drops in chronic absenteeism, lower dropout rates, increased graduation rates, and better student participation in afterschool programs.

However, in order to truly build on this success and help all kids get what they need, we must scale up and sustain the community school strategy with support, both public and private, at the federal, state, and local levels. We must move away from our current obsession with measuring and sanctioning, and move toward an approach of supporting and improving and working together to meet the needs of the whole child.

Most Americans agree with this strategy. According to the latest Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll of the public’s attitudes toward public schools, our nation is fed up with the overemphasis

and high-stakes consequences of standardized tests. They also believe that schools are underfunded. What these poll results tell us is that parents have a good sense of the better path for their kids—public schools where children are engaged, class sizes are smaller, teachers are supported, and all students have access to a relevant, well-rounded curriculum and wraparound services.

The AFT and others have called for increased support for community schools

in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The Senate version of the law, known as the Every Child Achieves Act of 2015, includes an amendment sponsored by Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) to create a dedicated grant program to support schools that want to implement the community school strategy, in addition to an amendment by Senators Brown, Manchin, and Shelley Capito (R-WV) to support the community school model as a way to improve student safety, health, and academic achievement.

At the same time, we need to promote local and state policies to support community schools, from the statehouse to the school board, to ensure that the community school model is implemented and funded.

We know what works. We know what we need to do. Instead of pursuing strategies that promote deepening inequities, we must invest in services that level the playing field. The community school model is built on shared responsibility and effective solutions. It’s going to take all of us working together to create safe, welcoming neighborhood public schools that are at the center of flourishing communities.



4 Where It All Comes Together

How Partnerships Connect Communities and Schools

BY MARTIN J. BLANK AND LISA VILLARREAL

The movement to establish community schools has come a long way since the AFT made it a priority in 2008. More than 150 communities across the country have established these schools to reduce chronic absences due to poor health, decrease disciplinary issues and truancy rates, increase family engagement, expand learning opportunities, and create more stable home lives for children.

12 Cultivating Community Schools

Austin's Grassroots Effort

BY JENNIFER DUBIN

A plan to transform one Texas school facing closure eight years ago into a place where students and teachers thrive has evolved into an extensive partnership, in which the union and the school district hope to turn other high-poverty schools into community schools.

18 All Hands on Deck

Organizing for the Schools Saint Paul Children Deserve

BY ERIC S. FOUGHT

In negotiating its most recent contract, the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers in Minnesota rallied community members to win a collective bargaining agreement that goes far beyond wages and benefits to include programs and services that students and families need.



28 Bilingual Education

Reviving an American Tradition

BY CLAUDE GOLDENBERG AND KIRSTIN WAGNER

Debates rage today on the role of bilingual education, but America's long history of bilingual instruction is often forgotten. Educators and policymakers should reclaim this legacy to nurture and promote bilingualism, not only for language minority students but for those who speak English at home.

33 Ask the Cognitive Scientist

Do Students Remember What They Learn in School?

BY DANIEL T. WILLINGHAM

Although students do forget some of what they learn in school, research shows that they remember far more than they—and their teachers—might think.

24 The Professional Educator

Connecting with Students and Families through Home Visits

BY NICK FABER

Educators and parents have a common interest in seeing children succeed, but too often they have little contact. To help establish ties, a veteran teacher shares how he worked with his local union to create a home visit program that allows educators to learn how to support students even better.

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Reflections on “Tenure”

I would like to extend my gratitude to *American Educator* for publishing the article by Richard D. Kahlenberg, “Tenure: How Due Process Protects Teachers and Students,” which appeared in the Summer 2015 issue. I’m a newcomer to the profession and just completed my first full year of teaching in Baltimore City Public Schools. In college, I didn’t learn anything about tenure, and during this past school year only heard it mentioned in passing. This article explained what it is and why it is important.

—KALLIE LIENDO
Baltimore City Public Schools
Baltimore, MD

I enjoyed reading about the hard-fought protections that tenure provides in Kahlenberg’s article. But as with many discussions on the subject, a huge piece of the puzzle is left out: the role of administrators.

Many people mistakenly believe that the job of an administrator is keeping teachers in line. But the job is actually one of support. If an administrator does not appropriately discipline students, monitor hallways so children get to class on time, provide classroom supplies, ensure that room assignments and schedules are fair and make sense, offer access to quality professional development throughout the school year that is pertinent to current expectations, and communicate with both teachers and parents, then it becomes hard for a teacher to instill new and challenging ideas in young minds.

Teachers are not in charge of the building but are often subjected to the quality of their management, as in any other workplace.

—CHRISTOPHER J. LUCAS
Newburgh Enlarged City School District
Newburgh, NY

In his article, Kahlenberg goes beyond the due process protection of tenure into a socioeconomic discussion of ways to ensure that students with the greatest need get the best teachers. He demonstrates that poor students stuck in schools with poor work environments for teachers can contribute to even the best educators burning out. To counteract neighborhood segregation, he advocates mixed-income schools and says “students should be given



an opportunity to choose among a menu of school options.”

Citing a Connecticut case that challenged de facto economic and racial school segregation, *Sheff v. O’Neill*, Kahlenberg suggests that “California needs a similar lawsuit.” It already had one.

In 1982, *Crawford v. Los Angeles Board of Education* was the culmination of some two decades of contention to force desegregation of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). It provided the impetus for the creation of district magnet programs, which are often more integrated than neighborhood schools.

As of this writing, there are almost 200 magnet programs in LAUSD. The real issue of increasing school integration is resources. LAUSD should increase the size of some of its best magnet programs. My own children qualified to enroll in the district’s highly gifted magnet program, and I am grateful to their teachers—now my colleagues—for the great start they provided them. I am appalled to hear anecdotes about students not admitted to this program because there were too few slots to accommodate every qualified applicant.

The gifts of the magnet teachers might also be shared with more of the students at their schools.

—JAY HARWITT
Los Angeles Unified School District
Los Angeles, CA

For another reaffirming response to Kahlenberg’s article, see education historian Diane Ravitch’s blog post, “Why Tenure Is Important for Students and Teachers,” at www.bit.ly/1KTIqGJ.

—EDITORS

Talking Points for Teachers

I have been so pleased with the recent run of high-quality, in-depth articles surrounding the hot-button topics of tenure, teacher quality, and education policy. In the Spring 2015 issue, I enjoyed the synopsis by Dana Goldstein on the “teacher wars.” Her article, “Quieting the Teacher Wars: What History Reveals about an Embattled Profession,” offered a practical survey of the history surrounding education reform and the current policy landscape.

The Summer issue was then a perfect complement. The cover article on tenure explained a policy that few outside of teaching truly understand and contained valuable talking points for anyone attempting to counter the myth that tenure guarantees a “job for life.” Then I read Jal Mehta’s article, “Escaping the Shadow: A Nation at Risk and Its Far-Reaching Influence,” and was simply amazed. This article should be essential reading for all educators in order to attain a firm understanding on the environmental and sociological factors that pushed the dialogue on education to the polarized state it occupies today.

It is so nice to read scholarly articles that give real ammunition to the arguments many of us are trying to make each day when advocating for children, the teaching profession, and the communities we serve.

—DEAN REASONER
North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale School District
North St. Paul, MN

Where It All Comes Together

How Partnerships Connect Communities and Schools



BY MARTIN J. BLANK AND LISA VILLARREAL

The modern-day community schools movement reached a new plateau in 2008 when Randi Weingarten made community schools a central element of her platform as the new president of the American Federation of Teachers. The AFT's action was a milestone on a journey that began a decade earlier, when advocates for community schools determined that it was necessary to renew a core American value—that our public schools should be centers of flourishing communities where everyone belongs and works together to help our young people thrive.

The AFT's leadership understood then, and continues to understand now, that students need the organized support of

Martin J. Blank is the president of the Institute for Educational Leadership, director of the Coalition for Community Schools, and author of numerous articles and reports on how schools and communities can work together to increase student learning. Lisa Villarreal is the education program officer for the San Francisco Foundation and chair of the steering committee for the Coalition for Community Schools. She has worked in public education for more than 30 years, serving as a teacher, counselor, and administrator.

their communities to succeed, and that schools alone cannot provide all the educational and developmental experiences young people need to graduate and succeed in life.

Leaders in local government, local United Ways, community foundations, higher education institutions, community-based organizations, and beyond are coming to the same conclusion. Across the country, they see a public school student population that is more than 51 percent poor¹ and increasingly diverse. And they see young people who are more isolated and distrustful,² and who face deep and pervasive inequities.

Community schools purposefully partner with youth organizations, health clinics, social service agencies, food banks, higher education institutions, businesses, and others to meet students' and families' academic and nonacademic needs, so teachers are free to teach and students are ready to learn. Community schools are becoming the chosen strategy for action among these leaders. Such schools represent a comprehensive—and transformative—school reform strategy that views young people holistically and expects everyone to step up to support them.

The Coalition for Community Schools, which was organized in 1997, has become a driving force in the community schools movement. With 214 partners in education, health and mental

health, youth development, civil rights, local government, child and youth advocacy, philanthropy, and local community school initiatives, the coalition has helped raise the visibility of community schools and has led many partners to pursue the development of community schools as part of their own agendas.

In this article, we outline how far the community schools movement has come since the AFT made community schools a priority in 2008. We explain why the movement has grown, clarify what exactly makes a community school different from other schools, lay out how community schools work, and show the positive results that community schools are attaining. We conclude with a brief discussion of the challenges that lie ahead.

The Rise of the Community Schools Movement

Approximately 5,000 schools in more than 150 communities across the country currently employ the community school strategy, serving around 2 million students. Exact numbers are hard to determine because community schools come in so many shapes and sizes and often don't follow a formal model. Large school districts (such as Baltimore; Chicago; New York City; and Oakland, California), medium-size districts (such as Cincinnati; Evansville, Indiana; Lincoln, Nebraska; and Salt Lake City), and smaller districts (such as Vallejo, California; Evanston, Illinois; and Allentown, Pennsylvania) are embracing community schools. University-assisted community schools, where higher education institutions partner with schools, are also growing, as is Communities In Schools, a national nonprofit focused on eliminating the barriers that contribute to students dropping out of school. These places and approaches cut across political perspectives, reflecting the fact that gathering the community at the schoolhouse in order to better support young people and the community is a traditional American idea.

Significantly, these school districts and communities are not just organizing individual community schools; they are working to transform every school into a community school, where both the school district and the community share responsibility for ensuring better outcomes for young people.

Multiple factors have led to the continuing adoption of community schools. First, the test-based accountability movement simply has not achieved what its architects set out to do: dramatically improve student achievement, especially for poor children and children of color. While that movement has illuminated the achievement gap, it has not addressed the inequities in young people's lives, the toxic stress,³ and the sense of isolation that come from growing up in racially and economically segregated neighborhoods. Nor has it addressed health disparities, chronic absence, school discipline, the lack of social capital, and other challenges receiving growing attention today.

The increase in poverty among our nation's students cannot be overemphasized as well. The majority of public school students now come from low-income families, and that number seems likely to grow as the squeeze on the middle class continues. Our country's population is also more diverse than ever,^{*} with the percentage of English language learners continuing to increase,⁴ and the number of languages spoken and cultures present in public schools continuing to challenge a predominantly white teacher workforce.

^{*}For more about the increasing diversity of language and culture in the United States, see the article by Claude Goldenberg and Kirstin Wagner on page 28 of this issue of *American Educator*.

Also, a growing recognition that children learn and develop across multiple domains has bolstered the community schools movement. The success of young people depends not just on their academic achievement but on their cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and ethical growth, as well as their civic participation. This realization harkens back to the work of Abraham Maslow, Urie Bronfenbrenner, and James Comer,[†] who have argued for the importance of these multiple domains and for addressing the needs of the whole child.⁵

Moreover, as Robert Putnam demonstrates in his new book *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*,⁶ too many of our young people lack access to opportunities to find their talent for art, music, athletics, and other abilities—opportunities that help them

Our public schools should be centers of flourishing communities where everyone belongs and works together to help young people thrive.

develop vital skills and build connections and relationships to adults. The contrast in access to opportunity is stark for low-income children compared with their upper-middle-class peers.

The rise of community organizing efforts calling for community schools is another significant development. Family and community engagement have always been key components of the community school strategy. Now, families, young people, and community residents are coming together in deeper ways, demanding that their public schools not be closed. Community members are calling on state and district officials to give their schools the option to become community schools.⁷ They want the stable institutions their communities deserve—places where their children can get the education they need.

[†]For more on the work of James Comer, see "School Ties" in the Spring 2013 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/spring2013/dubin.

For more on the history of community schools and how coordinated partnerships meet students' academic, health, and social service needs—and also free teachers to teach—see the Summer 2009 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/summer2009.



These community organizers have come together under the banner of the national Journey for Justice Alliance, a coalition of grassroots organizations. They also belong to the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, a broader union-community organizing coalition that has helped introduce community schools legislation in 10 states.*

Finally, teachers know firsthand the impact that a changing student population and difficult family circumstances have on a child's education. In a recent survey by the Council of Chief State School Officers of 46 state teachers of the year, 76 percent



named family stress and 63 percent named poverty as significant barriers to student achievement.⁸ And in a Communities In Schools survey, 88 percent of teachers said poverty is a major barrier to learning.⁹ Additionally, a survey conducted by the AFT in spring 2015 highlighted the workplace stress that teachers face—stress that many educators believe impedes instruction and demeans the profession.[†]

*For more on the Journey for Justice Alliance and the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, visit www.j4jalliance.com and www.reclaimourschools.org.

†For more on the AFT survey, visit <http://go.aft.org/AFT-Workplace-Survey>.

Conditions for Learning

- Early childhood development is fostered through high-quality, comprehensive programs that nurture learning and development.
- The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students.
- Students are motivated and engaged in learning—both in school and in community settings, during and after school.
- The basic physical, social, emotional, and economic needs of young people and their families are met.
- There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents and school staff.
- The community is engaged in the school and promotes a school climate that is safe, supportive, and respectful, and that offers students access to a broader set of learning opportunities.

SOURCE: COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS, *COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: PROMOTING STUDENT SUCCESS; A RATIONALE AND RESULTS FRAMEWORK* (WASHINGTON, DC: COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS, 2010), 10.

We can no longer afford to ignore the voices of teachers, who know our children best, or the data on the conditions in young people's lives that influence their learning and development. And more and more school and community leaders agree. That is why they are partnering to establish community schools.

Elements of a Community School

To be clear, academic achievement is central in community schools. After all, we all want young people to be ready for college, career, and citizenship.

But if we focus on academics alone, we fail to understand that young people develop, as we previously discussed, across multiple domains, and we fail to see that it is the responsibility of the school, family, and community, working in concert, to fulfill the necessary conditions for learning (for more on these conditions, see the box to the left).

From a community school perspective, fulfilling these conditions requires deep, respectful, and purposeful relationships among educators, families, and community partners. These partnerships ultimately help build and integrate the common elements of a community school: (1) health and social supports for students and families, often called wraparound services; (2) authentic family and community engagement; and (3) expanded learning opportunities inside and outside the school building that support the core curriculum and enrich students' learning experiences. For school and community leaders, community schools are not a "silver bullet" but a strategy for developing collective trust, collective action, and collective impact.

By establishing partnerships with child and family services organizations, community health centers, mental health agencies, and hospitals, community schools can respond to the fear, hunger, physical pain, and psychological distress that many students experience. Such partners place mental health counselors in schools and sometimes work with schools to operate and house health, dental, and vision clinics inside the actual school building. If such clinics are not located within community schools themselves, the schools link students and families to clinics located in the community.

Family resource centers that connect students and families to the services they need are also common in community schools. And it is not unusual for staff members from community partner organizations to sit and participate on student support teams.

Restorative justice programs have increasingly become a feature of community schools, as well. The term "restorative justice" describes approaches to discipline that help students "proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing."¹⁰ Such programs can improve student behavior and help students avoid the pipeline to prison. By coordinating these services, community schools can reduce chronic absences due to poor health, decrease disciplinary issues and truancy rates, and help create a more stable living situation for children at home.

Authentic family and community engagement is the second dimension of a community school. Research clearly shows the important role that families play in their children's learning and development.¹¹ To that end, community schools seek to build mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents, families, and school staff. Community schools don't happen *to* families but *with* their active involvement.

Working with community-based partners, educators at many community schools interact with families beyond traditional parent-teacher conferences. Often, community schools embrace parent-teacher home visits,[†] participate on academic teams of parents and teachers, work with parents in leadership development, and engage in the work of community organizing groups. At community schools, families are seen as valuable resources for the education of their children. Such collaboration between teachers and parents helps create a more welcoming, respectful, and supportive culture and climate across the entire school. As teachers know all too well, the better the school climate, the more teaching and learning occur.

Finally, the enriching learning experiences that community schools offer can take place before, during, and after school, and may even extend into the summer. These experiences engage young people in real-world problem solving around issues of critical concern to students, families, and their neighborhoods. Issues such as decreasing violence, improving the

Focusing at the systems level is essential if community schools are to become a permanent part of the education and community landscape, and if they are to avoid the pitfalls of leadership transitions, policy shifts, and other forces. There are more than 150 places scaling up community schools, among the most recent being New York City, where Mayor Bill de Blasio has overseen the development of 128 community schools and has set a goal of establishing 200 by 2017.

Growing systems of community schools has become a key priority for the Coalition for Community Schools. Our experience shows that establishing interactions among a community-wide leadership group and site leadership teams from community schools within the same school district, with the support of a strong intermediary organization, is the key to building a successful system of community schools. In the coalition's guide *Scaling Up School and Community Partnerships: The Community Schools Strategy*, we outline the structural elements that experience tells us are necessary for the most sustainable system.¹²



Community schools can reduce chronic absences due to poor health, decrease disciplinary issues and truancy rates, and help create a more stable living situation for children at home.

environment, increasing access to healthcare and good nutrition, and others enable the community to become a focal point for learning, with service learning as a common strategy. In community schools, partnerships with businesses, higher education institutions, and healthcare systems and hospitals offer students career-focused learning experiences, apprenticeships, and internships.

How Community Schools Operate

Strong leadership across multiple institutions, a focus on results, and the presence of a community schools coordinator are among the key ingredients for bringing community schools to life. School and community leaders have learned about these and other key ingredients for organizing effective community schools over the past two decades (see the box on page 8), and they are learning how to grow systems of community schools where partners and educators develop relationships with multiple community schools that coordinate resources, share best practices, and get results.

The community-wide leadership group, made up of members from the school district, local government, United Ways, businesses, teacher unions, and community- and faith-based organizations, is responsible for setting the overall vision, developing policy, aligning resources, and outlining accountability plans to build and sustain a system of community schools. A school-site leadership team, consisting of parents, residents, principals, teachers, school staff, community partners and usually a community coordinator, and students, is responsible for school-based decision making, which includes planning and implementation, and satisfying local needs that align with the school's academic mission. An intermediary entity (an organization or a working group composed of key managers from one or more partner agencies) provides planning, coordination, and management. Intermediary staff ensure communication among community-wide and school-site leaders. With these leadership structures in place, educators and partners can increase the number and effectiveness of community schools across a school district.

It's important to note that community schools are well-suited to engage with related efforts to help young people, families, and communities. For instance, the Becoming a Man program,¹³ a prototype for President Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative,

[†]For an example of how parent-teacher home visits can work, see the article on the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project on page 24 of this issue.

was designed by Youth Guidance, the lead partner in a number of Chicago community schools. (For more on the Becoming a Man program, see page 11.) Other community school initiatives also have taken up the call of My Brother's Keeper—to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color so all young people can reach their full potential.

Similarly, in addition to major organizational partners (e.g., the Afterschool Alliance, the School-Based Health Alliance, the National League of Cities, the School Superintendents Association, and United Way Worldwide), the coalition works with broad national initiatives that are related to community schools, including Attendance Works, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, the Promise Neighborhoods Institute, Partners for Each and Every Child, and the National Opportunity to Learn Campaign. Community schools welcome such efforts because each one requires the active engagement of the school and community to succeed. This makes community schools a powerful vehicle in collective impact and place-based strategies.¹⁴

Community Schools Are Effective

Multiple research studies show that community schools work, including a recent Child Trends meta-analysis that found that community schools support young people's needs, reduce grade retention and dropout rates, and increase attendance, math achievement, and grade-point averages.¹⁵

Key Ingredients of an Effective Community School

- A principal who knows his or her community, sees achieving equity as fundamental to his or her work, and makes the school building a place where educators, partners, and the public feel comfortable working together.
- Skilled teachers who have high expectations for their students, enjoy collaborative relationships with families and community partners, and offer students robust learning experiences that draw on community resources and expertise.
- Community partners with the expertise to help achieve the goals of the community school, and who are well integrated into the life of the school.
- A community schools coordinator who serves as a bridge between the school and community, aligns the work of educators and community partners toward a common set of results, and supports a site leadership team.
- A site leadership team that gives families, students, and residents a voice and involves them, along with educators and community partners, in the planning, implementation, and oversight of the community school.
- A community assessment that identifies the needs of the school, students, families, and community, as well as the assets of individuals, formal institutions and agencies, and informal organizations in the community that can be mobilized to meet these needs.
- A focus on results and accountability that uses data to define specific indicators that the community school seeks to improve, and the capacity to collect and analyze data to measure progress.

SOURCE: COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS, "FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT COMMUNITY SCHOOLS," WWW.BIT.LY/1NBfNFR.

In Chicago, which has been subject to a variety of reforms over the years, research by Carnegie Foundation president Anthony Bryk and his colleagues found that schools with community school characteristics were more successful in terms of academic achievement in reading and math scores, and in reducing chronic absenteeism, along with other key indicators of student success.¹⁶ Spanning many years, the research concluded that successful schools had robust parent-community ties, a student-centered learning climate, and instructional guidance. Trust among school leaders, teachers, families, and community members was also an important predictor of school success.

Similar findings appear in studies of community schools across the nation. For example, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, students in community schools that successfully implemented student and family supports had math scores that were 32 points higher and reading scores that were 19 points higher than their counterparts in other Tulsa schools.¹⁷

Students involved with City Connects in Boston community schools showed higher reading, writing, and mathematics report-card performance in grades 3–5, and higher third-grade math scores on the state standardized test. In middle school, students earned higher overall course grades in grades 6–7, and performed better on math and English language arts state tests in grades 6–8.¹⁸

Evaluators of Baltimore's community school initiative found that schools that had been implementing community school practices for five or more years had significantly better attendance rates and lower chronic absence rates than noncommunity schools. From the 2009–2010 to 2013–2014 school years, these community schools increased average attendance by 1.6 percent, compared with a 1.8 percent decrease for noncommunity schools, and decreased chronic absence rates by 4.1 percent, compared with a 3.6 percent increase for noncommunity schools.¹⁹ (For more on Baltimore's community school initiative, see page 11.)

Finally, a study by the Finance Project shows that community schools return \$10 to \$14 in social benefits for each dollar invested.²⁰

The Policy Environment for Community Schools

At the federal level, we continue to impress upon policymakers the importance of addressing the challenges that community schools take on. Progress is incremental but promising. As Congress debates the renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the coalition has been promoting the authorization and funding of the Full-Service Community Schools Act²¹ as a specific program, while also advocating for a set of principles that reflect the operational elements of community schools.

Key principles include a broader accountability framework, with elements such as health, wellness, and discipline; language undergirding the role of community school coordinators; professional development that enables principals, teachers, instructional support personnel, and community partners to work more effectively with families, communities, and each other; and capacity building that supports community school partnerships and better aligns and coordinates programs. In our discussions with members of Congress, these principles have received a positive reception.

At the state level, we have seen a marked increase in interest in community schools. New York and the District of Columbia have appropriated funds for community schools. Legislation supporting community schools has been enacted in Connecticut, Maine, and New Mexico. And in July 2014, the West Virginia Board of Education approved a policy framework endorsing community schools for statewide implementation.

A number of other states, often at the behest of community organizers, have already introduced or plan to introduce legislation this year to support community schools, including California, Georgia, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Texas, and Wisconsin. (For more on legislative efforts in Texas, see the article on page 12.) Passing bills will not be easy, but in the short term, introducing legislation raises the visibility of the community school strategy and strengthens the foundation for future growth. To support state efforts, the coalition is convening state-level community school advocates in order to promote supportive policies, provide technical assistance, and create a statewide peer learning group.



The Way Forward

Across the country, the widespread adoption of community schools shows great promise. The way forward is hopeful, but challenges as well as opportunities lie ahead.

Viewing Our Young People Differently: A fundamental transformation in the way our society sees young people is necessary. Our society must view our youth as assets to be developed, not problems to be addressed.²² We must rebuild their trust in the people around them and help them to develop the agency—the sense of control over their own lives—so important to success.

Engaging Teachers and School Staff: Teachers and school staff members, who all play an enormous role in helping to create a safe school climate and culture, are becoming more deeply involved in the planning and implementation of community schools. And they are making clear the importance of addressing poverty, family stress, and other issues for success.

But there is more work to do to engage teachers in school-based decision making and in the nuts and bolts of community schools. With both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association strongly committed to community schools, there is a significant opportunity to strengthen local ties between teachers and community partners.

Changing Mindsets, Enhancing Leadership, and Strengthening Professional Development: Leadership and professional development programs in education, social work, community development, and other fields need to offer a sharper picture of the inequities that influence public education. Principals and teachers not only need to be able to lead and deliver instruction, they must be prepared to work more effectively with families, community residents, and community partners. So too must the mindset of community partners change. They need to understand the culture of public schools, and as education allies, they must find effective ways to share their expertise.

Preparing Coordinators for Community Schools: Community school coordinators require interdisciplinary expertise in youth and community development, social work, and student learning, as well as data-driven decision making and strategic planning. To date, much of the preparation of these individuals has been handled at the local level, with limited resources. Only the University of Chicago offers a comprehensive master's-level

Across the country, the widespread adoption of community schools shows great promise.

program.²³ Much greater attention must be given to how coordinators are prepared and to professionalizing their role as the field grows.

Providing More Extensive Support for Capacity Building: There is a paucity of funding for capacity building of community schools, with minimal federal and state investment. While the National Center for Community Schools at the Children's Aid Society provides assistance, as do other local and regional groups, the support of public and private funders is essential.

Becoming a Community School District: As more school districts and communities work to bring community schools to scale, districts and community partners must consider ways to build and sustain their relationships. All partners must ask how they must change as an organization.

Districts will need to answer questions such as: How must data systems, leadership, professional development programs, facilities planning, and other practices change? How does the district integrate the assets of community partners into its school improvement planning so that the work of educators and community partners is aligned toward common results? How does it support principals and teachers in that endeavor?

(Continued on page 43)

Where Community Schools Are Strong

Across the country, in places that have expanded and sustained community schools, leadership—at both the school-building and school-district level—has played a major role.

Union leadership also matters, including representatives of both teachers and school support staff. When unions partner with community organizations and the school district, they can more effectively promote a common vision for public education. By their very nature, unions have the organizational infrastructure to organize educators and community members and do what they do best, which is to mobilize and engage around educational issues and student support.

In many cases, schools and communities must rebuild, strengthen, and/or create trusting relationships. Those who work in our schools and those who live in our communities have different assets and needs. The only way to provide access to opportunity for all children is for schools and communities to collectively come up with solutions that go beyond organizational self-interests. Effective community schools make decisions by consulting with school staff members, students, parents, and community partners.

National and local unions have supported such schools and see their potential. Organized labor and community organizations each bring their own kind of leverage and political power that can help schools and communities work toward a common vision of how to support children and families.

In moving the community school strategy forward, we need to be intentional about ensuring that labor groups, school officials, and community members are working together to drive school-based decision making and deepen the work of community schools nationwide.

A particular strength of the community school strategy is that it fosters local decision making, so that educators, parents, and community stakeholders can determine what's best for each child. The school-site leadership team—composed of a community school coordinator, parents, residents, principals, teachers, school staff, community partners, and students—makes school-based decisions that involve planning, implementation, and school improvement.

This team also focuses on making decisions that fulfill the needs of students, families, and the immediate community, all

the while aligning those needs with academic goals.

Examples of how unions are helping to grow community schools include:

- **Helping to create state and local coalitions that can push for policy changes to support and fund community schools.** This work is taking place in Baltimore, New York City (pictured to the right), Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. For example, in partnership with the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, local and state union affiliates have formed statewide coalitions to advocate for state community school legislation.
- **Ensuring that community schools are part of political platforms, including in mayoral races and school board elections.** The United Federation of Teachers collaborated with community organizations across New York City, including the Children's Aid Society, to make sure all 2013 mayoral candidates included the expansion of the community school strategy in their platforms. As a result, after his election, Mayor Bill de Blasio made a commitment to invest \$52 million to create more community schools.

Additionally, the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers and the organization Great Public Schools Pittsburgh specifically endorse school board candidates based on their commitment to bring community schools to Pittsburgh Public Schools.

- **Building awareness around the community school strategy in their communities and with their members.** Education on what community schools are and how various stakeholders can get involved is crucial to ensuring that union members, community members, parents, students, and others are part of the conversation when it comes to creating community schools. For instance, the Baltimore Teachers Union created the Education Roundtable in partnership with a variety of stakeholders—the Family League of Baltimore, the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland, Maryland Communities United, CASA de Maryland, and the Baltimore/Maryland Central Labor Council, among others. Together, they are building awareness around community schools by holding trainings at schools for their members as well as for community members and parents.



AFT PHOTOS

- **Using this strategy as common ground for labor-management relationships.** Conversations with school districts around the creation of community schools must take place, even in the instances where strong relationships don't yet exist. Ultimately, having labor groups, community members, and management working together on this strategy will be a key factor in its sustainability. For example, in Cincinnati, where community school work has been taking place for more than 10 years, the superintendent closely works with the Community Learning Center Institute (which leads the district's community school effort) and the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers. Thanks to this partnership, the school board implemented a policy that codifies the community school strategy.

—AFT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT

Portions adapted with permission from *"The Power of Community Schools"* by Natasha Capers and Shital C. Shah, *Voices in Urban Education*, no. 40 (2015), available at www.bit.ly/1GqxMpS.

AFT Resources

- Visit www.bit.ly/1fhB5on to watch AFT members discuss the importance of community schools.
- Visit www.bit.ly/1JbFkg8 to learn more about what makes a school a community school.

A Community Hub

As shown below, a community school functions as the hub of its community. Partners such as unions, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, businesses, and higher education institutions collaborate to ensure that both academic and nonacademic needs are met for students and families so that students can focus on learning and educators can focus on teaching.



DANIEL BAXTER. IMAGE ADAPTED WITH PERMISSION FROM FAMILY LEAGUE OF BALTIMORE INFOGRAPHIC

Building Character in Chicago

Male students at John Hancock College Preparatory High School, a community school in Chicago, are building character and learning how to solve conflicts in *Becoming a Man*, a dropout- and violence-prevention program that helped inspire President Obama's *My Brother's Keeper* initiative. And *Working on Womanhood* is doing the same for young women.

A signature program of Youth Guidance, the lead agency at Hancock, *Becoming a Man* provides students with mentorship experiences and peer support. Group sessions, field trips, and afterschool sports focus on developing social-emotional skills in young men through stories, role playing, and group exercises. The lessons are intended to teach impulse control, emotional self-regulation, and how to read social cues and interpret others' intentions.

An evaluation by the University of Chicago Crime Lab found a 44 percent reduction in violent crime-related arrests for students in the program, and at Hancock, there has been a decline in school suspensions since *Becoming a Man* began. While school staff members refer students to the program, many students also "self-refer" because they want to be part of the enriching field trips and afterschool sports activities, says Kathryn Rice, Hancock's resource coordinator.

The creation of a care team, consisting of community partners and school staff members, has helped to increase the

attendance at the school from 78 percent in 2010 to a current all-time high of 88 percent. Every other week, the eight-member team pores over names of students considered at risk and plans strategies for improving outcomes for those students. Because of that structure, "We don't have students who just slip through the cracks," Rice says.

Family League of Baltimore

"Leading collaborations" is how the Family League of Baltimore describes its work to improve outcomes for Baltimore's students. This approach was apparent three years ago when the league made a strategic decision to require social service organizations and other community groups that wanted to work with afterschool providers to demonstrate a commitment to community schools in order to receive funding. The goal was to create a more integrated approach to improving outcomes for students through an array of enrichment, health, and social support programs for students and their families.

While some were skeptical about the new direction, says Julia Baez, the senior director of initiatives for the Family League, providers now see that "this relationship is mutually beneficial."

Participation rates in afterschool programs have increased, and because each of the city's 45 community schools has a full-time coordinator, Baez says there is "constant communication" involving teachers and providers around which

students would most benefit from additional learning and enrichment in extracurricular activities. Students who attend afterschool programs for at least two years have higher school attendance rates and are less likely to be chronically absent.

The Family League has also devoted considerable resources toward making sure new community school coordinators and community partners develop the skills that will help them be more effective in their roles. In 2014, 113 professional development opportunities were provided, reaching roughly 1,400 participants. Sessions for coordinators included topics such as the Common Core State Standards and youth development best practices.

The growing support of the community school model throughout the city is also being reflected in organizations such as the Y of Central Maryland, which has made community schools one of its priorities.

Community schools are a central piece of the city's plan to renovate or build new schools. Collaborative spaces will be included in the design of buildings, health services are being planned, and schools will be open extended hours to meet the needs of students, families, and community members.

—M.J.B. and L.V.

Adapted with permission from the Coalition for Community Schools' "2015 Community Schools Awards Profiles," available at www.bit.ly/1DCLZiQ.

Cultivating Community Schools

Austin's Grassroots Effort



BY JENNIFER DUBIN

In 2007, Walter P. Webb Middle School faced a crisis. One evening in January, the superintendent at the time held a meeting at the school in Austin, Texas, to let students, parents, teachers, and community members know that at the end of the academic year, their school would close. Thanks to a new state law focused on accountability, the superintendent, with the approval of the school board, could close a school because of low test scores. The superintendent told the community that students would be sent to two other middle schools in the Austin Independent School District, both of which were struggling academically.

The hundreds of people who attended the meeting at Webb were outraged. They took turns going up to the microphone to urge school district leaders to reconsider. They reminded district officials that students hadn't even taken the end-of-year state-mandated tests, and they demanded that students be given another chance. The superintendent held firm: he believed that not enough students would pass the tests.

Jennifer Dubin is the managing editor of American Educator. Previously, she was a journalist with the Chronicle of Higher Education. To read more of her work, visit American Educator's authors index at www.aft.org/ae/author-index.

"It was a terrible meeting," recalls Allen Weeks, a community activist. "We were told that the kids had failed, the teachers had failed, the community had failed—everybody had failed except the school district." The superintendent's words hit a nerve for Weeks. "I thought, he would never say this on the other side of town."

Webb is located in northeast Austin, a low-income area removed from the trendy restaurants and gleaming buildings of the University of Texas at Austin that have come to signify the wealth of downtown. Separated by I-35, a monstrous double-decker freeway, these affluent neighborhoods are a world away for Webb's students, nearly all of whom are poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-price meals at the school. One of those students, Zaira Garcia, pleaded with the superintendent that night to keep her school open. "Teach us, educate us, do not tell us the answer is closing Webb down," said the eighth-grader. "Give us resources. We need clubs, teams, and committees of parents and students. There is nothing wrong with the students. There is nothing wrong with this school building. We just need a better system."

Garcia's statement would prove prescient. The "better system" would turn out to be a community school.

After that night, a group of parents, teachers, and community members decided to save their school. They had one month to convince the school board to reject the superintendent's plan for closure.

A neighborhood resident, Weeks was determined to help the community keep Webb. He was a former teacher who had taught high school English in North Carolina and Virginia and had also done youth development work overseas. Since moving to Austin a few years earlier, he had spent much of his time volunteering at John H. Reagan High School, the high school Webb feeds into.

Weeks used his community organizing skills to help this group of parents, teachers, and community members figure out what would dramatically improve their school. They agreed that Webb most needed a way to support student achievement by bringing social services to the school. So the group wrote a proposal to the school board calling for the creation of a family resource center where a coordinator would connect parents with housing, immigration, counseling, and other resources, so that teachers could focus on teaching and students could focus on learning.

The school board accepted the group's proposal and declared that Webb would remain open. With a renewed sense of purpose among students, parents, and teachers, enough students did in fact pass the state-mandated tests, undercutting the superintendent's reason for closing the school.

One year later, in 2008, Reagan High School faced a similar crisis. Again, the superintendent invoked low test scores as a reason to close the school.

Immediately, Reagan's Parent-Teacher Association contacted the group that had saved Webb and asked for help with Reagan. The group met with students, parents, and teachers at Reagan, and collectively, they crafted a wide-ranging plan, including the implementation of wraparound services similar to those established at Webb.

At the time, the plan had no specific name. "It was just common sense," Weeks says.

Without even knowing it, community members had turned Webb and Reagan into community schools. It would be several months before they would first hear the phrase "community school," at a conference in Portland, Oregon, led by the Coalition for Community Schools. (For more on the coalition, see the article on page 4.)

Today, their plan to transform one school on the brink of closure into a place where students and teachers thrive has evolved into a strategy to turn 13 high-poverty schools in Austin, including several elementary schools, into community schools. Last fall, the American Federation of Teachers Innovation Fund and the National Education Association contributed a combined \$180,000 toward the effort. The money supports community dinners and other meetings to generate buy-in from teachers and community members, as well as the hiring of personnel to grow the community school model.

Ken Zarifis, president of Education Austin, the locally merged affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, and Weeks, now the executive director of Austin Voices for Education and Youth, a nonprofit that helps coordinate social services at Webb and Reagan, have helped state lawmakers craft legislation to encourage the development of community schools in Texas. They have also met with public school teachers and administrators from Dallas and Houston, who are eager to learn how to establish their own community schools.

"We've got Webb and we've got Reagan," Zarifis says proudly. "But I really think we've got to hit this early. What would happen if we had an entire feeder pattern that had all these supports from the minute a child stepped into the classroom?"

By working together, the teachers' union, the school district, and community leaders hope to find out.

Inside a Family Resource Center

Turning Webb into a community school did not require the school district and the community to start completely from scratch. Several nonprofit organizations were already partnering with the school so that students could access an array of supports. But there was very little coordination.

"Before I got into this position, there was one child [at Webb] who had three mentors and one child who had none," says Margaret Bachicha, academic dean of student support services, who

Several nonprofit organizations were already partnering with Webb. But there was very little coordination.

oversees social services at Webb. "The better the coordination, the more likely you are to pinpoint and target what the student needs and what the family needs to succeed."*

Today at Webb, nearly 90 percent of the school's 705 students receive at least one type of service through more than 30 community partners. These partnerships enable students to access a range of services, including attending afterschool programs run by the Boys and Girls Club, participating in a college mentoring program offered by Breakthrough Austin, and receiving free immunizations and physicals thanks to a mobile clinic that visits the school.

Partnerships also extend to supporting families. The school works with nonprofit organizations that help parents with legal, employment, health, and housing issues. To coordinate these services, a family resource center is located at Webb. Housed in a doublewide portable trailer behind the school, the center is run by Austin Voices for Education and Youth. Inside, Julie Weeks, the center's director, and Angelita Tobias, a social worker, meet with up to 300 families throughout the school year. Julie, a former nurse, is the wife of Allen Weeks, Austin Voices' executive director.

*For more on the important role that coordinators play in community schools, see "These Kids Are Alright" in the Summer 2009 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/summer2009/dubin.

Both women are in close contact with Bachicha, whose office is in the actual school building, and they sit on the child study team that she coordinates for the school. The team is made up of teachers and administrators, as well as two representatives from Communities In Schools, a national nonprofit that partners with Webb to help eliminate the barriers that often contribute to students dropping out of school.* They meet twice each week to discuss students who are struggling with academic achievement, attendance, or behavior issues. If, for instance, the team agrees that a student needs counseling or learns that a family may soon lose their home, it will refer the student and his or her family to the family resource center, which can connect them to appropriate supports.

The community school strategy, however, is about more than just wraparound services. The very reason that school staff mem-

bers and community organizations work together is so that schools and families can keep student learning front and center. the portable trailer is cool and inviting; the air conditioning is on full blast. To the left of the door is a reception desk with fliers in Spanish and English about upcoming events, such as a class for parents on how to talk with adolescents. Just past this desk is a small sitting area with a green sofa, a green easy chair, a coffee table with flowers, a toddler-sized table and chair, several children's books, and toys. Green curtains frame two tiny windows above, giving the place a homey feel.

Next to this space is Tobias's office, the door of which is often closed for privacy when she meets with families. On the other side is a classroom used for adult education classes, like the one Steve Pina is teaching this morning. Seven women, all of whom are Hispanic, are enrolled in his English as a second language class, which takes place in the resource center for two and a half hours three days a week. Weeks explains that Pina works for the school

The family resource center asks that families fill out a survey to gauge what types of services they may need.



bers and community organizations work together is so that schools and families can keep student learning front and center.

At the beginning of the school year, the family resource center asks that families fill out a survey to gauge what types of services they may need. The family resource center keeps those surveys on file and then pulls them when families seek out the center's help. Julie Weeks estimates that about 75 percent of families return the surveys each year.

On a given day, anywhere from one to eight parents will walk into the center asking for help with domestic violence, housing, or legal issues, among others, Weeks says. The center currently case manages approximately 80 families, meaning that Weeks and Tobias regularly meet with them to help resolve issues throughout the year, or sometimes throughout all three years their children attend the school.

Besides connecting families with services, the center also provides direct assistance with utilities. According to Weeks, a grant from the city of Austin enables the center to give families up to \$1,000 each year to prevent electric bills from going unpaid.

One April morning, Weeks shows a visitor around the center. In stark contrast to the heat and humidity outside, the inside of

district's adult education department and that his students are mothers of students at Webb. Most of the women are from Mexico; others come from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Many work two jobs and have enrolled in the class to improve their English.

On the board, Pina has written "decrepit (adj.)," along with a sentence: "Mr. Jones is going to have a hard time selling his decrepit 15-year-old truck." With their textbooks open, he and his students move on to another part of the lesson: ordering food at a fast-food restaurant. After Pina "orders" two containers of cole slaw and 10 lemonades, a student haltingly reads, "For here or to go?" The women then practice their pronunciation by slowly reading the vocabulary words out loud: "cole slaw, sandwich, fries, coffee, chicken, shake." One student doesn't understand the last word and asks in Spanish, "What's a shake?" A classmate turns to her to explain. "It's very thick," Pina adds.

Weeks says 28 students initially signed up for the class, for which the family resource center recruited parents. But with the demands of family and work, enrollment has dwindled; 8 to 12 students now usually attend. Those who complete the class will benefit not only themselves but also their children, Weeks says. "When parents are involved in pursuing their own learning, they're more supportive of their children's education."

*For more on Communities In Schools, visit www.communitiesinschools.org.

Relying on Partnerships

Raul Sanchez, the principal of Webb, attests to the daily stress that parents face. He says that more than a third of students at Webb come from single-parent households, usually headed by a single mother. For the most part, parents are construction workers, day laborers, and housecleaners. Few have an education that extends beyond high school. Sanchez says that some of Webb's parents attended elementary school but had to drop out to work in the fields in Mexico.

Because many parents hold low-wage service industry jobs with little stability, the school has an extremely high mobility rate: 25 percent of students who begin the school year at Webb leave before the year ends, Sanchez says. While Webb's daily attendance rate has improved since becoming a community school (average attendance is around 95 percent), ensuring students come to school is still a challenge. Many parents often leave their homes to go to work as early as five in the morning and end up leaving their children unsupervised, trusting that they will come to school on their own. Parents "will wake their children, get them ready, prepare their food, and expect that they will just walk themselves to school, which doesn't always happen," Sanchez says.

He has found that most parents, even though they themselves have very little education, came to this country in search of new opportunities for their children, and many are doing the best they can.

As principal, Sanchez realizes he cannot control the external factors—students' home lives, for instance—that may hinder their education. And so he depends on the many partnerships his school has developed over the past eight years to help his students succeed. "Whether it be mentoring, wraparound services for families, direct counseling, someone is stepping in to fill that gap," he says. Such partnerships "allow teachers to focus on what they do best. And that is to teach, to develop and plan lessons that matter."

Sanchez attributes his school's improvement—Webb is now the highest-performing low-income middle school in the district—to the many partnerships that have enabled teachers to focus on teaching and students to focus on learning. For instance, the school receives more than \$350,000 each year thanks to a grant from the United Way for Greater Austin to implement wraparound services for students and families.

Among the partnerships Sanchez is most proud of is getting a mobile clinic to come to Webb so students can receive free physicals, which are required for them to participate on the school's athletic teams. The school was able to schedule these physicals thanks to the work of Julie Weeks in the family resource center. Before the mobile clinic, few students participated in afterschool sports at Webb because the district offered free physicals only once a year and not on school grounds, making it difficult for families to use the service. And since many families lacked health insurance, they were unable to pay for their children's physicals elsewhere. Now participation rates on Webb's athletic teams have soared, and teams are winning, adding to school pride.

Another organization that greatly benefits Webb's students is Austin Partners in Education (APIE). This group coordinates

professionals—researchers, engineers, and retired teachers, among others—who volunteer to help sixth- and eighth-graders in their math or reading classes. Before working with Bachicha and Sanchez at Webb, the volunteers would come with their own lessons. Upon learning that was the case, "I said, 'that's wonderful,'" Sanchez recalls, "but the left [hand] needs to know what the right is doing." Now the work of APIE volunteers is more closely aligned to the lesson plans of the classroom teachers.

As principal, Sanchez stays in constant contact with Julie Weeks. They have each other's cell phone numbers and exchange emails several times a day. That way, when students and families require immediate assistance, the school can help put supports in place. For example, when a mother recently registered her daughter as a new student at Webb, the daughter needed counseling right away. According to Sanchez, the mother told him



that the two had moved away from the girl's stepfather, who had impregnated her. "We knew there had to be wraparound services for the family," he says. So the resource center called Tandem, an organization in Austin that works with pregnant middle school students.

At Webb, teachers often reach out to the family resource center on behalf of students. Petra Rodriguez, who teaches sixth-grade social studies, says that she contacts the center at least once a week. Sometimes, she recommends students receive counseling because of abuse they may have experienced or witnessed at home. She also recommends eye exams for students when she notices they have trouble seeing the board. For students who can't afford eye exams or glasses, the family resource center provides them with a waiver for a free exam and a free pair of glasses thanks to a grant from the Boys and Girls Club.

Rodriguez appreciates the benefits of being at a community school, both for her students and for herself. "It's just nice to know that I am supported, and that students themselves are being taken care of beyond just their minds," she says.

A High School Transformation

Should students or their families ever need it, an array of supports

also awaits them at Reagan High School. Like Webb, the school has a family resource center with a full-time bilingual social worker. And another social worker, from the nonprofit organization Communities In Schools, works in the center with both Reagan's graduation coach and its parent support specialist. Here, these four professionals all work together.

The resource center opened in 2009, which was principal Anabel Garza's second year at the school. In 2008, she worked with Allen Weeks and committees of parents and students to formulate a plan for the creation of a center—and for pressuring the district to keep Reagan open. Their work had such an impact on the local community and gained so much publicity that a book about Reagan's struggles, *Saving the School: One Woman's Fight for the Kids That Education Reform Left Behind*, was published in 2012. Weeks, Garza, and Ken Zarifis, president of Education Austin, however, call the book's subhead misleading. While they all acknowledge that Garza is a charismatic and effective leader, they say the community as a whole really did rescue Reagan.



At the time, the school was desperately in need of saving. As middle-class families left northeast Austin in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the student body became increasingly poor. Enrollment had dropped to as low as 600 students, and the graduation rate hovered just below 50 percent. Then, in 2003, tragedy struck. A student was stabbed to death by her former boyfriend in a hallway of the school. The incident made headlines and scared away neighborhood families; students left Reagan in droves.

Today, the school no longer faces such turmoil. More than 1,200 students are enrolled in Reagan, and the graduation rate is 85 percent. The school also enjoys a successful early college high school program, in which many high-achieving students take college classes from Austin Community College and the University of Texas at Austin so that they can earn up to two years of college credit before they even graduate from high school.* "This school has done it, to the credit of the staff," Paul Cruz, Austin's current superintendent, says of Reagan's transforma-

tion. "It's the same community. We didn't change boundaries." Students can still transfer to other schools, he adds, but they no longer want to.

Ultimately, Cruz says he envisions the community school model extending to other Austin schools. More than 60 percent of students in the district receive free or reduced-price meals, and nearly 30 percent are English language learners. "The needs are there for our kids," he says. He adds that establishing community schools takes time and must be based on continuous conversations with parents, teachers, and community members. "It's not just a top-down model."

Zarifis emphasizes the importance of his union's strong relationship with the district. "In Austin, we have taken great efforts to keep a line of open, honest communication with school district leaders to build a trusting, productive relationship to ultimately benefit our entire school community, but especially our kids," he says. "We have an administration that wholeheartedly supports our work with community schools and is a partner in their development and success."

Despite being in Texas, a right-to-work state, Zarifis says that the prominent role of Education Austin in the district's community school effort can serve as a model for how local unions in other states currently fighting to keep collective bargaining rights can engage their members and partner with the communities they serve. "We don't lack power just because we don't have collective bargaining," he says. "We just have to develop our power differently. Communication and relationships are the keys for us."

Mia Watson, now a freshman at Texas A&M University, and a senior at Reagan when we spoke, admits that initially she did not want to attend Reagan. Even though years have passed since the school's troubles, its tough reputation tends to persist. In middle school, she would hear classmates describe it as unsafe. But when she and her family moved four years ago, Reagan became her neighborhood school. Her mother was impressed with the early college program and told her she would learn to like the school.

Watson's early concerns proved unfounded. She enjoyed her time at Reagan and excelled academically. "It's a really safe school," she says. "The adults here really care about us." Through the early college program, Watson earned 44 college credits. She plans to pursue a major in communications and a minor in business at Texas A&M.

The day before we talked, she and her classmate Suguey Zavala, who is also now a freshman at A&M, testified before the state legislature, along with Garza, Reagan's principal, in support of two bills that would help create more community schools in Texas. House Bills 1891 and 1892, filed by Texas state Rep. Eddie Rodriguez, were among similar bills being proposed in several states that would promote the creation of community schools. (For more on which states are considering such bills, see the article on page 4.)

In May, HB 1892, which would have provided state funding for community school coordinators, failed. HB 1891, which would have enabled schools at risk of being closed due to poor performance to become community schools, passed in the House and had strong support in the Senate, but it was kept from a final vote by the lieutenant governor for political reasons. However, com-

*For more on early college high school, see "The Early College Challenge" and "Hidalgo Sets Sail" in the Fall 2011 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/fall2011.

munity school language made it into other legislation, opening the door for more Texas schools to adopt the model.

Allen Weeks and Zarifis, who lobbied state legislators on both sides of the aisle, remain undeterred. “Even though we didn’t get the legislation signed into law, we have everyone at the capitol talking about community schools,” Zarifis says. “This model of school improvement was unknown to most six months ago but is now part of the educational vocabulary in Texas.” He adds that their efforts have created fertile ground for community school legislation for the 2017 legislative session.

Besides engaging in political advocacy, Weeks and Zarifis have also met with educators and administrators from Dallas and Houston to show them how community school legislation could help their schools struggling with poverty and student achievement. According to Weeks, 21 schools in the Houston Independent School District alone faced reconstitution last year and would have qualified to become community schools under HB 1891.

That help also extends to pregnant and parenting students. Long before Reagan became a community school, it housed a daycare for the babies of teenage mothers so they could continue their education. Today, that daycare still exists; about 20 babies are enrolled. Because Reagan is now a community school, the on-site daycare benefits from more supports. For example, when school officials noticed teen moms were missing school in order to take their babies to doctor appointments, Weeks worked with the school to win a grant for a mobile clinic to visit the campus once a week. Teen moms can now make appointments for their babies to receive checkups without having to leave school and miss classes.

The support for teen mothers goes beyond medical care for their children. Garza says that the school enables parents to eat lunch with their babies in the daycare, attend parenting classes, and engage with new mothers from a nearby church who serve as role models. The goal, she says, is that the need for the daycare will shrink as the early college program grows. For those stu-



The role of Education Austin in the community school effort can serve as a model for how unions can engage their members and partner with the communities they serve.

Watson and Zavala, academically strong students with stable home lives who have not needed to rely on the family resource center, spoke to lawmakers on behalf of Reagan students, families, and teachers, who all benefit from what the community school has to offer.

As a teacher at Reagan, Matthew Payne feels especially equipped to help students. The day before we spoke, he met with a social worker in the family resource center to discuss the difficult living situation of one of his students. The 18-year-old girl recently moved out of her house because she doesn’t get along with her mother; she now lives with her boyfriend, who is beating her. Payne found out what was happening after she wrote about it in a class paper. “I’ve known this student for a couple of years,” he says quietly. “This is very personal to me.”

After talking to the social worker and others in the family resource center, Payne says they came up with a game plan for approaching the student, making her aware of resources and options, and convincing her to seek help.

Reagan, he says, is a place where teachers can draw on many resources and many people to help students. “It’s just a central part of our fabric.”

Students who do become pregnant, however, this community school will continue to support them.

While Webb and Reagan successfully connect students and families with resources that enable teachers to teach and students to learn, other schools in Austin, with the help of the grant from the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, will try to emulate what they have done. Allen Weeks recalls that when Reagan initially faced closure, the community groups he was a part of spread the word. “We said, ‘The school is in crisis. It’s going to close. Come to dinner and let’s start planning.’”

It was out of these dinners that a sense of community—and the specifics of how students, parents, and teachers could turn their schools into community schools—first grew. “What they did at Webb and Reagan was to really listen to what was needed at those campuses and customize supports for the needs of those communities,” Zarifis says. Just as important, the voices of teachers, viewed as crucial partners in this work, were also heard.

(Continued on page 43)

All Hands on Deck

Organizing for the Schools Saint Paul Children Deserve

As an English teacher, I'm used to identifying the beginning, middle, and end of a story. And I enjoy letting others know when I have read a good one. I'm happy to share that the following two articles fall into this category. Both describe efforts that started during my time as president of the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers (SPFT) in Minnesota.

While the words written here by Eric S. Fought and Nick Faber of course must end, I like to think the story they tell about the power of partnership is far from over. Not only does a vibrant future of organizing educators and improving the lives of community members lie ahead of SPFT, but such promising work is in store for every local that learns from us or has taught us how to make common cause with the communities we serve.

I'm very proud of the work we started in Saint Paul, and I'm grateful for all the AFT members who support our efforts. I'm also honored that AFT President Randi Weingarten and Secretary-Treasurer Lorretta Johnson asked me to serve alongside them so together we can elevate the work our members do.

Educators face many challenges. For example, one of the things that concerned me when I began teaching in Saint Paul was parent-teacher conferences. My turnout was abysmal. In 2003, when I told my principal, "I've only been averaging 30 percent parent attendance," he was impressed. His reaction surprised me, given that I had more than 85 percent when I taught in Saint Cloud, a city in central Minnesota, about 75 miles away.

I reflected on the difference: in Saint Paul, many teachers didn't call home to invite families to conferences because of the language barrier. Like some teachers, I'm monolingual.

We were conducting these conferences the way they had been done for my parents 25 years earlier. So I started asking how we could change the process to better meet the needs of families. I was told not much could be done.

After I became president of SPFT in 2005, we brought ideas for improving our parent engagement to the bargaining table. We were told it could not be done. In 2010, SPFT leader Nick Faber shared his parent-engagement idea with me, and we made the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project our union's work.

It's work that any union can do. Please add to this partnership story by making it your own—and don't forget to tell me how it ends!

—MARY CATHRYN RICKER,
AFT EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



BY ERIC S. FOUGHT

On an unusually warm mid-February afternoon in Minnesota in 2014, members of the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers gathered in front of the offices of Saint Paul Public Schools before the start of a school board meeting. Teachers, in the midst of a contentious contract fight and nearing a strike vote, were surrounded by hundreds of supporters—parents, students, elected officials, representatives from other unions, and community leaders.

Eric S. Fought is an activist and writer based in Minnesota. He has served in senior leadership roles with progressive political, community, faith-based, and labor organizations, including the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, the Service Employees International Union, Minnesotans for a Fair Economy, and the Democratic National Committee. This article is adapted from Eric S. Fought, Power of Community: Organizing for the Schools St. Paul Children Deserve (Saint Paul: Saint Paul Federation of Teachers, 2014).

It's not unusual for members of a labor union to have others join them in solidarity in the midst of contract negotiations. However, it was clear to anyone at the rally that day that this wasn't just about a two-year contract. The very presence of those who trudged through the melting slush represented an emerging vision—not only for the union, but also for everyone with a stake in making sure that Saint Paul children have the teachers and the schools they deserve.

Two weeks later, after negotiating nearly 24 hours straight, the union reached an agreement that was ratified by an overwhelming 95 percent vote. The agreement included provisions for smaller class sizes, access to preschool, educating the whole child, family engagement, placing teaching before testing, wage and benefit increases, culturally relevant education, and high-quality professional development for teachers. It was a landmark contract.



But the story goes well beyond a successful contract campaign. This is the story of a group of dedicated educators who, in the midst of a constant barrage of attacks, dramatically changed the conversation. It is the story of a union that knew that, in order to bring about the transformation necessary for the betterment of the entire community, its members needed to transform the way in which they did business. It is a story of visionary and consistent leadership that built trust and delivered results. It is the story of parents, teachers, and community leaders coming together in partnership to find solutions.

This is the story of the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers, how it won and how it will continue to win for the students and the community that its members serve.

From Pop Machines to Gym Memberships

Mary Cathryn Ricker was elected SPFT president in 2005, a position she held until summer 2014, when she was elected executive vice president of the American Federation of Teachers. A middle school English language arts teacher, she brought to the job 13 years of classroom experience. She also brought a vision for the future.

When talking about the shift that occurred under Ricker's leadership, teachers and SPFT staff often employ an analogy. For

many years, the union operated as a pop machine—members put their money, or dues, in the machine, expecting the product they were thirsty for at the moment to fall near their feet. When you don't get what you want from a pop machine, you end up kicking it because you feel powerless. Buying an ice-cold pop also doesn't require you to do much; you simply put the money in the machine, expecting it to work for you.

Ricker and her colleagues who elected her saw another way. Instead of the pop machine model, they began to move the union to a model that represented more of a gym membership. Gym members pay a monthly membership fee, but results are only possible if they show up and do the work. Walking on the treadmill and lifting weights in the midst of a community of fellow fitness-seekers helps with motivation. Together, everyone celebrates the results they've accomplished.

The Saint Paul Federation of Teachers knew that its members needed to transform the way in which they did business.

Elected out of a desire to increase professionalism and return the union to its roots of social justice activism, Ricker took steps toward expanding leadership opportunities for her fellow officers and other members of the executive board. She also began to engage with community leaders and parents who shared concerns and hopes about the future of public education. Most importantly, she listened and, as a result, fundamentally changed the way SPFT does business.

Ricker became involved with the statewide advocacy organization TakeAction Minnesota, serving on its board of directors. In that role, she began to more fully understand the power of organizing. The union hired organizers such as Paul Rohlfling and Leah Lindeman, who brought about a new understanding of how to move the union from simply resolving conflicts and putting out fires to developing leaders and organizing for change.

Rohlfling recalls the environment when he joined the staff in 2008. "We had a very service-oriented union culture," he says. "The organizers were called 'business agents,' and the expectation was that you called our office when you had a problem."

Instead of "business agents," Rohlfling and Lindeman requested the title of "organizer." Stewards were trained to take many of the calls from members regarding concerns and grievances, freeing up the organizers' time to focus on organizing. And they started

working on two fronts—building leadership in the union around small-scale organizing and addressing building-specific issues. For example, the organizers mobilized folks in stopping cuts to the district’s music programs. To that end, they worked with music teachers in organizing a rally with parents and students playing instruments outside the school board before a meeting, turning a bunch of parents and allies out to those conversations.

The union also involved parents in discussions of the future of the profession and the schools in which teachers serve—important steps in finding common ground and cooperation. Nick Faber, an SPFT-elected officer and an elementary school science teacher, has led the union in many of its parent-engagement efforts, including an innovative SPFT parent-teacher home visit program, which he helped bring to Saint Paul. (For more about this program, see the article on page 24.)



Through these efforts, members saw powerful ways to engage. Their participation persuaded the union’s leadership to try to change district decision-making rather than just accept the district position as the “way it is going to be.” Instead, leaders encouraged members to organize. And the culture within the union began to shift.

Changing the Conversation

Many factors contributed to the success of the 2014 contract campaign and the transformation that the union has experienced in recent years. However, in conversations with SPFT staff and leaders, members, parents, and community partners, it was clear that a concerted effort to fight back against attacks on public education was the catalyst for change.

You’ve likely heard the refrain: teachers don’t know how to teach and must be monitored and disciplined; anyone can learn to teach since the job requires little training; and teacher unions protect bad teachers, make unreasonable demands of the system, and hold educational reforms hostage.

Simply put, the goal of such nationwide campaigns against public education has been to undermine the powerful roles of teachers and their unions. These campaigns have used concern about legitimate challenges around inequity in schools to effectively build a coalition

with others who are generally pro-public education and pro-teacher. And for many years, teachers found themselves on the defensive—trapped and powerless in their attempts to respond.

When organizer Rohlfling joined the staff of SPFT in 2008, he came with a great deal of experience working with other labor unions and community organizations. In a previous role with a local of the Service Employees International Union in the Twin Cities, he worked on issues related to healthcare reform in Minnesota. It was through that work that he met Dave Mann, associate director of the Grassroots Policy Project, who was leading the coalition to shift the dominant narrative around healthcare reform.

“What Dave helped our organizations do together was to talk about the idea of health in a totally different way,” Rohlfling says. “Dave saw that a lot of the time when we were talking, we were using terminology that had been expressly created to support a

A concerted effort to fight back against attacks on public education was the catalyst for change.

market-oriented approach to healthcare.”

Rohlfling saw a similar challenge in the way people in Saint Paul were talking about public education. Ricker had also worked with Mann while serving on the board of TakeAction Minnesota and decided to bring in Mann to rethink the narrative around public education that everyone was stuck in. It was important to Ricker, Rohlfling, and other leaders that the work not occur in isolation, so leaders from the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers were invited to join.

“I think once we began the process, we saw a critical need to help people find some hope and not just be in hunker-down defensive mode,” Mann says. “There was a need to do something that started to internally change the story about the union so that there would be more energy and more involvement, including both veteran and younger teachers. And there was a need—if they were going to flourish as teachers and as a union and have an active role—to make this shift to be thinking about power. I think that the understanding of power and the power it takes to win a real fight—as opposed to negotiate a settlement—was not clear for many people.”

With the Grassroots Policy Project’s help, the union took a fresh look at how members thought about issues and explained what they were fighting for.

Asking Questions, Listening to Answers

In the spring of 2012, Ricker traveled to Finland as part of a delegation of U.S. education advocates, where she met Barnett Berry of the Center for Teaching Quality, author of *Teaching 2030: What We Must Do for Our Students and Our Public Schools*. Ricker had several conversations with Berry about the future of public education and became interested in the possibility of using his book to help continue the discussion that began with Mann in 2009.

At roughly the same time, teachers in Chicago went on strike. “We saw how Chicago teachers were making these connections in their communities,” says organizer Lindeman. “Mary Cathryn, Paul, and I made a trip to Chicago to talk to their leadership about what they were doing and what was working.”

Following both of these experiences, Ricker was inspired to engage these ideas in a new way as a contract campaign



approached. She notes, “I returned from Finland and this experience in Chicago, and I remember sitting down with Leah one day and saying, what if, before we even put together a bargaining team, we actually asked parents and the community what they want to see in our contract first?”

Based on Berry’s book and *The Schools Our Children Deserve* by Alfie Kohn, SPFT leaders proposed a series of group discussions. They asked an outside facilitator to lead the process.

Lindeman remembers folks asking, “What if we took this idea of having a book club or a study group and made it not just be about the books, but about what we really want in Saint Paul public schools? Let’s build a platform of ideas that we can start to work toward.” SPFT leaders began to write a document, ultimately titled “The Schools St. Paul Children Deserve,” that would serve this purpose.* “The original idea of creating the document was not just about the contract campaign, it was about grounding ourselves to be sure that we were always working toward the same goals.”

The study groups began by grounding themselves in this new narrative. While the process included reading the books and discussing the ideas contained therein, a series of listening sessions

and an online member survey ensured broader participation from members, parents, and community representatives.

Participants were tasked with answering three questions with the ongoing contract negotiations in mind:

- What are the schools Saint Paul children deserve?
- Who are the teachers Saint Paul children deserve?
- What is the profession those teachers deserve?

Through this process and with the work of a researcher, the document was created. Parents, educators, students, and community leaders began advocating for the ideas contained in its pages.

Together, they came to believe that Saint Paul students and families deserve:

- An education for the whole child;
- Authentic family engagement;

The entire community had a stake in the process, just as they have a stake in their schools.

- Smaller class sizes;
- More teaching and less testing;
- Culturally relevant education;
- High-quality professional development for educators; and
- Better access to preschool.

The document wasn’t a set of ideas that the executive board or a group of members drafted behind closed doors. The entire community had a stake in the process, just as they have a stake in their schools.

The Contract Campaign

Armed with this document that answered important questions, the union faced contract negotiations with greater energy and resolve than ever before.

When Lindeman joined the staff as an organizer in 2011, she brought extensive experience with “open bargaining” in other local unions, with contract negotiations open to the public. “The nature of open contract negotiations, everyone being able to witness and see, is that they are transparent,” Lindeman explains. “You can say whatever you want about what you saw or heard at the bargaining session. It is all out there. That transparency goes a long way in building members’ confidence in their union, trust

*An electronic version of “The Schools St. Paul Children Deserve” is available on the SPFT website, www.spft.org.

in their bargaining team, and motivation to be involved in the process.”

That trust turned into training, as members became part of Contract Action Teams (CATs). The teams are composed of a set of leaders who cover every building in the district and who have a dual responsibility as two-way communicators—it is their job to bring information about negotiations and actions in support of negotiations back to their members, and it’s their responsibility to collect feedback, questions, and concerns from their coworkers and report them back to their union. Besides acting as the communications hubs, team members became leaders in their buildings. Union staff showed them how to mobilize their coworkers, hold effective workplace conversations, and answer tough questions.

CAT members also actively participated in the open negotiations, a shift from previous contract negotiations where bargaining

ing sessions. The union took the stance that issues often considered “management rights” belong in negotiations. Teachers requested smaller class sizes and less standardized testing, along with the hiring of additional librarians, nurses, social workers, and counselors. These requests were placed directly on the negotiating table as members advocated for the issues as central to their working conditions and overall effectiveness in the classroom.

In September 2013, the district walked away from open negotiations and filed for mediation. Negotiators claimed that the issues the union brought to the table did not belong in the bargaining process. In response, teachers amped up their outreach and engagement with parents and the broader community. When negotiations were scheduled to continue, members went door to door to share their vision for Saint Paul Public Schools. On November 12, SPFT members and parents packed the school board meeting.



Breaking the mold of traditional collective bargaining, the union put forward proposals far beyond wages and benefits.

team members were alone in the room with district representatives. This move was, at times, controversial. Current SPFT President Denise Rodriguez, who at the time was a middle school Spanish teacher and the union’s vice president, has been a part of the past five contract negotiations as a member of the bargaining team. “Bringing the CAT members into the room was a very different way of doing things that left me unsettled,” Rodriguez says. “I felt powerless. Maybe the bargaining team wasn’t as valuable as we thought we were.”

But then Rohlfiing put another metaphor into the mix. He encouraged both the bargaining team and CAT members to see breaks in the negotiations like time-outs on the basketball court. In a time-out, coaches huddle to decide next steps. Then they present their plan to the team. In the context of bargaining, the bargaining team members were the coaches, while members of the CAT were the athletes about to head back to the court.

“I watched how the process turned out, and I became a believer,” Rodriguez admits. “Our members saw that it was working, and it was.”

Breaking the mold of traditional collective bargaining, the union put forward proposals far beyond wages and benefits, based on the recommendations from the study groups and listen-

ing sessions. Board members received packets containing signatures from 4,000 people who had signed a petition in support of the bargaining teams. Another 2,000 signatures were collected after the meeting.

SPFT partnered with Minnesota 2020, a progressive, nonpartisan new media think tank, to produce videos highlighting high-priority bargaining proposals. Each Monday, a new video was released publicly,* in a sense continuing the open negotiations, with or without the district. Minnesota 2020 had approached the union seeking ways to help, encouraged by the collaborative process and vision outlined by the teachers.

In January 2014, hundreds of educators and parents met outside of dozens of Saint Paul public schools in the midst of a Minnesota blizzard for a nontraditional “walk-in.” At each school location, a member briefly spoke to the crowd, emphasizing the priorities outlined by teachers, parents, and the community, and the need for all parties to return to the bargaining table. As parents stood with teachers and children, it was a visible reminder of the power of the community. Rather than walking out, everyone walked in to school to start the day.

*The videos are available on the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers YouTube channel at www.bit.ly/1Us2bsh.

Increasingly, members were prepared to strike. On February 10, the SPFT executive board voted to authorize a strike vote to take place on February 24. With this announcement, the campaign encountered a turning point. Parents became even more engaged, creating their own Facebook group to show solidarity and to discuss ways in which they could support teachers and students if a strike happened. The group became a space for parents to publicly vent and work through disagreements. Other labor unions publicly supported the teachers. For the first time since 1989, steps were taken in Saint Paul to prepare for a possible strike.

Finally, in a marathon bargaining session from February 20 to 21, the district agreed to negotiate on all the issues the union had put on the table. A strike was averted. A historic contract was agreed to and ratified. (For lessons that SPFT learned from this campaign, see the box on the right.)

Connecting with the broader community inside and outside of contract campaigns became a top priority.

Generally, media coverage of teacher contracts fails to include any information outside of the dollars and cents and other agreed-upon details. That was the case with reporters covering previous SPFT contract resolutions.

However, in their coverage of this contract, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and other news outlets included stories about the broader wins for teachers and students, including many of the priorities outlined in “The Schools St. Paul Children Deserve” and highlighted in every step of the campaign. In a story titled “St. Paul Teacher Deal Goes beyond Wages and Class Size,” reporter Mila Koumpilova wrote, “Taxpayers wondered about wages and benefits. But in more than 60 pages of new or revised agreements were also innovative ideas that drew little attention. A rethinking of the traditional parent-teacher conference, an avenue for educators to make over their schools, new support for novice teachers—those are just a few among potentially consequential changes to the contract.”

Prioritizing Community Partnerships

Connecting with the broader community inside and outside of contract campaigns became a top priority for SPFT President Ricker and her team. This included ongoing conversations and relationships with elected officials and other community leaders. And it

meant continuing a long tradition of Saint Paul teachers fighting for what is right—especially in matters of social justice. That long tradition includes being home to the first organized teachers’ strike in the United States. Female members of Local 28 conducted that strike, which began in Saint Paul on November 25, 1946.

“There is a deep historical precedent in this local of lots of community activism that, the more I learned about, the more I got excited,” Ricker says. “It wasn’t just the 1946 strike, although that was obviously something that really captured my attention. Generally, teaching doesn’t really attract firebrands, although I think teachers are more militant than we give ourselves credit for.”

In recent years, those “firebrand” members of SPFT have played a pivotal role as activists on important issues at the local, state, and national levels, partnering with other labor unions and the broader progressive community. In 2006, SPFT members called on the Minnesota legislature to pass the Cover All Kids bill, which cut in half the number of children who didn’t have access to basic healthcare in the state. In 2012, the union successfully engaged its members in campaigns to defeat two divisive constitutional amendments that were on the ballot in Minnesota. In 2014, members were active in campaigns to raise the state’s minimum wage and in national efforts to reform our country’s broken immigration system.

For Ricker and others, engagement in issues affecting the broader community, rather than a sole focus on improving professional conditions, is fundamental for unions. “It has to be both,” she says. “We have to be assertively and aggressively working on community-benefit issues, and we have to be the voice for teaching and learning quality in our field at the same time.” □

Lessons Learned

- Grounding in values and beliefs is powerful. Speaking and acting out of your own story is critical to building strong relationships with members and with the community.
- Transparency is key. Keeping the process open and available to the public allows everyone to see what you are fighting for and to join with you.
- Intentionally make space for all perspectives to be heard. This is true internally (e.g., for the bargaining team) and in public spaces (e.g., meetings with community members).
- Start early—there are no shortcuts to good organizing. Building ownership, leadership, and involvement of members, parents, and people in the community takes time and resources.
- Don’t just play defense. Get everyone involved in thinking about how to improve public education grounded in shared values, beliefs, and experiences.
- Be bold. Expand beyond issues “typically” addressed in contract negotiations.
- Expect and prepare for some pushback. When you change how the union acts, there will be pushback both internally and externally. Be open to it, but don’t get trapped by it.
- When you do all this, parents will have your backs, and it will energize your members.

Connecting with Students and Families through Home Visits



Professional educators—in the classroom, library, counseling center, or anywhere in between—share one overarching goal: ensuring all students receive the rich, well-rounded education they need to be productive, engaged citizens. In this regular feature, we explore the work of professional educators—their accomplishments and their challenges—so that the lessons they have learned can benefit students across the country. After all, listening to the professionals who do this work every day is a blueprint for success.

BY NICK FABER

As educators, we have many hopes and dreams for our students. We want them to succeed academically and reach their full potential during their time in our classrooms and beyond. Their parents do as well. All parents, no matter who they are or what life has dealt them, want their children to succeed. For a variety of reasons, when our students come from low-income families, we as teachers and school support staff may not interact with their parents as much as we'd like. We may not get to know them and learn of *their* hopes and dreams for their children—our students. As a result, we build assumptions about families, as they do about us.

Nick Faber is the vice president of the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers. He has taught in the Saint Paul Public Schools for 29 years as an elementary school science teacher, earning national board certification in 1995. Elected board president of the national Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project in October 2014, he coordinates the local project in Saint Paul and participates in other community engagement work.

Parents know things about their children that can make us better educators, but except for one or two parent-teacher conferences each year, we may not see them at school much or get an opportunity to talk with them about their child's interests. Many parents work long hours at multiple jobs to provide for their families. It's not the interest in their child's education they lack but the time to devote to it.

In 2010, as a way to build stronger partnerships between parents and their child's teacher, I helped bring the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project* to Saint Paul, Minnesota, where I have been a teacher for 29 years. The project is a national nonprofit organization that was established in 1996 in California. It partners with school districts in several cities, including Boston, Denver, New York City, Reno, Sacramento, and Washington, D.C., enabling teachers to visit families so that together, parents and educators can build strong relationships to support student learning.

*To learn more about the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project, see www.pthvp.org.

How to Strengthen Parental Engagement

My colleagues and I believed at the time that the school where we were teaching, John A. Johnson Elementary School, could benefit from a stronger plan for parent engagement. This full-service community school opened its doors at eight o'clock in the morning and closed them at eight o'clock at night, with parents and students coming and going. But we started to realize that, as teachers, we really weren't interacting with many parents, even though our school offered wraparound services such as housing and job services and a dental clinic. In fact, we pretty much just saw parents at parent-teacher conferences in the fall and spring. We would also see a few parents—not necessarily the ones we most needed to reach—during parent nights at school to discuss curricular changes in math and reading or show them how they could help their students with core subjects at home.

We wondered why more parents didn't come to the school for these evening events and engage with their children's teachers. One of the things we started to realize was that a lot of our parents had not had successful experiences themselves in school. Johnson enrolled approximately 400 students, nearly all of whom received free or reduced-price meals. Most of our families were low-income and often uncomfortable coming into the school.

Secondly, we as educators began to realize that we were part of the problem: we were looking at parents from a deficit lens. We were essentially telling them, "You don't know something and we do, and we're going to ask you to come into school, a place where you don't feel comfortable, and we are going to tell you what you don't know. And then we (the staff) are going to stand around and wonder why you don't show up, and we're just going to repeat that cycle over and over again."

At the time, I taught science to kindergartners through sixth-graders at Johnson, and I was also an active member of the Saint Paul Federation of Teachers (SPFT). During an organizing training, I met a community organizer from California. We started talking about parent involvement (or the lack thereof, at my school), and he asked me if we had ever thought about doing home visits. I told him that we hadn't, and he shared with me what his organization was doing with the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project (PTHVP). He gave me the organization's contact information, and I reached out to the executive director, Carrie Rose, who expressed interest in working with educators in Saint Paul.

I told our district's area assistant superintendent about the program's training, which cost \$3,000, and I got the typical response: "There's no money." So, I went to Mary Cathryn Ricker, at the time

our local president and now the executive vice president of the American Federation of Teachers, and asked if our local could fund the training. I explained to her that home visits could not only benefit our students but also help our teachers become better acquainted with the community. She was intrigued and began looking for ways to fund the initiative.

Mary Cathryn eventually found grant funding for PTHVP trainers to come to Saint Paul. They trained six of our teachers (including myself), our community school coordinator, and the principal of Johnson Elementary; Mary Cathryn participated as well.

The training took three hours; we learned the nuts and bolts of this particular model, including how to set up the visit and questions to ask to get to know a parent quickly. Visiting teachers focus on asking about the parent's hopes and dreams for his or her child and what school was like for the parent when he or she was young. Such questions let teachers learn more about parents' interests in their children's education and enable parents and teachers to better relate to each other throughout the school year. We also explored the barriers that might impede a strong visit: for instance, negative assumptions we may hold about our students' families, and fears we may have, such as making some sort of cultural faux pas when interacting with parents, especially those who are new to our country. And we discussed the importance of feeling comfortable around other cultures and languages—more than 70 are spoken in Saint Paul public schools.

Those six teachers visited about 15 families that first year. After those visits, we met as a group to debrief. We realized we held so many differ-

ent assumptions that proved to be wrong: for instance, that because a lot of our students lived in poverty, we were going to find parents who weren't passionate about their children's education and success, and houses that were falling apart and in disarray.

What we found instead was that parents really did care about their children's education and that the fundamentals to support their learning were there. They shared their stories of where they were in life, how they got there, and how they wanted better for their children.

Many parents were resistant to our visits at first. They were suspicious of our interest in coming to their houses, and understandably so—teachers in Saint Paul didn't typically do such a thing unless something was wrong (really wrong). And the fact that their child's teacher was saying she wanted to come over to "get to know you" so that she could be a better, more informed teacher was met with skepticism. But because we visited a cross section of our students, never targeting any subgroup, and offered to meet somewhere else



We wondered why more parents didn't come to the school for evening events and engage with their children's teachers.

in the community if the parents felt more comfortable doing so than meeting in their home, all the parents agreed to our visits and word got around that our efforts were sincere.

After these initial visits, we realized what a positive impact this program could make in the lives of our teachers and students. So we, as a union, decided to expand it. Again, we asked the district to buy into it. This time, I went to our district's family engagement coordinator and said, "Are you interested? We found this program really powerful." The district official expressed little interest, saying, "It's really not a direction we want to go with our parent engagement." We were disappointed but not deterred.

A few months later, we brought the idea to our bargaining team during contract negotiations. The team loved the home visit concept and put it on the bargaining table. Because we do open bargaining here, meaning the public can attend contract negotiations (and therefore parents are in the room), it would have been hard for the district to say, "No, we don't want our teachers going out and visiting parents." The district agreed to the program, and we won \$50,000 that year in our teachers' contract to fund the program. The amount, which has increased to \$75,000 in our current contract, paid for stipends for teachers' home visits. Even today, the extent of the district's involvement is limited to funding stipends, while SPFT pays the trainers for conducting the trainings for teachers before the visits.

Getting to Know Each Other

Teachers in every public school in Saint Paul can participate in this program but are not required to do so.

They are compensated \$50 for each home visit they make, and these take place outside their regular school day, on their own time. The stipend is to cover their time setting up and making the visit as well as their transportation. Typically, home visits last 30 to 40 minutes.

To receive the \$50, a teacher must complete our training, which we've extended from three hours to four. A training team made up of six teachers, a paraprofessional, two parents, and a retired teacher, all of whom have been on (or, in the case of the two parents, have received) home visits, runs the project, with occasional advice from two administrators. The team meets monthly to plan trainings and outreach and never holds a training without one of the two parents present. SPFT compensates parent trainers for their time at the same pay rate as our teachers.

Teachers must also log their visits after they occur and submit records of those visits to me, the project coordinator. And they are required to attend a two-hour debriefing session after their visits, in the fall and spring. To keep the program strong and growing, we felt that it was important to meet regularly as a group.

We encourage teachers who participate in the program to conduct a home visit in the fall with each of their families. We also encourage them to make one in the spring. We must go in pairs on the visits so that parents build relationships with two educators in the school building. And I say "educators" here, rather than "teachers," because our paraprofessionals do these visits as well. In addition to teachers, SPFT represents two groups of paraprofessionals: educational assistants, and school and community support professionals. These groups' contracts also include the PTHVP. They have the same language and compensation per visit as teachers have. Typically, these paraprofessionals go on home visits with a classroom teacher, but some paraprofessionals in our high schools visit together.

Because the emphasis of the first home visit is on establishing relationships, teachers and paraprofessionals don't bring anything with them. These visits are not for having a parent-teacher conference, getting an Individual Education Program (IEP) signed, or going over school rules—all of which can take place at another time and in a different setting. This time is sacred and meant for establishing relationships, so we don't want to raise anything that might distract from that.

The educators also don't need to take notes during their visits, since visiting homes in pairs allows them to debrief immediately after with their visiting partner. They remind each other what was discussed and bounce ideas off one another. It's especially important for teachers to remember what they learn about students—their

interests and any activities they participate in after school—so they can better connect with students and possibly work that knowledge into a lesson plan.

At the spring visit, the visiting educators might bring materials along, based on the parent's expressed interests for the child from the fall meeting. Once you have established a relationship with the family and know about something the parent wants to work on with his or her child, you can follow up. For example, you might say something like, "I know you've been talking about wanting to make sure your child is up to grade level in reading this year. I heard that at our first visit, and you mentioned it at parent-teacher conferences. So I brought you these books that you might want to read this summer to help your child's literacy skills improve. I know that's something that you really value and that we can partner on."

Again, we emphasize that these visits are not for discussing how many times a student has skipped school. And they're not a place to do a report card conference. The purpose is to get to know each other and focus on the parent's hopes and dreams for his or her



These visits are not for discussing how many times a student has skipped school. The purpose is to focus on the parent's hopes and dreams for his or her child.

child. For instance, parents often tell us they want their child to be the first in the family to attend college or they wish their child had more friends at school. We want parents to know that we, as educators, see them as an asset. The philosophy of our home visit project can be summed up this way: no matter who you are, no matter what life has dealt you, you know something about your child you can share with me that can make me a better teacher.

There's so much finger-pointing today in public education. A lot of times in social situations, people who don't know I'm a teacher will start blaming teachers for everything that's wrong. When I tell them that *I am* a teacher, they immediately pivot to blaming parents.

Educators and parents are the two groups of people who are always blamed for our students not achieving. At the end of the day, we're also the people who know our students the best. What makes our home visit project work so well is that these two groups, instead of blaming each other, are getting together and supporting each other in raising and educating these children.

Of course, there are challenges. Our biggest stumbling block right now is that most of our educators, like educators everywhere, are just short on time. In Saint Paul, schools with teachers who are making the greatest number of home visits are the ones whose principals have unlocked the class list early in the summer so that teachers can visit families during their summer vacation, when many teachers take a break from classroom teaching and have greater flexibility in scheduling these visits. Our big push now is to convince the entire district to commit to sharing class lists with our teachers by August 1. So even if teachers choose not to do home visits, they can still reach out to parents in some way, by phone or email, before school starts the day after Labor Day.

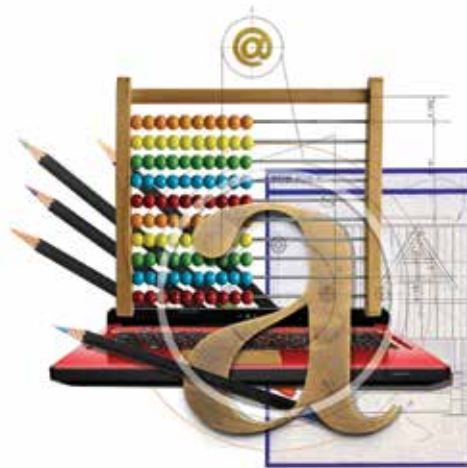
“When Are You Coming to My House?”

Since it first began in 2010, the program in Saint Paul has grown significantly. We have gone from having a handful of teachers make 15 visits five years ago to having 160 educators make more than 1,000 visits this past school year. And more than 50 of our schools, nearly all of them high-poverty, now have anywhere from two to 20 educators who have received training and have made, or are prepared to make, home visits.

Teachers and principals have been enthusiastic about this program and take pride in its success. At our debriefs, teachers report numerous benefits. They feel supported by their students' parents, and they talk about being able to communicate more freely with them. Greater communication allows teachers and parents to take care of academic and behavior problems quickly, before they get

out of hand, enabling students to stay in class and therefore increase their learning time.

An evaluation of the program,* commissioned by the national Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project and SPFT, found that teachers do indeed value the home visit model. Of the educators who visited homes during the 2013–2014 school year and who responded to a survey that was part of the evaluation, 76 percent said that home visits changed their assumptions about parents. And 93 percent said that making a home visit taught them something about their students they didn't already know.



Students don't care what you know until they know you care. Home visits show students you care.

According to the evaluation, which was also based on observations of debrief sessions, “teachers reported feeling energized by the process of home visiting,” with some teachers calling it “their favorite part of the year or their job.” It just makes sense that when teachers build relationships with parents and feel supported by them, they find their work rewarding.

Home visits also helped teachers strengthen their connections with colleagues. As the evaluation makes clear, “in a profession that can often isolate teachers in their classrooms, the home visiting program gave them a shared experience and time to build relationships with their fellow teachers.”

Students have been receptive to these visits. Some get very excited when they know their teacher is planning to see them in their home. It's not uncommon for students to eagerly ask their teachers, “When are you coming to my house?” It may sound cliché, but one thing educators who do home visits often say is that students don't care what

you know until they know you care. Home visits show students you care.

Parents have also welcomed these visits. They respect the effort educators are making to come into their home, a place that might feel about as comfortable for the visitors as it feels for parents going into school. And just by teachers extending themselves outside the school day, they are showing parents that they actually care about their children.

Just as important, the program, which in Saint Paul is run entirely by educators and parents, has helped parents move away from seeing the teachers' union as an obstacle. Now they are saying, “Wow. Our teachers' union wants its members to go out and visit us in our community and have a relationship with us.” That's a pretty powerful message to send, and it's one that has helped us organize parents to advocate for the resources their children—our students—need. □

*To read the full evaluation, *St. Paul Federation of Teachers Parent/Teacher Home Visiting Project Evaluation*, visit www.bit.ly/1ARXQb7.

Bilingual Education

Reviving an American Tradition



BY CLAUDE GOLDENBERG AND KIRSTIN WAGNER

In the United States, bilingual education continues to provoke fierce debate. It seems that nearly everyone—from educators to policymakers to parents with school-age children to those without children—has a strong opinion on whether children with little fluency in English should be taught academic content in their home language as they learn English.

Many people, however, regardless of whether they support this approach, would be surprised to learn of our country's legacy when it comes to bilingual education.

Bilingual education has been a part of the American educational landscape since before the United States was forged from a collection of fractious colonies. According to one report, the first instance of bilingual education in the future United States occurred with 17th-century Polish settlers in the first permanent

English settlement of Virginia.¹ At the time, the colony was in severe need of the Poles' manufacturing skills for shipbuilding and glassworks. So the colonial government extended to Poles "the rights of Englishmen," permitting them to establish the first known bilingual schools on the American continent.

The American Bilingual Tradition by the German scholar Heinz Kloss, first published in English in 1977, further documents the little-known history of bilingual education and other types of support for those whose first language was not English.² From its colonial beginnings, bilingual education in the United States has existed in one form or another to the present day, with a brief interruption during and right after World War I in the wake of virulent anti-German sentiment and a more general nativist opposition to the use of non-English languages.

There have been German bilingual schools in Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and other states; bilingual schools for Scandinavian languages in the Dakotas, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, among other states; Dutch bilingual schools in Michigan; Czech bilingual schools in Nebraska and Texas; Italian and Polish bilingual schools in Wisconsin; French bilingual schools in Louisiana, Ohio, and throughout the northeast; and Spanish bilingual schools in the southwest and, most recently, in Florida and the northeast. By 1900, contemporary estimates were that more than 1 million elementary grade students—more than 6 percent of the 16 million elementary grade students at the time—were receiving bilingual instruction in English and another language.³ This is almost certainly a greater percentage than are enrolled in bilin-

Claude Goldenberg is the Nomellini & Olivier Professor of Education at Stanford University. Previously, at California State University, Long Beach, he was a professor of teacher education, an associate dean of the College of Education, and the executive director of the Center for Language Minority Education and Research. Early in his career, he taught junior high school in Texas and first grade in a bilingual elementary school in California. Kirstin Wagner holds an undergraduate degree in international relations from Stanford. For the last four years, she has worked with elementary and middle school students in Palo Alto, California. Portions of this article were published online in Goldenberg, "Congress: Bilingualism Is Not a Handicap" (Education Week, July 14, 2015).

gual programs today, at most around 3 percent of the elementary grades population (prekindergarten through grade 8).⁴ The schools educating these 1 million students in 1900 form part of the American bilingual tradition, which is essentially ignored in contemporary debates over bilingual education.⁵

Political Support for and Challenges to Bilingual Education

The modern bilingual education era in the United States had its origins in the Cuban Revolution.⁶ Cubans fleeing their native island after 1959 were overwhelmingly from the professional and business classes and were intent on succeeding in their new English-speaking home while maintaining their language and culture. The bilingual programs they established in Florida were and remain among the most successful in the country. These expatriates did nothing novel, much less radical. In keeping with the American bilingual tradition, they were becoming part of the fabric of American society while maintaining their own distinct linguistic and cultural strands, both in and out of school.

The most important impetus for widespread adoption of bilingual education, however, was the 1960s civil rights movement. At a time of national liberation struggles and demands that our society live up to the ideals of “equality under the law,” Latino activists, educators, and academics made the education of Spanish-speaking children a top priority. Among their principal tenets, as a matter of civil rights, was that the education of Latino children build on their native cultures and include instruction in Spanish.

The culmination of this political movement on the educational front came with the passage and 1968 signing into law of the Bilingual Education Act (also known as Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA), which Kloss calls “the first major measure adopted at the federal level in order to promote bilingualism.”⁷ On the one hand, this was indeed precedent setting. But on the other, the act was an extension of a legacy reaching back to the 17th-century Polish settlers in Virginia mentioned earlier. It was “much more in keeping,” Kloss observes, “with widespread though little known American traditions than some of those who fought for its adoption may have been aware of.”⁸ Contrary to its title, however, the Bilingual Education Act did not require bilingual education, even though in practice all of the early programs it funded used students’ native languages in the curriculum to one degree or another.⁹

For the next 30 years, through different presidential administrations, the status of bilingual approaches to educating language minority students rose and fell. Studies, evaluations, and research reviews appeared that presented differing views of bilingual education’s effects on student achievement. Polemics proliferated. Caught up in the culture wars, bilingual education pitted “traditional” American values and visions of a unified America against presumed “radical” attempts to promote multiculturalism and linguistic pluralism, both of which were feared to result in a fractured and Balkanized America.

At times, bilingual education was favored, or at least not slated for elimination. At other times, most recently with the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA under the No Child Left Behind Act, bilingual education was left far behind, no longer part of the federal framework for the education of English learners as it had been since 1968. Tellingly, under the administration of President George W.

Bush, the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs became the Office of English Language Acquisition.

Throughout its history, bilingual education has always had its share of doubters and detractors.¹⁰ The present era is of course no exception. In addition to federal policies that were at best indifferent, if not outright hostile, to bilingual education, starting in 1997 voters in Arizona, California, and Massachusetts enacted the country’s most restrictive language policies, severely limiting the use of the home language in the education of language minority students.

These political moves were understandable, given the widespread frustration with naggingly low achievement by many of the nation’s 11 million students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. But have such moves worked? Results suggest not so much.

From its colonial beginnings, bilingual education in the United States has existed in one form or another to the present day.

In a 2006 study of the effects of Proposition 227, California’s “English for the Children” ballot initiative, researchers found that even after 10 years in California schools, an English language learner has less than a 40 percent chance of being considered proficient in English.¹¹ A similar examination of Boston’s public schools, conducted in 2009, showed increases in out-of-school suspensions, grade retention, and dropout rates for most of the five largest non-English-speaking language groups after Massachusetts restricted bilingual education.¹² In Arizona, the achievement gap in reading between English language learners and non-English language learners has increased by about one and a half grade levels for fourth- and eighth-graders, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In California, the gap has increased almost as dramatically as Arizona’s in eighth grade and has increased slightly in fourth. In Massachusetts, the achievement gap has increased somewhat in both grade levels. In contrast, in the country as a whole, where generally bilingual instruction remains an option, the reading achievement gap has *decreased* by nearly a grade level in fourth grade and has *decreased* slightly in eighth grade.¹³

To be fair, it’s difficult to draw hard and fast conclusions based on state data, since policies vary in many ways and other trends might suggest different conclusions. For example, the rate at which Arizona’s English learners are considered “English proficient” has increased since 2005. But even so, the test scores of the

70 percent of English learners who do not become proficient in English each year have plummeted. In California, the rate of English learners considered English proficient has also increased, although very little—from 7 to 12 percent.

One thing is clear, though: restrictive language policies are no silver bullet. As the data reported above suggest, they might even be counterproductive.

In order to assess the advantages and disadvantages of bilingual education, it's more useful to look at research than at messy state data, where we know little about what types of bilingual education students are receiving, how many are receiving it, and how the redesignation rates—the rates at which students who are initially classified as “limited English proficient” gain sufficient English proficiency to be designated fluent English speakers—have changed. And, unlike earlier periods in American

around the sun rather than the other way around.)

Other studies have found that, at worst, instruction in the home language produces English results that are no different from results for English learners in all-English instruction, with the added bonus of allowing them to maintain and further develop their home language. In fact, these were the findings of researchers from Johns Hopkins University in the most experimentally rigorous study of bilingual education conducted to date.¹⁶ The researchers, who studied data from Spanish-speaking students in Texas's Rio Grande Valley, found that bilingual education can help promote *bilingualism* without significantly sacrificing English proficiency. Comparable findings have been reported with Mandarin and English speakers in Northern California.¹⁷ In these studies, students in Mandarin immersion—whether they were English or heritage Mandarin speakers—developed Mandarin proficiency while outperforming their nonimmersion peers on standardized reading and math tests *in English* in the upper elementary grades.

Why, then, the opposition to bilingual education? Despite the evidence that bilingual education can actually boost achievement in English, or at a minimum not detract from it, many continue to subscribe to the “commonsense” logic that English-only instruction will lead to faster acquisition of English proficiency. Moreover, opposition toward bilingual education is inflated by critics who falsely frame it as a choice between proficiency in English or in the student's home language.¹⁸

Resistance to bilingual education is sometimes rooted in xenophobia and ethnic prejudice, although clearly not all bilingual education skeptics are prejudiced xenophobes. But the anti-foreign-language and anti-immigrant rhetoric that peaks during periods of increased immigration is clear evidence that nativist sentiments can lead to fears that the use of languages other than English in school will somehow fracture the national identity.¹⁹

For many Americans, this national identity is tightly bound to speaking English. Liberal historian and John F. Kennedy confidant Arthur Schlesinger worried that encouraging multiple languages and cultures would lead to a “disuniting” of the United States.²⁰ But Heinz Kloss's monumental study that we mentioned earlier demonstrates just the opposite: “non-English ethnic groups in the United States were Anglicized not *because of* nationality laws which were *unfavorable* toward their languages but *in spite of* nationality laws relatively *favorable* to them.”²¹ This seems paradoxical, as does so much having to do with bilingual education.

The explanation Kloss offers should give pause to bilingual education's detractors. Language minority groups became assimilated, Kloss persuasively argues, not because of “legal provisions” restricting the use of their native languages but because of “the absorbing power ... of the manifold opportunities for personal advancement and individual achievements which this society offered.”²²

From Bilingual Education to Bilingualism

Whatever the reasons for opposition, it's time to move the discussion away from bilingual education—which in the United States is invariably about *those kids*—and focus instead on bilingualism and its benefits for *our kids*—all of our kids—and the adults they will become. Experience and research in the United States and other countries around the world, including Canada,



history, we now have a credible research base to determine whether the American bilingual tradition benefits individuals and society at large.

A Closer Look at the Research

It may seem counterintuitive, but in fact instruction in a student's home language can improve achievement *in English* (or whatever the national language may be). At least six meta-analyses (quantitative research syntheses), involving dozens of studies, support this conclusion.* A recently published long-term study by two Stanford University researchers found that students enrolled in bilingual programs since elementary school were, by high school, more likely to be deemed proficient in English compared with similar students who had been in all-English programs.¹⁴

A likely theory to explain these results is that students develop their academic skills most readily in their home language while acquiring English proficiency, and then, as they learn English, transfer what they have learned in the home language to their new language.¹⁵ (If this sounds implausible, just think of those skeptics who believed Columbus was out of his mind when he suggested one could reach east by sailing west, or those who condemned Copernicus and Galileo for suggesting that the earth revolved

*For more on effective instruction for English learners, see “Unlocking the Research on English Learners” in the Summer 2013 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/summer2013/goldenberg.

Finland, and Sweden, have demonstrated that children can learn their own and a second or even a third language—for example, French, Spanish, and English; Swedish, Finnish, and English; or Mandarin, Cantonese, and English—and turn out academically and linguistically competent in both, all three, or more. Canada, despite language-based political tensions that seem to appear occasionally in Quebec, has a relatively seamless approach to bilingualism that spans from school instruction in both English and French to official government business to road signs and to labels on merchandise.

Far from being a problem, bilingualism is an asset both to individuals and to society. Bilingual education (a means) can help us take advantage of this asset by promoting bilingualism (a goal) *both* for English speakers and for students who come from non-English backgrounds.

languages, particularly Chinese and Spanish. Referring to bilingual candidates, a New York City executive coach noted, “It’s easier to find them jobs and they often get paid more.”²⁷

The economic benefits of bilingualism can vary significantly depending on factors such as age, location, industry, and languages spoken. For instance, in towns along the U.S. border with Mexico, fluent bilingualism may help individuals obtain certain occupations, while at the same time making employment in other positions less likely.²⁸ Specifically, research has shown that fluent bilinguals have an advantage over monolinguals in obtaining occupations above low-skill services and manual labor but not necessarily in higher status occupations. For instance, fluent bilinguals are more likely than English-speaking monolinguals to gain employment in middle-tier public service roles such as police officers, medical assistants, and reception-

It’s time to move the discussion away from bilingual education and focus instead on bilingualism and its benefits for all of our kids and the adults they will become.



Apart from the obvious intellectual and cultural advantages of speaking two or more languages, bilingualism has been linked to a number of other positive outcomes. In a comprehensive review of 63 studies, researchers from Washington State University found that bilingualism is associated with cognitive benefits such as increased control over attention, improved working memory, greater awareness of the structure and form of language, and better abstract and symbolic representation skills.²³ Other research, widely publicized when it first appeared, has even shown that bilingualism delays the onset of Alzheimer’s disease.²⁴

Beyond the cognitive benefits, recent studies suggest that bilingualism may also have economic benefits for young adults related to employment, promotion, and earnings. One study has found that fluent bilingualism is associated with a decreased likelihood of dropping out of high school and an increased probability of obtaining a higher status job and higher annual earnings.²⁵

Conversely, monolingualism may have costs: one study has found that for young adults in the United States, a lack of proficiency in one’s home language is associated with annual income losses of between \$2,100 and \$3,300 (after controlling for cognitive ability, educational attainment, and parental socioeconomic status).²⁶ A University of Phoenix Research Institute survey, reported in the *Wall Street Journal*, found increasing demand among prospective employers for workers who speak foreign

ists. On the other hand, fluent bilinguals are less likely than their English-speaking monolingual peers to have occupations such as physicians, lawyers, and public safety managers, even at similar levels of education. These findings suggest that bilingualism can confer important economic advantages, but that the advantages might be constrained by other factors, such as the social status of bilinguals’ first language or discrimination against immigrants.

To the extent that these other factors constrain the advantages bilingualism confers, it appears that bilingual education can also play a role in reducing their effects. In a review of the research on bilingual education in Canada and the United States, researchers found that bilingual education can have positive effects on intergroup relationships, identity, and self-esteem.²⁹ Likewise, others have found that white, English-speaking children who participated in Spanish bilingual instruction were more likely to choose Latino children as potential friends compared with their white, English-speaking peers who, though in multiethnic classrooms, did not take part in bilingual education.³⁰

The United States has great linguistic resources we are not only failing to use—our schools are actually quashing them, if only through neglect. More than 11 million of the country’s 50 million public school students speak at least one of 400 different languages other than English at home. Yet only a negligible fraction of these students are in programs that simultaneously nurture

their home language while using it to help them acquire English and also to help English-speaking students acquire a second language.

Last year, 17 years after California (followed by Arizona and Massachusetts) began its assault on bilingual education, California state Senator Ricardo Lara introduced a bill in the California legislature, recently approved, to put a proposition on the 2016 California ballot that would give students more access to bilingual and even multilingual instruction. Passage of the proposition by California's electorate would be an important step forward in increasing the state's and the country's linguistic resources.

Lara's bill was timely, as demand for bilingual education has been rising in many states. In Oregon, an explosion of interest in dual-language programs led the state to award nearly \$900,000 in grants for additional programs in 2013, adding to the programs



that already existed in 70 schools throughout the state.³¹ Parents and students in Washington, D.C., have also demonstrated their desire for bilingual programs. At one of the city's eight dual-language immersion schools, nearly 1,100 applicants applied for 20 spots in 2013.³² The Seattle area now boasts 30 bilingual preschool options, and the parents driving this demand are not necessarily bilingual themselves. In fact, at one of Bellevue's Spanish-English immersion public preschools, 96 percent of the children have monolingual English-speaking parents.³³ Interest in bilingual programs crosses lines of language background, neighborhood, and income as parents across the United States realize the social and economic value of bilingualism.³⁴

School districts, seeing the benefits bilingual education offers to their students, are also actively fighting for these programs. Despite legislation in California that has come close to eliminating bilingual education, 30 percent of students in the San Francisco Unified School District are enrolled in bilingual programs.³⁵ This is in large part due to the district's efforts to reach out to parents and notify them of the option to authorize their children's placement in one of these programs. New York City has partnered with foreign governments that provide funding for bilingual programs in their languages and is developing or expanding 40 dual-language

programs for the 2015–2016 school year.³⁶ To ensure the success of their investments, districts like Arlington Public Schools in Virginia are undergoing extensive evaluations of their bilingual programs.³⁷

Support for bilingual education is evident at the state level as well. Nine states have approved the "Seal of Biliteracy," which will appear on the high school graduation diplomas of students who have studied and attained proficiency in two languages.³⁸ Hawaii's Department of Education established the Hawaiian Language Immersion Program in 1987,³⁹ and Montana's governor recently signed into law a bill that will fund Native American language immersion programs in public schools.⁴⁰

For its part, in reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Congress is missing an opportunity to capitalize on this groundswell of support by including provisions and even providing funds to encourage and help states and localities develop and implement bilingual instruction, not just for language minority students but for *all* students to have the opportunity to become bilingual.

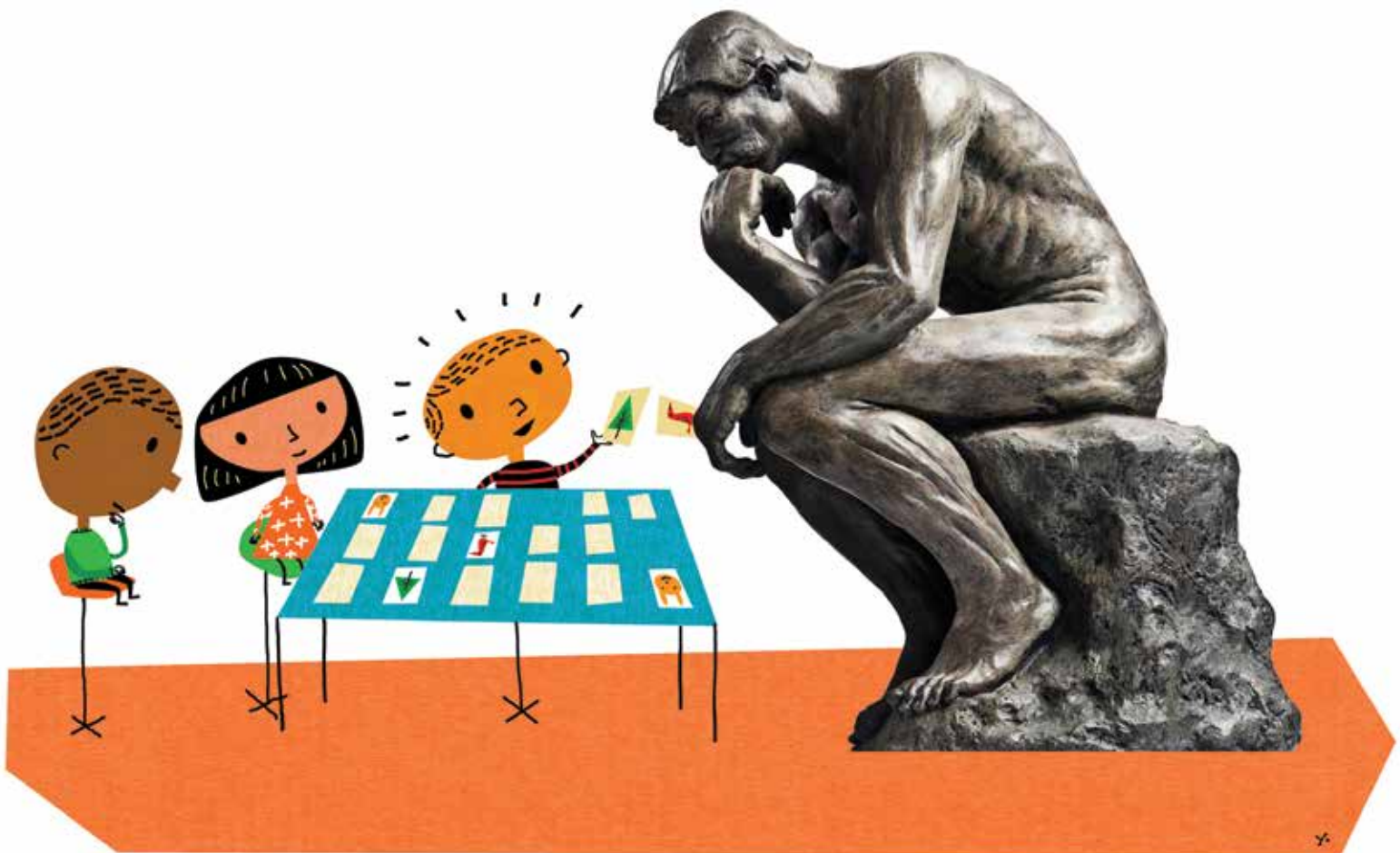
Such provisions were part of the ESEA legislation of the 1960s but were eliminated under No Child Left Behind—a dysfunctional aspect of the law that should be corrected. Federal legislation cannot and should not attempt to impose bilingual education, of course. But it can help strengthen an important American tradition that we risk losing, to everyone's detriment. □

Endnotes

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2. Heinz Kloss, *The American Bilingual Tradition* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1977; repr., Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1998). Originally based on Heinz Kloss, *Das Nationalitätenrecht der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1963). Citations refer to the 1998 edition.
3. Kloss, *American Bilingual Tradition*.
4. The basis for this 3 percent figure is as follows: The most recent federal study of Title III, which provides federal funds for English learner (EL) support, reported that native language instruction was the least common type of instructional service for EL students: Only 20 percent of districts provided native language instruction to a majority or all of their ELs. There are approximately 3,700 Title III districts. See U.S. Department of Education, *National Evaluation of Title III Implementation: Report on State and Local Implementation* (Washington, DC: Department of Education, 2012), 45. Based on numbers reported in the Title III report, the average number of ELs in the nationally representative districts was about 1,200. Multiplying this number by 20 percent of 3,700 (740), we can estimate that, at most, about 900,000 ELs receive some amount of native language instruction in school; the number in elementary school is certainly lower. A second source of students in bilingual programs would be students from English-speaking backgrounds in immersion programs designed to help them acquire a second language. A current estimate places the number of these programs at around 1,000. See Korina Lopez, "Spanish-Language Immersion Schools Gain in Popularity," NBC News, November 9, 2014, www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/spanish-language-immersion-schools-gain-popularity-n225776. As with the data on ELs in bilingual programs, it's impossible to give a precise number of students enrolled, but we can estimate that each school might enroll, at most, 270 students (assuming one or two classrooms of 30 students each at each of six grade levels). 270 students at 1,000 different schools total 270,000 English-background students in immersion programs; but again, the number in elementary school will be lower. Taken together, these figures suggest that there are, at most, about 1 million elementary grade students in bilingual programs, no more than in 1900. When we consider there are nearly 40 million elementary grade students in the United States, this means that no more than 3 percent of U.S. students in the elementary grades are receiving some form of bilingual education. See "Enrollment in Educational Institutions, by Level and Control of Institution, Enrollment Level, and Attendance Status and Sex of Student: Selected Years, Fall 1980 through Fall 2021," in National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2012, table 2. Even if some of the assumptions made here are wrong, there would have to be more than 2 million elementary grade students in bilingual programs to approach the percentage in 1900. (Our thanks to Annette Zehler for her help in making current estimates.)
5. See chapter 4 of James Crawford, *Educating English Learners: Language Diversity in the Classroom* (Los Angeles: Bilingual Educational Services, 2004).
6. Crawford, *Educating English Learners*.
7. Kloss, *American Bilingual Tradition*, 369.
8. Kloss, *American Bilingual Tradition*, 369.
9. Crawford, *Educating English Learners*.

(Continued on page 44)

Do Students Remember What They Learn in School?



How does the mind work—and especially how does it learn? Teachers' instructional decisions are based on a mix of theories learned in teacher education, trial and error, craft knowledge, and gut instinct. Such knowledge often serves us well, but is there anything sturdier to rely on?

Cognitive science is an interdisciplinary field of researchers from psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, philosophy, computer science, and anthropology who seek to understand the mind. In this regular American Educator column, we consider findings from this field that are strong and clear enough to merit classroom application.

Daniel T. Willingham is a professor of cognitive psychology at the University of Virginia. He is the author of *When Can You Trust the Experts? How to Tell Good Science from Bad in Education* and *Why Don't Students Like School? His most recent book is *Raising Kids Who Read: What Parents and Teachers Can Do*. For his articles on education, go to www.danielwillingham.com. Readers can post questions to "Ask the Cognitive Scientist" by sending an email to ae@aft.org. Future columns will try to address readers' questions.*

BY DANIEL T. WILLINGHAM

Question: Part of me feels funny asking students to memorize content knowledge because I know they are going to forget a lot of it. (After all, I know *I* have forgotten a lot of what I learned in middle school.) What does the research say about memorizing things for school that you're just going to forget later?

Answer: We certainly forget things over time, and there's no reason to expect that what students learn in school should be any exception. But take heart: we don't forget everything, and under some conditions, we remember nearly everything. Researchers have some understanding of why we're likely to overestimate what we've forgotten. And most important, there is some evidence that the memory of what we've learned in school matters—and actually makes us smarter.

“Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.”

This quotation is variously attributed to Albert Einstein, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harvard President James Bryant Conant, psychologist B. F. Skinner, and many others. (In fact, its origins are obscure.)¹ The quotation is typically invoked in one of two contexts. Either the author means to suggest that schools do not teach things that *really* matter in life, or, on the contrary, that schools *do* educate, even though we forget most of the details we’re asked to learn.

Seldom questioned is the assertion that what’s learned in school is forgotten. Perhaps it seems self-evident. Many of us have come across a decades-old test paper and been shocked to see that, at one time, we could name Brazil’s most important exports or prove that two angles are complementary.

The contention that we forget most of our education is wrong. Under some conditions, we remember nearly everything.

Nevertheless, the contention that we forget most of our education is wrong. Naturally, lessons learned in school are subject to forgetting, like any other experience, but some of what we learn stays with us. Let’s look at the conditions that contribute to retaining or losing school lessons. Then we’ll examine the reasons we might overestimate forgetting.

What Do We Remember from School?

The year-end cumulative examination used in many classrooms suggests a natural experiment; what if students took the same exam a second time, say, a year later? Many experiments have relied on this basic structure, with the second exam composed of different questions than the first but testing the same concepts. The upshot? There’s less forgetting than you might think.

Learning loss is usually expressed as a percentage of original performance; for example, students averaging 80 percent correct on test one and 40 percent correct on test two would have shown a 50 percent loss. A review from the mid-1990s pulled together the existing experiments on this issue and reported that, in 22 experiments using test questions that demanded students recall information (for instance, “What years in U.S. history are often called the Gilded Age?”), learning loss was about 28 percent. Retention was even better when questions required recognizing the correct answer, as on a multiple-choice test. For such tests, the average learning loss across 52 experiments was just 16 percent.

These results sound too good to be true, and in one sense they are. Data on average levels of retention don’t reflect information about the conditions under which people were trying to remember. For example, the amount of time that elapses between the first and second tests would surely be crucial—you’ll remember more of the history you took in high school when you’re 20 years old than when you’re 40. Indeed, elapsed time matters, and the high retention rates reported in this review are due (in part) to a lot of relatively short test intervals.

Another study offered a systematic look at the consequence of test delay.² Researchers administered several types of tests (including multiple-choice questions with only two possible answer choices, so participants had a 50 percent chance of answering the items correctly) to adults who had taken a college course in cognitive psychology between three and 125 months (nearly 10 and a half



years) earlier. Recognition of concepts and important names was fairly good at the three-month delay—80 percent accuracy. Over the course of three years, accuracy declined to 65 percent, but there was little further decline. This relatively rapid loss over the course of a few years is typical, as is the maintenance of at least *some* residual memory of course material.³

We would also guess that the more a student originally learned in the course, the more she would remember. That is, if the A student knows more Spanish than the C student, she might still know more Spanish 10 or 15 years later. That eminently reasonable assumption seems to be true; if you know more to start with, you remember more later.⁴

Still another factor seems likely to affect memory for learning in school: what happens between the first and second test. Although a 30-year-old will have had 10 extra years in which to forget compared with a 20-year-old, she might remember more American history if she refreshes her memory by reading popular books about it.

In fact, when studies showed the rapid forgetting of course content, researchers had made reasonably sure that people were *not* revisiting course content. So what happens to memory if you do review the material?

As you’d predict, memory is better. For example, in one study, researchers asked seniors at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to take an examination in mechanics that was very similar to

one they had taken in their freshman year.⁵ (It was the final exam for a required mechanics course.) The researchers examined the seniors' scores, with the data broken down by major. They figured that biology or political science majors would have had few occasions to use their knowledge of mechanics in the seven semesters since they took the course. But students majoring in physics or mechanical engineering would be very likely to have used it.

The biology majors showed a loss of about 55 percent in their ability to solve problems, and a similar loss in their understanding of concepts. This finding—steep forgetting over the course of three years—is comparable to other findings we've reviewed. But the physics majors lost *none* of their ability to solve mechanics problems, and their understanding of concepts declined by only 25 percent. So reviewing course content (or closely related content) in future classes offered protection from forgetting.



Other work has shown that this factor—reviewing content later—can have an unexpected consequence. If something is reviewed consistently over the course of several years, there's a good chance it will not be forgotten, even if never used again. It's as though continued study permanently fixes the content in memory. This conclusion was drawn by researcher Harry Bahrick in a study of memory for high school algebra.⁶ Bahrick administered a battery of algebra tests to more than 1,000 people; some had just finished a high school algebra course, and some had taken such a course as many as 74 years earlier. Bahrick also questioned people extensively about the other courses they had taken in high school and college, and the grades they had received, verifying this information with the schools when possible. He also asked about the extent to which they relied on mathematics in their jobs, whether they enjoyed working on mathematical puzzles in their spare time, and so on.

Like previous researchers, Bahrick found that if you took algebra in high school, you would, over time, forget what you had learned. If you took Algebra II, you later remembered more algebra because you studied it more (in the same way that the physics students later remembered more mechanics than the biology students), but you still lost most of what you had learned, eventually. But remarkably, students who took some courses beyond calculus showed *no* loss of their algebra knowledge, even 50 years after their last math course, and even if their daily lives did not

require the use of algebra! The coursework up to and including calculus prompted students to continually use and review their algebra knowledge for several years. That's apparently what it takes to commit something permanently to memory. Similar findings have been observed in students studying Spanish as a second language⁷ and in people remembering the names and faces of school classmates⁸ and street names.⁹

So do we forget much of what we learn in school? This is a glass-half-empty-or-half-full type of question. I find it impressive that we remember any course content a couple of decades later, in the absence of putting it to use. And bear in mind, memory will be better to the extent that a student mastered the material in the first place and had reason to revisit it in the intervening years. And with systematic review over several years, the memory of that material will be nearly indestructible.

Memory will be better to the extent that a student mastered the material in the first place and had reason to revisit it in the intervening years.

If memory for what we learn in school really isn't all that faulty, as I've suggested, why do people think it is? There are two reasons. First, we underestimate what we know, and second, even when we recognize we know something, we may not realize we learned it in school.

You May Know More Than You Think You Know

We may misjudge our knowledge because we are quick to conclude that a failure of memory means the memory is gone, unrecoverable. Suppose you ask a middle-age friend about the plot of the novel *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles. Immediately, he remembers that (1) he read the book in middle school, and (2) the main characters are young men. If nothing else comes to mind in a second or two, your friend is likely to conclude he simply doesn't remember anything else. That's especially true if he already believes that his memory for school content is poor; why keep trying to remember if you're reasonably sure the memory simply isn't there? But continued attempts to retrieve a memory actually help; you are more likely to remember if you keep trying.¹⁰

A second reason people overestimate forgetting is that they don't consider the most powerful method of determining whether something is in memory: *relearning*. Here's what I mean. Suppose you started studying French in grade 6, and by grade 12 your French was good enough to engage in routine conversation. After

graduation, however, you did nothing to maintain your proficiency of the language. Now, 15 years later, you're planning a trip to Paris. Let's pretend you take a French test and find you've lost about 75 percent of the French you once knew. Is that 75 percent *gone*, simply erased from your memory?

It appears gone—after all, you couldn't remember it for the test. Well, suppose you started studying French again. If 75 percent of your knowledge is gone, then for you to become as proficient as you were at the end of high school, you would presumably have to study 75 percent of the seven years it took you the first time. But that doesn't seem right. Your intuition indicates you would relearn French more quickly than you learned it the first time. Your intuition is right. This phenomenon is called *savings in relearning*. Even if you cannot recall or recognize something you once knew, that doesn't mean the knowledge is utterly gone; the residue of that initial learning is evident through faster relearning.¹¹

handled by different memory processes than memory for the content.¹³ Thus, it's quite possible to retain content without remembering the context.

For example, if someone mentions a movie and you think to yourself that you heard it was terrible but can't remember where you heard that, you're recalling the content, but you've lost the context. Context information is frequently easier to forget than content, and it's the source of a variety of memory illusions. For instance, people are unconvinced by a persuasive argument if it's written by someone who is not very credible (e.g., someone with a clear financial interest in the topic). But in time, readers' attitudes, on average, change in the direction of the persuasive argument. Why? Because readers are likely to remember the content of the argument but forget the source—someone who is not credible.¹⁴ If remembering the source of knowledge is difficult, you can see how it would be easy to conclude you don't remember much from school.

Continued attempts to retrieve a memory actually help; you are more likely to remember if you keep trying.



The thought experiment I've just suggested has actually been conducted. Researchers tested adults who had gone to Japan or Korea to do missionary work. The missionaries spent between 18 and 36 months abroad, and the time elapsed since their return was between one and 45 years. The researchers quizzed the former missionaries on a long list of words they were required to learn for their work abroad, noting which ones they remembered and which ones they forgot.

Then the researchers compiled an individualized list for each missionary of 16 words he or she had failed to remember. Next, the researchers trained the subjects to learn this personalized list of 16 forgotten words, along with 16 new words. (They were actually pseudo-words the experimenters created, in order to be certain the subjects could not know them.) Compared with the new words, the old words were learned much more quickly, even though the first test indicated they had been forgotten.¹²

Losing the Source of a Memory

One reason we think we forget most of what we learned in school is that we underestimate what we actually remember. Other times, we know we remember something, but we don't recognize that we learned it in school. Knowing where and when you learned something is usually called *context information*, and context is

This problem is even more profound when we encounter the same information in multiple contexts. For example, if I ask you on which continent Egypt is located, you will quickly answer "Africa." But if I ask you where and when you first learned that, you will probably have no idea. If you were a second-grader who had learned that fact the previous day, you could readily tell me "I read it" or "my teacher told me." But as an adult, you've encountered that fact scores or hundreds of times in as many different contexts. The fact remains, but the contexts are lost.

Research by Graham Nuthall provides a good example.¹⁵ After 10-year-old students had a classroom lesson, Nuthall tested their memories for the content as soon as a week or as much as a year later. He also interviewed them about the circumstances in which they had learned it. He found that students were quite good at attributing their knowledge to the lesson after a delay of just a week, and they were also able to describe details of the lesson. After a year, students were still pretty good at answering detailed questions about the lesson, but their answers seemed to be based not on actual memory for the details but rather on memory for general principles, to which the students added inferences. And when it came to remembering context—how they had learned the information—their recall was often quite bad.

Nuthall offers one example of a student's loss of the source of

information. In a lesson on Antarctica, students saw a picture of a transport plane landing on a snowy field in bright sunshine. The photo was taken at 11 p.m., during the Antarctic summer. The speaker mentioned in passing that she actually acquired sunburn during the night. Eight months later, when asked to pick from a list the most serious problem faced by people working in Antarctica during the summer, one student picked “serious sunburn from the sunlight reflected off the snow.” When asked why she thought this was a serious problem, the student replied, “I’ve heard it somewhere,” and described how the sun shines 24 hours per day during the summer. When specifically asked if sunburn was mentioned during the school unit, the student said, “I can’t remember it.”

Naturally, we can often guess that we learned something at school based on the content. I might think to myself, “How else would I know the formula to find the volume of a sphere? That’s not the kind of thing I would read up on myself.” But if we make

Proving that school makes you smarter is not as simple as one might think.* Researchers started with the simple prediction that getting further in school ought to be associated with higher IQ scores. That’s true, and the effect is pretty strong. In one meta-analysis, the correlation of years of education and IQ was 0.46.¹⁶ (Correlation tells you whether two measures are related. For example, people who earn high grades in high school tend to earn high grades in college. That correlation is about 0.40.) But of course this simple correlation is difficult to interpret. Maybe it’s not that schooling makes you smarter but rather that being smarter makes you more likely to stay in school. Or maybe a third factor, like family wealth, is responsible. Wealthy people might have both better access to schooling and access to better schooling, and also to life experiences that contribute to IQ. So the association is observed because wealth increases both intelligence and time in school.

A better way to address the question entails statistically removing these other factors. Several researchers have taken this

Even if you cannot recall something you once knew, that doesn’t mean the knowledge is utterly gone; the residue of that initial learning is evident through faster relearning.



that attribution only when something sounds particularly school-like, we may lead ourselves astray.

Some knowledge gained in school might be especially difficult to recognize as such because it is so broad. For example, consider knowing how to look up and extract information from a two-dimensional table. Via the times table (and others), a student learns how to use rows and columns to find an entry, and that it doesn’t matter whether one locates the row first or the column first. Years later, the student may not recognize that this knowledge enables her to use a bus schedule. Another student may learn the technique of isolating variables to determine causality in science but not recognize that he’s using a strategy learned in school when he tries to determine what’s causing his allergic reaction to a new recipe for barbecue sauce.

So far we’ve seen that people probably remember more from their school days than they think they do. That’s all very nice, you might say, but are these memories consequential? Maybe you *do* remember the date of the Battle of Hastings. So what?

School and Smarts

The answer to “so what?” is that going to school makes you smarter, and some—possibly most—of the reason is that you remember stuff that you’ve learned in school.

approach, measuring the IQ of a large group of children at an early age, say 10, and gathering information about each child’s family, such as parental income and education. Then the researchers measure intelligence again some years later, often around age 19.

By the time they take that second intelligence test, people will differ in how many years they’ve been in school. So, we can see whether “years of schooling” is correlated with the IQ measure taken at age 19. We know they will be strongly related, but now we’re in a position to address the alternative interpretations that concerned us. We can test whether schooling is associated with age-19 IQ *after* we’ve statistically removed the effects of age-10 IQ, and also the effects of the family characteristics. The former addresses the interpretation that “smart people stay in school,” and the latter addresses the argument that “families, not schooling, make the difference.” The results of these studies¹⁷ show that schooling does indeed make students smarter.

*Here, I’m using standard intelligence tests as a measure of “smarter.” Whatever you think of them, IQ scores have long been known to predict job performance and individual economic success. See Linda S. Gottfredson, “Why *g* Matters: The Complexity of Everyday Life,” *Intelligence* 24 (1997): 79–132; and Yoav Ganzach, “A Dynamic Analysis of the Effects of Intelligence and Socioeconomic Background on Job-Market Success,” *Intelligence* 39 (2011): 120–129.

A third research technique is perhaps the most powerful. Occasionally, policymakers change the minimum number of years students must attend school. Thus, independent of family factors and student choice, a large number of students go to school longer than students in their jurisdiction used to. If schooling boosts IQ,* we should expect an IQ increase that coincides with the increase in compulsory years of education. In the 1960s, the minimum number of years of education required in Norway increased from seven to nine. The average years of education jumped from 10.5 to 10.8, and average IQ increased by 1.5 points.¹⁸

So schooling makes you smarter, but is there evidence that the stuff you remember from school is what's making you smarter? Maybe going to school exercises your brain, so to speak, so you get smarter, but the specifics of that exercise don't matter. We have some tentative (but probably not conclusive) research suggesting that the specifics *do* matter.



Two factors contribute to IQ: the breadth and depth of what you have in memory, and the speed with which you can process what you know. There are ways of measuring mental ability that are mostly independent of what you know. Sheer speed of processing data is one. For example, IQ is highly correlated with the time taken to verify which is the longer of two lines presented on a screen.¹⁹ Researchers have shown that although years of education is associated with IQ, it's not associated with processing speed. That finding suggests that education increases IQ by increasing the breadth and depth of what you know, which runs counter to the idea that school is like mental exercise, and that the content of the exercise doesn't matter.²⁰ Other research has evaluated whether schooling affects IQ via a boost in very general processing capability (for example, the ability to mentally manipulate several things in mind at once) or via improvement in more domain-specific knowledge like reading and math.²¹ Findings from this research support the latter: schooling bolsters IQ by increasing students' content knowledge and skills to use that knowledge.

*For more about schooling and measures of intelligence, see "Schooling Makes You Smarter" in the Spring 2013 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/spring2013/nisbett.

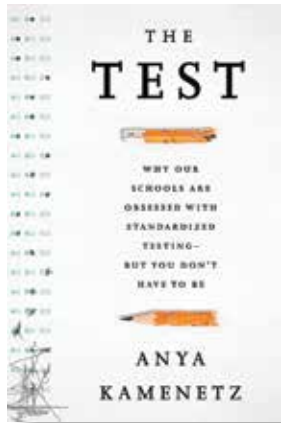
All too often, teachers are confronted with research conclusions that seem only to make their jobs more difficult. This subject is a happy exception. Research indicates that we remember far more content knowledge than we realize.

So what about that quotation offered at the start of this article? I believe it has things backward. Education is not what remains when we have forgotten what we learned in school. On the contrary, education *is* (at least in part) what we remember of what we learned in school. Teachers can rest assured that the memory of that learning is substantial. □

Endnotes

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THE TEST: WHY OUR SCHOOLS ARE OBSESSED WITH STANDARDIZED TESTING—BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE



As Anya Kamenetz writes in her book *The Test: Why Our Schools Are Obsessed with Standardized Testing—but You Don't Have to Be* (PublicAffairs), “something’s in the wind.” The backlash against high-stakes testing is in full force. Together, parents and teachers are decrying the way that standardized tests in math and reading have narrowed the curriculum, depriving children of a well-rounded education.

Kamenetz, an education writer and a parent of a young child,

chronicles the overwhelming frustration with testing in numerous interviews with students, parents, and teachers, and provides context with a look at the history of testing and its focus in recent federal education policy.

In the very first chapter, Kamenetz makes 10 arguments against testing, which include the following: “they are making teachers hate teaching,” “the high stakes tempt cheating,” and “they are gamed by states until they become meaningless.” While she acknowledges some benefits of the Common Core State Standards—for instance, with one set of standards there “will potentially be just three or four Common Core tests in use across the country,” which could help to make “comparisons

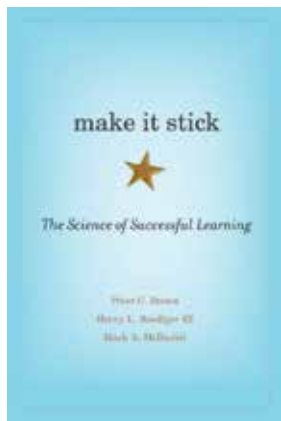
between states more valid”—she objects to attaching high stakes to these tests. She is also leery of the “major business opportunity” that the Common Core creates for for-profit companies, such as Pearson, given “school districts’ need to swiftly adopt brand-new curricula and tests.”

In the second half of her book, Kamenetz offers solutions. Among them is a focus on performance assessment. She highlights the New York Performance Standards Consortium, a group of public schools in New York state that require students to complete long-term assignments such as literary essays, social studies research papers, and science experiments. Students must also present their work to their teachers and peers. (In 2013, the consortium won the AFT’s inaugural Prize for Solution-Driven Unionism, which recognizes educators’ work in creating innovative solutions to tough problems.)

Kamenetz notes that from 2008 to 2012 (the years for which most recent data are available), the consortium schools in New York City and the city’s regular public schools shared similar student demographics. Yet consortium schools performed better in a couple of key areas: their five-year graduation rate was nearly 10 percentage points higher (76.0 percent compared with 66.1 percent), and their dropout rate was much lower (5.3 percent compared with 11.8 percent).

“Part of the Consortium’s edge may be that these are small schools with self-selected students and highly dedicated teachers,” Kamenetz writes. “But you can say, at a minimum, that given these numbers, individualized project-based learning sans bubble tests is not hurting these students’ academic progress and may be better preparing them to succeed.”

MAKE IT STICK: THE SCIENCE OF SUCCESSFUL LEARNING



Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning (Harvard University Press) is a book about how we learn. Cognitive scientists Henry L. Roediger III and Mark A. McDaniel, along with writer Peter C. Brown, merge complex research about the brain with accessible examples that bring the findings to life. The authors weave throughout their narrative lessons learned from aviation, neurosurgery, baseball, parachuting, ornamental gardening, and traditional classroom settings to illustrate how our brains gather bits of

information to form knowledge.

Most important, the authors describe the strategies that help us learn best. For example, “learning is deeper and more durable when it’s *effortful*,” they write. In other words, “learning that’s easy is like writing in sand, here today and gone tomorrow.” While rereading texts and massed practice—focusing on a single topic—are popular study techniques, they are actually among the least productive. And a strategy known as

“*retrieval practice*—recalling facts or concepts or events from memory—is a more effective learning strategy than review by rereading,” they find, especially when the practice is interleaved, meaning spaced out over time and interwoven across subjects. Think flashcards or a quiz.

The authors acknowledge the heated debate over standardized testing, amid concerns that it “leads to an emphasis on memorization at the expense of high-level skills.” But they say it has unfairly given knowledge acquisition a bad rap. “Accumulating knowledge can feel like a grind, while creativity sounds like a lot more fun,” they write. “But of course the dichotomy is false.”

They contend that “notwithstanding the pitfalls of standardized testing, what we really ought to ask is how to do better at building knowledge *and* creativity, for without knowledge you don’t have the foundation for the higher-level skills of analysis, synthesis, and creative problem solving.”

To succeed in any endeavor, one must gradually acquire knowledge to build expertise as well as the “conceptual understanding, judgment, and skill” that go along with it. By turning to “Tips for Teachers,” a section in the book’s final chapter, educators can demystify the learning process for their students and help them gain and retain the knowledge they need for any subject. Ultimately, the authors steer clear from being overly prescriptive, noting that “every teacher must find what’s right in his or her classroom.”

The Next Generation Science Standards

RELEASED IN APRIL 2013, the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) are based on the National Research Council's Framework for K–12 Science Education. They were developed by 26 states and partners, including the National Science Teachers Association, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and Achieve Inc., and have now been adopted by 14 states and the District of Columbia.

The standards bring together the latest research in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields to create a focused, coherent, and rigorous set of expectations for students. Ultimately, the point of these standards is to help students make informed decisions when it comes to science and technology, and better prepare them for college and career. To that end, they incorporate science and engineering practices and core ideas so that students learn to think critically and solve problems based on an understanding of concepts.

Of course, curriculum and resources, professional development, and time to learn about the standards and develop classroom materials are all essential to implementation. If you feel less than prepared to teach to the Next Generation Science Standards, you are not alone. The AFT has a team of NGSS experts who helped develop these new standards. This team is currently working to create learning opportunities for educators to understand what science education should look like in the classroom. Contact Melanie Hobbs (mhobbs@aft.org) to learn more.

And check out these helpful resources:



Next Generation Science Standards

Read the standards and learn about how they came about and what instructional shifts they require at www.nextgenscience.org.

National Science Teachers Association (NSTA)

The NSTA's website (<http://ngss.nsta.org>) includes information about the standards, curriculum planning, and professional learning, as well as videos and a library of resources vetted by 55 educators from around the country.

Edutopia

Ainissa Ramirez, a former engineering professor, regularly blogs for Edutopia on STEM-related topics. Read her posts at www.bit.ly/1MsoMCU, or listen to Science Underground, a weekly science podcast by

Ramirez and journalist Bill Retherford (www.scienceunderground.org). The short segments target students and teachers as the hosts share lesson ideas that regularly align with the standards.

Share My Lesson

An archived webinar at www.bit.ly/1Nv2ZYw introduces the MIT BLOSSOMS free online video library of more than 120 math and science lessons (<http://blossoms.mit.edu>). The interactive presentations, developed by high school and university educators, feature biology, chemistry, and physics lessons aligned with the NGSS.

Teaching Channel

"The Next Generation Science Standards: Standards with a Purpose" (www.bit.ly/1fc7Di3) is a blog post on the new science standards that provides an overview of Teaching Channel videos that will help teachers understand the standards and incorporate them into their classrooms. Watch the videos for high-quality lessons as well as a discussion on the instructional changes the standards require.

PBS LearningMedia

Drawn from programs such as PBS's Design Squad Nation and the Engineering Is Elementary project at the Museum of Science in Boston, "Teaching NGSS Engineering Design through Media" (www.bit.ly/1Pq77u5) is a collection of activities and professional development resources. They will deepen teachers' understanding of the NGSS and will help them make engineering come alive for elementary, middle, and high school students.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMES YANG

—AFT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT

A Personal Learning Network

EDUCATORS UNDERSTAND the importance of a positive school community. For students, this type of environment promotes trust and enables them to learn and feel valued.

But sometimes educators become so focused on guiding their students toward success that they forget about the importance of growing in their own profession. Just as students need support, teachers need it too. And so educators might want to consider establishing personal learning networks (PLNs) with their colleagues or joining an existing PLN. In a PLN, participants support each other by offering tons of advice, instructional tips, and classroom materials.

Establishing a Network

One of the most effective and immediate ways an educator can connect with a PLN is to find a teaching community that offers materials, resources, and advice applicable to his or her school and classroom. The AFT's own Share My Lesson (www.sharemylesson.com) provides a space for educators to share lesson plans and classroom materials (<http://go.aft.org/AE315sml1>), find online professional development (<http://go.aft.org/AE315sml2>), and connect with teacher leaders. Educators can also find great collections to help them infuse new ideas into their classrooms.

Using Blogs and Social Media

Another great way to establish a personal learning network? Blogs. Find several terrific ones at <http://go.aft.org/AE315sml4>.

By sharing thoughts through blog posts, educators can connect with others around the country and even the world. And the best part? Blogging provides a venue for reflecting on practice and, perhaps, gaining a different perspective. For those nervous about sharing their writing, commenting on blog posts written by other educators in a PLN is a great place to start.

Another way to form a personal learning network is through social media, such as Twitter. (Find Share My Lesson on Twitter at www.twitter.com/sharemylesson.) Though tweets are limited to 140 characters, these microposts are great for those who want to dip their toes online but are not ready to detail their thoughts in a blog post. Educators can also use Twitter to follow what others are saying, without actively tweeting.

And, finally, there's a tried and true method of establishing PLNs: meeting in person. Attending conferences and AFT events, or simply reaching out to teachers in the same school district, can create invaluable networks for educators.



No matter how it is set up, a professional learning community will enhance educators' experiences both inside and outside of the classroom—and ultimately help students be more successful.

—THE SHARE MY LESSON TEAM

RESOURCES

ELLs AND THE COMMON CORE

How can teachers involve English language learners in the rigorous work of the Common Core State Standards at the middle and high school levels? Teachers in Poughkeepsie, New York, address that question in a multimedia presentation that is featured on the free, research-based website Colorín Colorado, a partnership of PBS station WETA, the AFT, and the National Education Association. The presentation features lessons from Poughkeepsie schools that illustrate approaches teachers use in the Common Core environment, showcasing methods that bring an intense focus on academic vocabulary and the use of text-dependent questions to the classroom. The resource, developed by the Poughkeepsie teachers' union with a grant from the AFT Innovation Fund, is available at <http://go.aft.org/AE315res1>.

EUREKA MATHEMATICS CURRICULUM

Eureka Math is a preK–12 curriculum written by a team of teachers and mathematicians who have put a premium on the discipline's logical progression, a feature that is critical to effective mathematics instruction. The Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit Great Minds publishes Eureka Math, which

offers in-depth, teacher-designed professional development, books, and support materials. Developers of the curriculum emphasize that, while many curricula and textbooks bill themselves as “standards-aligned,” Eureka Math is created specifically to meet the new Common Core State Standards. Additional information is available at www.greatminds.net/maps/math/home.

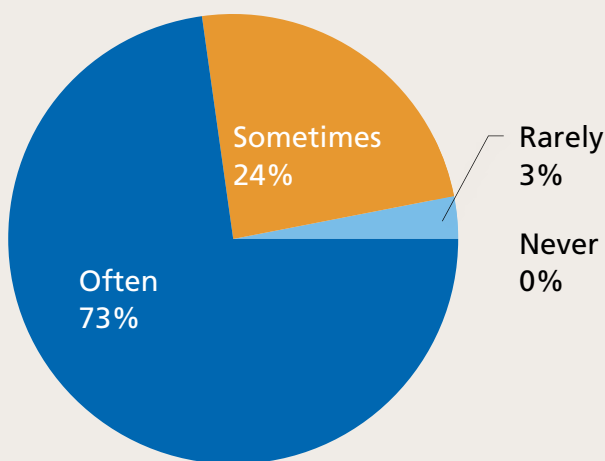
ETHICAL RECRUITING ABROAD

The Teachers' Code for Ethical International Recruitment and Employment Practices is a new policy model to help safeguard human dignity and protect the quality of school services whenever U.S. systems hire educators from other countries. The guidelines, unveiled in June by the AFT and several partners, help school systems ethically and effectively address a variety of issues—from visa types, disclosures, and documentation, to cultural and professional orientation for teachers who are new to U.S. classrooms. The document also features a strong statement of respect for individuals and their right to pursue better conditions and expanded opportunities in other countries. Get the code at <http://go.aft.org/AE315res2>.

SURVEY REVEALS HIGH STRESS AMONG TEACHERS

Job-related stress leaves more than three out of four teachers emotionally and physically exhausted at the end of the day, a first-of-its-kind survey reveals. The 80-question survey, developed by the AFT and the Badass Teachers Association, was completed last spring by more than 34,000 teachers and staff. Fewer than half of those responding say they are treated with respect by public officials, the media, and school boards. Among the greatest reported workplace stressors are the adoption of new school initiatives without proper training or professional development, mandated curricula, and standardized tests. The AFT is calling on the Department of Education to conduct a scientific study to shed light on the concerns raised in the survey. Preliminary findings are available at <http://go.aft.org/AE315news1>.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU FIND YOUR WORK STRESSFUL?



SOURCE: "QUALITY OF WORKLIFE SURVEY," PAGE 3.

TIPPING POINT ON TESTING?

The 47th annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools shows that 64 percent of Americans think there is too much emphasis on standardized testing in schools, and fewer than 20 percent consider test scores to be a good measure of school effectiveness and student performance. In what may be a reflection of growing concerns about testing, the poll also reveals that 54 percent of Americans oppose having teachers use the Common Core State Standards. "Americans are fed up with the overemphasis and high-stakes consequences of standardized tests," AFT President Randi Weingarten commented following the poll's August 23 release. "They've seen those consequences and effects firsthand and now oppose the Common Core State Standards and using test scores in teacher evaluations. What's infuriating is that parents and teachers have repeatedly raised the red flag over high-stakes testing, but policymakers routinely dismissed them." The 2015 poll marks the third straight year that a majority of the public opposes using standardized test scores to evaluate teachers. And a wide margin of Americans again identified lack of financial support as the biggest problem facing schools. The full report and survey highlights are available at <http://pdkpoll2015.pdkintl.org>.

ESEA REAUTHORIZATION MOVES AHEAD

A House-Senate conference committee is working to reconcile two very different visions for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), known in its current form as No Child Left Behind. In the Senate, a bipartisan majority in July approved its version of the bill, called the Every Child Achieves Act, by a vote of 81-17. It was a much different story in the House, where a companion bill, the Student Success Act, passed along party lines. The conference committee must iron out differences between the two bills, and the AFT is one of dozens of organizations urging Congress to approve a final bill that resembles the Senate's version. In a recent column, AFT President Randi Weingarten detailed the keys to crafting a strong ESEA bill, available at <http://go.aft.org/AE315news2>.

PLANS TO INCREASE COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

Democratic presidential contender Hillary Clinton in August released the New College Compact, a \$350 billion plan to ease college borrowers' massive debt burden and make higher education a more affordable, debt-free option for the next generation. The plan from Clinton, the AFT's endorsed candidate in the 2016 Democratic primary, addresses state disinvestment, which is a major contributor to soaring college costs, and would allow borrowers to refinance at current interest rates. This would help an estimated 25 million borrowers, who could save an average of \$2,000 over the life of their loans. Clinton also is calling for additional help for parents who are college students by adding 250,000 spaces at on-campus child-care centers through state-matched federal grants. Read details of the plan at www.bit.ly/1T198It.

PRIVATIZATION: RESPONDING GLOBALLY

Commercialization and privatization were top-tier education issues when delegates from 171 countries convened for the 7th World Congress sponsored by Education International (EI) in Ottawa, Canada, in July. The body adopted a resolution calling on EI to mount a global response to the rise of a \$5 trillion for-profit education industry, and to call out the growing trend to outsource education-related activities and services. The resolution also won support from guest speaker Jordan Naidoo of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization). The U.N. agency "is fully committed to education as a human right and the protection of that right as a public good," he said. The resolution is at www.bit.ly/1Nqx6mX.

TEACHable MOMENTS

More than 2,000 educators traveled to Washington, D.C., in July for TEACH (Together Educating America's Children), the AFT's biennial education conference. In her keynote address, AFT President Randi Weingarten urged members to raise their collective voice through collective bargaining, in schools and communities, and in the political arena. A united voice, Weingarten said, allows educators to counter threats such as public officials who are intent on overtesting students, demonizing teachers, and destroying public schools and the communities they serve. For comprehensive coverage of TEACH, including videos of general sessions, visit <http://go.aft.org/AE315news3>.

Where It All Comes Together

(Continued from page 9)

A similar set of questions must be asked of community partners: How must their policies, practices, and professional development change to sustain a community school? The emerging experience of school districts and communities in taking community schools to scale provides the foundation for a set of standards that the coalition is currently developing.

Strengthening Leadership Networks:

The coalition now coordinates networks of community school leaders, superintendents, community school coordinators, United Ways, higher education institutions, and funders. Expanding the reach of these networks to share lessons learned and broaden participation is crucial to achieving the coalition's goal of having 200 school systems and their communities adopt a community school strategy in the next five years.

Investing in Our Children: Inequities in school funding formulas in many states, and inadequate funding for critical opportunities and supports (e.g., early childhood education, afterschool programs, and mental health services), are obvious to many education observers. These funding gaps must be remedied at the federal, state, and local levels. A strong economy and equitable society require such investments.

Ultimately, community schools benefit students, families, and teachers in three important ways: They reduce the demand on educators and other school staff by addressing the academic and nonacademic challenges that students bring to school. They nurture students' social and emotional development. And they enable students and families to build social capital—the networks and relationships that support learning and development, and that enable young people to envision and enjoy a successful future.

In sum, the community school strategy is built on recognizing that the education and development of our children is a shared responsibility. Only together can schools and communities achieve positive outcomes for young people and our society. □

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Austin's Community Schools

(Continued from page 17)

And so Weeks and Zarifis are using community dinners and other strategies funded by the grant to seed changes in Austin's other high-poverty schools. At these dinners, the two men, along with facilitators from their organizations, ask parents, teachers, and students to join together in small groups to answer three important questions: What do you like about your school? What does your school need in order to be the school you want it to be? And what resources would make that happen?

While transformations at both Webb and Reagan resulted from times of crisis, Zarifis says that the union and the district "want to move away from change born from crisis to change born from need." To do so requires asking communities what exactly they need.

One night in April, about 50 people answer these questions at a community dinner at J. J. Pickle Elementary School, one of the schools that feeds into Webb. Parents, many of them Hispanic and a few African American, all of them pushing strollers and carrying small children, file into the gym for Pickle's first community dinner—a meal of chicken and tortillas, and a chance to share their thoughts on the future of their school.

After they eat, Weeks asks everyone to split up into groups of Spanish speakers and English speakers. Each group files into separate classrooms to discuss the three questions Weeks had asked them to answer. Children, supervised by staff members from Austin Voices for Education and Youth, stay behind in the gym to play and watch a movie.

In one classroom, several of Pickle's teachers and Patricia Sewall, a parent, sit in chairs arranged in a circle. As Gabriel Estrada, a youth and community facilitator from Austin Voices, begins asking questions, and Bernard Klinke, an organizer from Education Austin, records the group's thoughts, a teacher turns to Sewall. "I really appreciate you being here," she says. "I'm really sad more parents aren't here. We don't have parent involvement."

Sewall explains that she listened to the voice mail message from the school telling her about tonight's event. "That's why I'm here," she says and smiles. "I saved the message, too."

Zarifis, the president of Education Austin, nods. It's a good start. □

Bilingual Education

(Continued from page 32)

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SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER

STUDENT VIDEO CONTEST

voting rights

freedom of expression

labor rights

"Speak Truth to Power" is a video contest that encourages middle and high school students to become engaged in social justice.

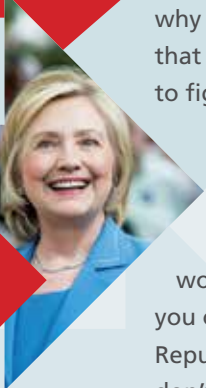
The contest is an AFT collaboration with Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights and its curriculum on human-rights defenders. Winning three- to six-minute videos have been made about such topics as voting rights, child labor, freedom of expression, bullying, reconciliation, labor rights, and domestic violence.

The contest encourages students to demonstrate strong content knowledge and engage in creative storytelling. And it is tech-friendly, with no video experience necessary and a simple uploading process.

For more information on the contest, including submission details, prizes, and a look at past winners, visit www.speaktruthvideo.com.

Hillary Clinton *on* the issues

As the first Democratic and Republican presidential primaries get closer, Hillary Clinton continues to show why she's the best person for the job—and the AFT's endorsed candidate. On the whole range of issues that affect AFT members both on the job and off, Hillary has shown she shares our values and is prepared to fight with us on behalf of students, families and communities.



What's more, rather than scapegoating unions, she's committed to working together with the AFT and other unions to rebuild the middle class and protect workers' collective bargaining rights. As she said on Labor Day, "America's workers are the backbone of our economy. Working men and women forged the basic bargain that made this country great—that if you work hard and do your part, you can get ahead and stay ahead." Unfortunately, she adds, that basic bargain is under attack from Republicans "who want to cut taxes for the wealthy and let corporations write their own rules. They don't want to strengthen workers' rights; they want to undermine them. We can't let that happen."

As a U.S. senator, Hillary had a 100 percent AFT voting record, and her stands on the issues reflect that strong record.

- On education, she promises to **work collaboratively with educators** on issues such as ending our fixation on high-stakes testing, addressing the impact of poverty on students, holding charter schools accountable and providing universal prekindergarten. "Where I come from, teachers are the solution," she says. "And I strongly believe that unions are part of the solution too."
- She has proposed a sweeping plan to **make college more affordable and accessible** and to help the large numbers of college students who are also parents. She would provide tuition-free community college, cut the interest rate on student loans, allow borrowers to refinance, and provide grants to states and colleges to reverse years of disinvestment in higher education. "We cannot continue to increase tuition and cost on the backs of hardworking families and their kids."
- Hillary **opposes contracting out and privatization** of public services and school district jobs. She has fought throughout her career to ensure public services are provided by public employees.
- She has **stood up for nurses** and, as senator, proposed a number of bills to address the nation's nursing shortage and support nurse education and high-quality healthcare. "I want more people to know that the single biggest correlation between your outcome in the hospital and the problem that brought you in is your nursing care."
- Throughout her career, Hillary has worked to **protect Social Security and Medicare** and ensure they are adequately funded.
- She has stood up for **equal pay and equal treatment for women** in the workforce, and she has championed women's health (including access to emergency contraception and a woman's right to make her own healthcare decisions) and the needs of families (such as paid family and sick leave and expanded healthcare coverage of low-income children).
- Hillary has a plan to **curb the outsized influence of big money** in American politics, including undoing the misguided *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision that benefits billionaires and corporate CEOs, requiring effective public disclosure of political spending, and creating a program of matching funds for smaller donations.



Visit the AFT's Elections Matter 2016 page for more information. (www.aft.org/election2016)

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