

*Education Follies*

Four Decades of  
Tilting at Windmills  
for No Apparent Reason

*Jeff Lee Byrem*

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Apparent Reason

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*Education is not the filling of a pail;  
it is the lighting of a fire.*

*W. B. Yeats and/or Plutarch*

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## *Foreword*

Several months after my retirement from Education, while idly poking about folders on my hard drive, I came across dozens of documents I had prepared that were related to various aspects of my work as a teacher, curriculum and assessment specialist, high school principal, and state-level bureaucrat. Sifting through them, I felt the need to share those documents that I believed addressed some of the significant reasons why American Education was failing to meet the needs of those students who most needed a sound education, and I *did* share via a blog: *Education Follies*.

In time, I realized that what I needed was not the opportunity to share because I knew little would come of it; instead, I realized I needed to reflect on my career. What follows are selected blog posts and edited historical documents from my personal archives that I assembled, after reflecting upon the over forty years I had spent tilting at educational windmills for no apparent reason. In other words, I compiled this memoir solely for my own edification. It has turned out that I needed to understand what I had experienced and learned

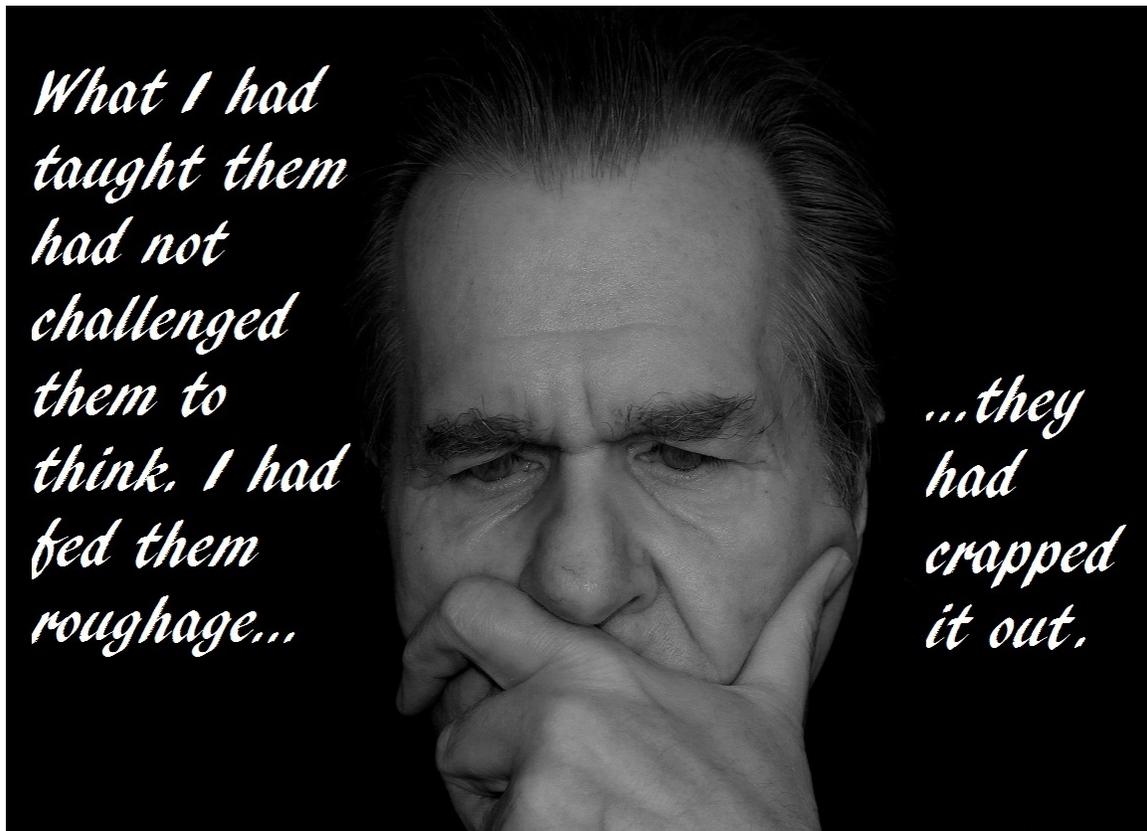
over the past four decades, before I could look toward what might be on the horizon.

If you have managed to lay hands on this memoir, I wish you well as you peruse what it contains and hope that you may find things that are enlightening or reinforcing. Underlying it all is my belief that *there are no reasonable excuses for failing to teach millions of our children.*

There are many metrics that certify too many students are not learning to a worrisome degree, and if there is no learning there has been no teaching, just educators tilting at windmills for no apparent reason.

Effective education is not rocket science. There are literally thousands of pieces of research and other sources that tell us what should and can be done to increase student achievement, but as an American Culture, we collectively do not do it. Is it because we lack the shared compassion and will to do the right thing, which is to ensure that all students are provided real opportunities to learn? Or do those in positions of cultural dominance and power just not give a damn about those who are the victims of History? Likely, it is both.

If we are a truly compassionate people who cared about others regardless of their race, ethnic background, or class, if all teachers practiced what we've learned about motivation and instruction, if educational leaders cared more about *making a difference* than they do about *making a career*, then all children would be receiving the education that American Mother Culture professes is the promise of equality of opportunity. At this moment in our history, that promise is an undeniable and immoral lie for millions of our children.



## *It's a Wonder I Can Think at All*

*When I think back on all the crap I learned in high school,  
it's a wonder I can think at all...*

Those words were penned by Paul Simon (*Kodachrome*) in 1973, eight years after I graduated from high school. When I heard the lyrics near the end of my first year of teaching, they resonated. I'll explain below, but first I must digress...

If you have done the math, you know I have been an actor in the Education Follies longer than many educators have been alive, and now I sit and reflect upon how much we've learned over the last forty years about what works in

classrooms, while the achievement of students in failing schools remains a challenge—a following chapter will address the knowing-doing gap.

I hope the stories, observations—egad, perhaps even links to research—that I share in this memoir will connect with experiences you have encountered in the Follies, perhaps align with a hypothesis burgeoning in your mind, or run smack into a contrary perspective you might have.

I intend to delve into some of the clown shows that seem to be regular acts in the Follies, year after year, decade after decade. The “top definition” of clown show in the *Urban Dictionary* is: *when people are really screwing up an activity that should be fairly straight forward.*

There may be chapters that you will categorize as absolute bullshit, but categorizing is a type of higher order thinking, and opportunities to engage in higher order thinking should be exploited. If a chapter is bullshit, let’s rumble (jefflee.novels@gmail.com) because the only way I’m going to continue to learn as a retired educator is from the heartfelt feedback of colleagues who are still in the trenches.

So join me, fellow actor, as we trip the light fantastic in the Education Follies by returning to what it was in Paul Simon’s lyric that resonated with me...

In 1972, fresh from finishing two years of alternative civilian service as a [Conscientious Objector](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscientious_Objector)<sup>1</sup>, and two years removed from student teaching and

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<sup>1</sup> <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscientious\\_objector](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscientious_objector)

methods courses, I was hired to teach science to seventh and eighth graders living in a small bedroom community north of New Haven, Connecticut.

My first weeks as a teacher were salvaged by a demanding principal, Hrach Mahakian, and a compassionate and knowledgeable Science Department Chair, Salvatore Sagnella. Survival, as so often happens with emerging teachers, is more often a matter of good fortune than systemic support (Do I hear an “Amen?”). I had been lucky, and thanks to these two great educators, I was surviving, but I was not thriving (i.e. neither were my students!).

In the early weeks, while I was hanging on by a thread, a friend with a questionable sense of humor had just enlightened me with George Bernard Shaw’s notable 1903 quip that “those who can, do, and those who can’t, teach.” This was way too close to home because after downgrading my personal expectations in my junior year from pre-med to biology, and then as the post-graduation, two-year, draft-lottery-required delay in my studies approached, I began to feel that I did not have sufficient drive to pursue doctoral studies. Clearly, I had decided I could not do. I switched my major to Biology Education.

What I learned from Hrach and Sal convinced me that the undergrad preparation I had received was mostly useless, except to provide the insight that Shaw could have gone one step further: if, in fact, those who can, do, and those who can’t, teach, my undergrad preparation in Education convinced me that *those who can’t teach, often teach others to teach!*

Never good at handling hits to my self-esteem, I was feeling pretty blue in May of 1973 when *Kodachrome* was released. I had already decided to leave teaching and had been accepted into a marine science graduate program when I first heard the song. As noted, the lyric resonated. I had survived the year. My students had learned things, but I knew Simon's line was touching my truth. What I had taught my students had not challenged them to think. I had fed them roughage. They had crapped it out.

During my two years of civilian service, I had managed to complete the requirements for a Master's degree in the evenings. My instructors and professors had reinforced the Shaw Corollary referred to above, save for one, whose name I unfortunately cannot remember. During his course in the Fall of 1972, the instructor exposed us to the notion that how we teach and assess what students are supposed to know and be able to do, should be done in a way that increases the probability that ALL students will learn significantly, and NOT in a way that will generate a normal distribution curve—the latter being what many educators still believe is their primary job: sorting students.

I had understood, internalized, and applied what that sadly forgotten instructor had taught me (something which originated decades before 1972, and many years later would come to be called Standards-based Education) and by January of 1973, I was determining what it was that I wanted students to know and be able to do (no state or district curriculum had been provided to me; rather, I was provided with a text book that would have taken years to “complete,” from which I extracted my “objectives”). I was designing assessments that measured whether or not the students were, in fact, mastering the instructional

objectives, and I was implementing instruction that was designed to lead students to mastery.

My assessments told me my students were learning, but what they were learning was not reinforcing, strengthening, and challenging what is perhaps our greatest human gift: the capacity to engage higher-order thinking. I realized I was officially in the cadre of teachers who had inspired Paul Simon's lyrics and was not proud of it. Getting out of teaching seemed the best thing to do in the spring of 1973, but in less than a year, I was back in it up to my neck.

*The most important, foundational goal of educators should be reinforcing, strengthening and challenging higher-order thinking.*

This goal may be a tad obvious, or maybe just airy nonsense, but I bet if you put your mind to it, you can come up with actual, specific consequences that are the likely result of (public, private, or parochial) education's failure to effectively and universally nurture and enhance higher-order thinking. (Hint: think about Presidential politics over the past two decades.)



## *The Knowing-Doing Gap and the Nonscientific Sample of One*

In the 1990's, the Delaware Department of Education assigned an inexperienced educator the daunting task of leading a task force to determine what should be done in order to improve failing high schools. I was a representative of the district in which I worked and sat quietly as suggestion after suggestion was made. After an hour of a futile pursuit of consensus, I suggested the issue was not what it was that *should* be done; rather, I suggested it would be more productive if we figured out why educators were not implementing what leaders in schools and districts had already decided *should* be done.

My suggestion generated some discussion, but before we pursued the matter too far, the facilitator turned the group back toward the task with which she had been charged. Ultimately, nothing came of the inexperienced educator's attempts, through no fault of her own, nor was there a groundswell of interest in my suggestion! Fortunately, and unbeknownst to me at the time, Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton studied this phenomenon and wrote a book called "The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge into Action."

*Sidebar: Note the reference in the title to "Companies." Also note that for some reason—even though schools are complex systems with many of the same sub-systems and systemic interactions found in business entities—educators, according to my nonscientific sample of one, are loathe to look toward the century of research generated in the fields of management and industrial psychology, much of which—including the title referenced above—has direct relevance to some of the most significant challenges educational leaders are expected to face.*

Looking back over four decades in Education, my nonscientific sample of one leads me to hypothesize that **the Knowing-Doing Gap is an underlying foundation of failure in challenged schools.**

*Sidebar: I did not use "root cause" because "underlying foundation," to me, suggests an observation/ opinion and not a specific determination arrived at by a structured, root cause analysis.*

The emotional impediments and social machinations that are the foundation of the Knowing-Doing Gap are complex, which means the approaches management must use to overcome the gap must be equally complex, but there

is one simple axiom that every educator must accept and address unless s/he has a profound need to fail:

***We must view with profound respect the infinite capacity of the human mind to resist the introduction of useful knowledge.***

Francis Cummins Lockwood  
Quoted in *The Freshman and His College* (1913)  
by Thomas Raynesford Lounsbury

If you are an educator, you can imagine the number of times I have been a participant in professional development over the decades, including the numerous events I have facilitated for other educators, especially in the final years of my career. It is astonishing to me how often my colleagues participated in those sessions but never implemented what they learned. And if you are an educator, I am certain you are either an example of, or know colleagues who, exemplify the Knowing-Doing Gap, i.e. there is a gap between what such persons know they should be doing, and what it is they are actually doing in their classrooms.

What this means is, the decisions made by Knowing-Doing Gappers indicate the Gappers value their individual nonscientific samples of one over, say, Robert Marzano's nine *High-Yield Instructional Strategies*,<sup>2</sup> which were derived from a meta-analysis of a *very large* number of studies.<sup>3</sup> In my experience (*my* nonscientific sample of one), the Knowing-Doing Gap is a huge problem in

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<sup>2</sup> [Link to good summary of "Marzano's Nine" put together by Palm Beach Schools:](http://www.palmbeachschools.org/qa/documents/Handout5-MarzanoHighYieldStrategies.pdf)  
<<http://www.palmbeachschools.org/qa/documents/Handout5-MarzanoHighYieldStrategies.pdf>>

<sup>3</sup> [Link to wonderful paper by Marzano re: the "Nine."](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/cali/setting_the_record_straight_on_high_yield_strategies.pdf) <  
[http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/cali/setting\\_the\\_record\\_straight\\_on\\_high\\_yield\\_strategies.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/cali/setting_the_record_straight_on_high_yield_strategies.pdf)>

education, especially in schools populated by the most disadvantaged and challenged students.

If you are an educational leader, I believe wholeheartedly that you should challenge yourself to learn all you can about the specific origins of, and specific approaches to overcome, the Knowing-Doing Gap.

You can buy, study, and reflect upon Pfeffer's and Sutton's book, but if you're as busy as I was when I was a principal, and you're reading this chapter at eleven-thirty p.m. because it's the first free minutes you've had all day, you might want to check out the [eight-page summary](#) the authors put together<sup>4</sup>.

If I've just piqued your curiosity, and you're not motivated enough to tackle the eight-pager, you can skim the following [summary of Pfeffer's and Sutton's work](#) that a blogger named Jason Yip put together in 2012<sup>5</sup>; *HOWEVER*, just reading Yip's summary below will not do the trick. I only offer it with the hope that reading it might motivate you to learn more about the Knowing-Doing Gap:

- **Why before How:** philosophy is important. Focus on Why (philosophy, general guidance) before How (detailed practices, behaviors, techniques).

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<sup>4</sup> <[http://www.wenell.se/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/thinking\\_knowing.pdf](http://www.wenell.se/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/thinking_knowing.pdf)>

<sup>5</sup> <<http://jchyip.blogspot.com/2012/01/eight-guidelines-for-closing-knowing.html>>

- **Knowing comes from doing and teaching others how.** "Knowing by doing develops a deeper and more profound level of knowledge and virtually by definition eliminates the knowing-doing gap."
- **Action counts more than elegant plans and concepts.** Ready, fire, aim. Act even if you haven't had the time to fully plan the action.
- **There is no doing without mistakes.** What is the (top leadership's) response? Forgive failure. "Reasonable failure should never be received with anger."
- **Fear fosters knowing-doing gaps, so drive out fear.** "Organizations that are successful in turning knowledge into action are frequently characterized by leaders who inspire respect, affection, or admiration, but not fear."
- **Beware of false analogies:** fight the competition, not each other. Collaboration and cooperation over competition. "The idea that the stress of internal competition is necessary for high levels of performance confuses motivation with competition."
- **Measure what matters and what can help turn knowledge into action.** "The foundation of any successfully run (school) is a strategy everyone understands coupled with a few key measures that are routinely tracked." Focus on measuring the business model/process (aka why outcomes are achieved) over the outcomes.

- **What leaders do, how they spend their time and how they allocate resources matters.** "Leaders create environments, reinforce norms, and help set expectations through what they do, through their actions and not just their words.

If you are an educational leader who is placed into the role of change agent, and you ignore the Knowing-Doing Gap, I worry that you will be spending hours on planning for change that is likely to be doomed from the start.

If you are a teacher, and you are allowing your nonscientific sample of one to drive your practice, and not what *you know* is known about what works best with your specific kids, then *get over yourself!* You and I can “view with profound respect the infinite capacity of the human mind to resist the introduction of useful knowledge,” but *if you are a teacher charged with the moral imperative to educate our children and do NOT use what research indicates works in classrooms like yours, are you truly fulfilling that moral imperative?*

How would you feel about having an oncologist treat your child’s leukemia if that doctor had not incorporated into her practice what had been learned about the treatment of leukemia over the previous thirty years? If such a doctor somehow managed to establish a practice, it is highly likely that she would be sued for malpractice and ultimately drummed out of the profession.

How many teachers continue to practice on our kids, despite exhibiting the exact lack of professionalism shown by the oncologist described above, and why, as a culture, do we continue to tolerate this travesty? Why are these teachers not drummed out of the profession?



## *What Happens to Four-year-olds?*

For many years, I struggled to understand why normal four-year-olds—all of whom (according to my nonscientific sample of one) seem to have a remarkable capacity and eagerness to learn by exploration and experimentation—become fifth graders who are either emotionally disengaged from learning, or are students who appear to be motivated solely by the acquisition of gold-star stickers, dollar (or larger) bills for A’s, or recognition as student of the week. I encountered these fifth graders everywhere I went, and as a secondary teacher, virtually all of my students were these ubiquitous fifth-graders grown up.

Was this just the normal development of humans, I wondered; were we born with an innate curiosity that was aflame as a small child but destined to flicker and go out as we approached our adolescent years? The evidence suggested this was the case, but there was other evidence presented to my nonscientific sample of one, which suggested something else was at play.

There were moments in my classes when, exposed to demonstrations filled with cognitive dissonance (e.g. *Wait a minute! How can that piece of cardboard keep water in the cup when the cup is turned upside down?*) or challenged by questions never before considered (e.g. *The heat and light—the energy—coming from the burning candle you're holding has come from the sun, which is 149,600,000 km away: How could that possibly be?*) nearly every student became imbued with the same intense curiosity—the strong desire to learn—one sees nearly every day in a typical four-year-old.

*Sidebar: my nonscientific sample of one memory is that my highest achieving students were less impacted by those things that engaged the majority of students; I recall one of the “high flyers” telling me, after an inquiry-driven lesson that had generated significant student engagement, “Why didn’t you just tell us what we needed to know instead of expecting us to figure it out? What a waste of time.” We chatted further, and I discovered the student just wanted to know what she needed to know for the test, so she could get her usual “A.” Hypothesis: the “best” students as measured by GPA are the students most likely to have been rewarded extrinsically throughout their school experience, with the consequence that they may have a significantly-reduced intrinsic motivation to learn like a four-year-old.*

During a six-year hiatus from Education (1978 to 1984), I worked as a human resources executive with a retail firm, and later, with a university. Business management courses and professional development exposed me to findings from decades of research conducted in the fields of Industrial and Organizational Psychology regarding motivation—research, interestingly enough, ignored for the most part by educators.

What I was learning as a business person seemed to challenge the Skinnerian approaches to which I had been exposed as an undergraduate, approaches that had been promoted by education academics to my generation (e.g. kids are like pigeons: desirable behaviors can be conditioned by appropriate stimuli). One management workshop facilitator raised a very significant challenge to my then way of thinking: he claimed studies had shown extrinsic rewards directed at motivating a specific behavior almost always eliminated any intrinsic motivation a person might have had to, in fact, practice the desired behavior.

It was not until the late 1990's, while investigating Marvin Marshall's [Discipline without Stress](#)<sup>6</sup>, that I encountered a recommendation to read Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Motivation by Edward L. Deci and Richard Flaste. It was a dense and challenging read, but worth every minute that I put into it. For the first time in my professional career, I began to understand and appreciate why we humans (adults *and* children) do what we do.

In the previous chapter, I suggest that the Knowing-Doing Gap is a deep, underlying cause of Education's malaise. I want to hypothesize herein that

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<sup>6</sup>[www.marvinmarshall.com/the-raise-responsibility-system](http://www.marvinmarshall.com/the-raise-responsibility-system)

another deep, underlying cause of the malaise is: what has been discovered about motivation is not known by most educators; in other words, when it comes to the matter of motivation, there is no knowing-doing gap because (I hypothesize) there is a remarkable paucity of understanding about motivation among American educators.

Motivation is integral to everything an educator expects of others. A large body of research-based knowledge about motivation exists, which should be sufficient to require mastery of such knowledge, and yet, despite the importance of motivation in what we do as educators, such expectations are difficult to find in American college catalogs.

It might be helpful to know the degree to which the previous strong statement is accurate—I am relying on my nonscientific sample of one. If it is accurate, perhaps this deficiency is something that deans and other academicians in departments of education need to be address.

In the meantime, I suggest that educational leaders who may not have a deep understanding of motivation need to begin self-study in this area. An excerpt from the description of Why We Do What We Do from its Amazon.com page is a teaser and an opportunity to self-assess one's understanding of motivation:

*If you reward your children for doing their homework, they will usually respond by getting it done. But is this the most effective method of motivation? No, says psychologist Edward L. Deci, who challenges traditional thinking and shows that this method actually works against performance. The best way to motivate people—at school, at work, or at home—is to support their sense of autonomy. Explaining the*

*reasons why a task is important and then allowing as much personal freedom as possible in carrying out the task will stimulate interest and commitment, and is a much more effective approach than the standard system of reward and punishment. We are all inherently interested in the world, argues Deci, so why not nurture that interest in each other? Instead of asking, “How can I motivate people?” we should be asking, “How can I create the conditions within which people will motivate themselves?”*

Want to know more? I *strongly* encourage you to peruse [\*Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions\*](#)<sup>7</sup> by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci.

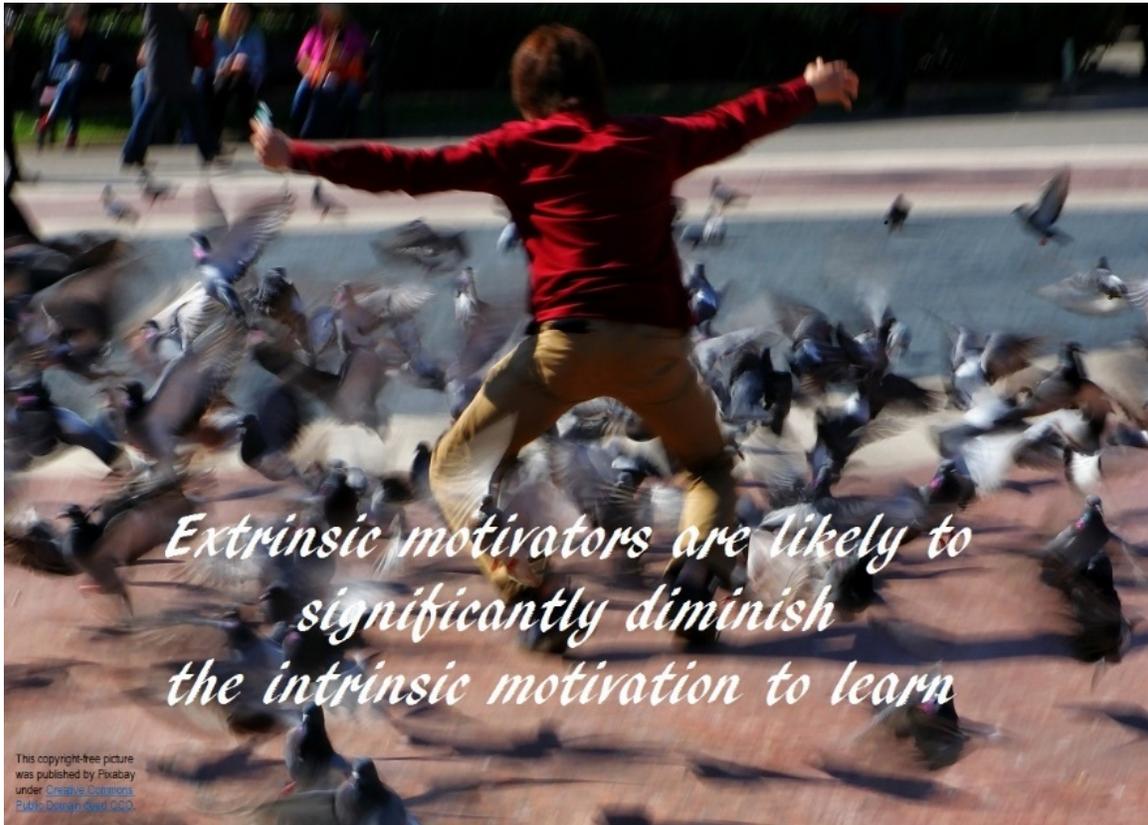
In addition, I encourage you to investigate Deci’s et al’s Self-determination Theory or SDT, beginning with the [SDT website](#)<sup>8</sup> to learn about scholars’ investigations into how we can support “our natural or intrinsic tendencies to behave in effective and healthy ways.”

The next chapter provides a memory technique that makes it easy to remember the three things needed to engage intrinsic motivation, i.e. what educators need to do to ensure that the remarkable capacity and eagerness of four-year-olds to learn by exploration and experimentation lasts for a lifetime!

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<sup>7</sup> Access to *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions* is available via this link: <[www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2000\\_RyanCeci\\_IntExtDefs.pdf](http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2000_RyanCeci_IntExtDefs.pdf)>

<sup>8</sup> SDT homepage: <<http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org>>



## *The Three C's (Children Are Not Pigeons!)*

In the previous chapter, the basic tenets of Self-determination Theory were considered as described in *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions* by Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci.

Understanding motivation is, to my way of thinking, perhaps the most important understanding an educator can possess, but my nonscientific sample of one tells me that a typical American educator's understanding is far less than what it needs to be. Too many of us rely upon extrinsic motivators, which *can* influence behavior, but extrinsic motivators are likely to significantly

diminish the intrinsic motivation to learn that we find with typical four-year-olds.

Many of us have been programmed to treat children like B. F. Skinner's pigeons. You *can* influence a child to do something if a reward is sufficiently valued by the child, but what happens when the reward is no longer provided? Educators need to understand and employ what is known about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to ensure that the remarkable capacity and eagerness of four-year-olds to learn by exploration and experimentation lasts for a lifetime!

Consider: By fifth grade, have we gold-starred, stickered, candy-barred, attaboyed, and student-of-the-monthed a child's natural intrinsic motivation to learn right out of our children (in a school setting), especially those students who are sometimes described as high-fliers. (I don't know about you, but to me, "high-fliers" creates an unfortunate connection with pigeons!)

Instead of using extrinsic rewards that may have a deleterious impact upon our children's intrinsic motivation to learn, Ryan and Deci suggest: "...in schools, the facilitation of more self-determined learning requires classroom conditions that allow satisfaction of these three basic human needs—that is (the need) to feel connected, effective, and agentic as one is exposed to new ideas and exercises new skills."

Elsewhere in the paper, the authors refer to these *three innate human needs* as the need for *autonomy*, *competence*, and *relatedness*. Given the barrage of ideas that are thrown at educators (by educators!) during the course

of a year, some years ago I gave a little thought to how I might help adults retrieve these three foundational needs.

I considered acrostics (a sentence made up of words that begin with the first letters of the words you want to remember) as a way to remember autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and I came up with a few. I considered *All Children Run*, which was a little too banal. I also considered *Angry Canadians Rage*, but Americans know that Canadians never get angry, so that would not have worked.

Ultimately, I opted to substitute control for autonomy, and connected for relatedness, because I thought the substituted words might have a more immediate hook for the educators I was training, *AND* it allowed me to encode *control*, *competence*, and *connected* as *The Three C's*. (Ryan and Deci actually use the terms competence and connected in the paper, so using those terms was not a stretch on my part!)

Presented to professional development participants, *The Three C's* has proved to be a helpful way to remember the three innate wants that each of us needs to employ if we wish to create a culture and climate in schools that allows students and colleagues to motivate themselves:

*Control*.....each of us has the need to feel as though we have some degree of control in our lives

*Competence*.....each of us has the need to feel capable, knowledgeable, and proficient

*Connection*.....each of us needs to feel connected with others in an emotionally meaningful way

Remembering three words is not the same as understanding the concepts, so it is important that you connect the three concepts with observed phenomenon, i.e. in order for you to incorporate the concepts into your practice, you have to implicitly understand what each looks like in the real world.

The following chapters will attempt to provide examples of what control, competence, and connected might look like when applied in the classroom and when applied to a faculty.



## *The Three C's: Control*

When I explored the meaning of control in the context of the classroom with professional development participants, this was the pushback I learned to expect: “Are you telling us we need to let kids decide what it is we should teach?”

Underlying this concern, I believe, is the palpable fear that I was suggesting to the participants that they should relinquish control to students regarding what it is students should be expected to know and be able to do. Challenges posed to me were:

- “What if they want to learn something that I don’t know anything about?”

- “What about the State Curriculum?”
- “What if I don’t have the resources to support what it is they want to learn?”
- “How am I going to explain this to the parents of AP kids?”

I bet you and I could generate a very long list of related questions if we put our mind to it, but let’s take a deep breath and consider this matter further.

I am not advocating that American K-12 teachers throw out the curriculum they are expected to teach for two very specific reasons: (1) students do not have the intellectual wisdom and maturity to make sound curriculum decisions, and (2) teachers do not have the freedom to allow students to make significant curriculum decisions.

For American college and university professors, Academic Freedom is an actual, [legal concept](#)<sup>9</sup>. A university professor assigned to teach a particular course does have the legal right to determine what it is s/he will expect students to know and be able to do. If a professor decides to structure a course based upon what it is that students want to know and be able to do, s/he can do that.

If you’re a K-12 teacher, however, [academic freedom for you](#) (note the use of the lower case) is not as protected as you might think<sup>10</sup>. For you, “academic

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<sup>9</sup> *Academic Freedom of Professors and Institutions*: <<http://www.aaup.org/issues/academic-freedom/professors-and-institutions>>

<sup>10</sup> *Academic Freedom: Professional or Legal Right?*: <<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar93/vol50/num06/Academic-Freedom@-Professional-or-Legal-Right%C2%A2.aspx>>

freedom is not the freedom to teach what you want to teach; it's the freedom to teach what you're supposed to teach, however you wish to teach it".<sup>11</sup>

How then might a classroom teacher nurture his/her students' need to feel as though each has some degree of control in what is transpiring in the classroom?

Let's look at a Pennsylvania Core Standard, i.e. what the Commonwealth expects students to know and be able to do:

*Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.*

If educators do what the Commonwealth legally expects of them, those educators will deliver instruction that leads all students to mastery of the above standard. Educators (ostensibly) do not have control of that expectation, nor do students. Both students and educators are expected to fulfill their roles, with the ultimate goal being that all students will be able to:

- (1) Determine a central idea of a text
- (2) Analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas
- (3) Provide an objective summary of the text

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<sup>11</sup> This is not a legal interpretation of case law; rather, it is the concept that I accept as a non-university educator. The quote is from Dennis Loftus, a former Delaware district superintendent.

How then, does a teacher nurture a student's need to feel as though s/he has some sense of control in the classroom? You have probably already figured this out, and it is likely you are already doing this because it is something that effective teachers do: you provide students the opportunity to choose the texts they will use for determining the central idea, et al.

If you are an effective teacher, you have learned the array of texts you select will be appropriate (i.e. significantly challenging) for your students. It is also likely that before providing choices to your students, you select a single text to model how to determine the central idea, et al.

Effective teachers are likely to use a narrow selection of texts (e.g. two to four) for guided practice in the classroom and/or when having groups of students tackle a given text (i.e. students can self-select their groups based upon the texts provided). A broader choice of texts may be provided to students by effective teachers for independent practice.

Many of us stumble onto effective practice out of desperation AND the intrinsic need we have to feel competent. "How can I get these kids to learn this damned concept?" is a question that is not foreign to effective teachers. If you are a classroom teacher, a powerful reinforcing experience is to think about your practice and identify all the ways that you have incorporated student choice into what it is that you do. Better yet, reflect upon this aspect of your practice with one or more colleagues.

The need to feel agentic, to feel some sense of autonomy, some sense of control, is not restricted to students. It is a human need, and managers of

educators need to nurture and respond to that need with as much energy as does an effective teacher.

If I am a manager of teachers, I have the responsibility to create a climate and culture that encourages my colleagues' "natural or intrinsic tendencies to behave in effective and healthy ways."<sup>12</sup> Even though teachers should be required to design instruction leading to mastery of whatever specific standards have been identified, managers can provide and support the freedom to be creative in the design of instruction ("...the freedom to teach what you're supposed to teach, however you wish to teach it").

Being trusted with creativity is a powerful thing. Personal choice is integral to creativity, and the encouragement of an authority figure to be creative is an act that endorses one's sense of competence. When a manager encourages and supports collaboration among faculty members in the design of instruction, that manager is not only nurturing a teacher's need to feel some sense of control and competence. The stage is set to provide opportunities for meaningful emotional connections with colleagues.

The next chapter will look at an experiment in elementary and middle level education that was intended to provide self-directed, student-initiated learning: the Open Classroom. As can happen in the Education Follies, it ended up being an American clown show due to misunderstanding and blatant incompetence.

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<sup>12</sup> From the [Self-Determination Theory](#) homepage.



### *The Three C's: Control and the Open Classroom*

Open Education is an approach to elementary and middle level education that reached some prominence in England (where it was also known as Modern Education) in the 1960's and early 1970's. Based upon the progressive approaches of John Dewey and the developmental psychology espoused by Jean Piaget, the approach, as conceived, addresses the three basic human needs identified within Self-determination Theory.

Addressing and nurturing one of those needs is a foundation of Open Education, and that need is the need to feel agentic or autonomous, i.e. the need to have some sense of control in one's life.

As happens so often in American education, the application of Open or Modern Education turned into a clown show, i.e. American policy makers *screwed up something that should have been fairly straightforward.*<sup>13</sup>

In American Education, clown shows evolve in this way:

Step 1: We collectively misinterpret the intent of a concept as well as the systemic components that support the concept.

Step 2: We add a significant dose of incompetence that results from the failure of policy makers to provide teachers and administrators with sufficient in-depth training, coupled with the failure to provide teachers with profound systemic monitoring and support.

Step 3: Insufficient training, inadequate monitoring, and scarce support create a vacuum in which poorly trained and non-supported educators interpret the concept in light of their own individual paradigms regarding what should be happening in schools.

Step 4: Policy-level educational leaders apply accountability constraints and demands that are not consistent with the original/intended design of the concept, which makes it impossible to accurately assess the effectiveness

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<sup>13</sup> *Urban Dictionary* definition of "clown show."

of applications (which are not aligned with the original concept to begin with).

Step 5: At cocktail parties, church socials, or sidebar conversations at sporting events—which are the essential crucibles of collective thought in the American Middle Class—parents and other taxpayers deride what they do not know is a corrupted system, often relying upon educator friends' nonscientific samples of one to support their passionate opposition.

Step 6: Policy level educational leaders (who, because of the high turnover in school districts and state DOEs, are not likely to have been responsible for the original introduction of the concept) see an opportunity to respond in a supportive way to the rising, passionate opposition, and use misaligned assessment results to determine that whatever corrupted system had been put into place is without merit.

Step 7: The determination in Step 6 taints the name of the original process, regardless of the proven efficacy of the process when practiced as originally intended. The taint is extremely persistent and can last for decades, with the result that policy level educators will reject the concept out of hand if it ever comes up in the future.

Let's look at the Open Education clown show in a bit more detail...

To begin with, “open” as applied in an English classroom was never intended to reference space. “Open” was used to infer an openness of active learning

opportunities for children. An “open classroom” was one that was student-centered—it had nothing to do with large, open, interior spaces.

A “closed” classroom (and to my knowledge this term may not have been used as I am using it here) would be one that was teacher-centered; all students would follow lessons that were likely to have a linear sequence, where each lesson led to the next, with students directed along that road to a universal, summative assessment of some type, i.e. it would be the classroom that has been most familiar in American education for over a century.

The first misinterpretation (Step 1)—and it was a fatal one—was that “open” implied a school without internal walls.

(I know, you’re thinking it was the Sixties in America, and someone must have gotten hold of some bad grass.)

The justification for removing the walls was that a small team of teachers, responsible for one-hundred-plus students, would be able to design instruction based upon dynamic grouping patterns that allowed student interests and teacher strengths to be matched effectively.

As tons of money were being spent to build schools with vast open spaces, a relatively minuscule amount was being directed at training teachers how to make the process work in those vast spaces. What may have made open classrooms more appealing to educational leaders, especially at the middle level, was the American infatuation with the middle school concept. At first blush,

middle schools and open classrooms seemed made for each other, but what the combination was made for was Step 3.

Open space, i.e. the American open classroom, would, it was thought, support a fluid concept of teaming that would “be more responsive to the needs and interests of young adolescents,” which was a key principle of middle schools according to William Alexander, the “Father” of the American Middle School.

Unfortunately, the vacuum created by insufficient training, inadequate monitoring, and scarce support put teachers in a position where they had to solve this challenge: teach for mastery over one hundred, hormone-riddled, often embarrassed and fearful, young adolescents, who normally behave as though they are out of touch with reality, in a large open space where each student had the potential to make eye contact with any one of the other one-hundred-plus students.

Falling back on their then seventy-year paradigm of how teaching was to occur, these well-meaning teachers (I knew many of them) attempted to apply traditional, teacher-centered instruction in the vast space of the open classroom. I was personally aware of three schools that were built to respond to what American educators thought was the open classroom. In each school and in the first year, teachers began to construct walls using bookshelves, and any other furniture they could find, to delineate traditional classroom spaces.

While you can still find schools with large open spaces, most schools designed with this intent had permanent walls installed within ten to fifteen years, behind which teachers continued to teach teacher-centered lessons.

If we had understood the concept of Open or Modern Education from the outset, if we had provided the training, support, and resources needed to do it effectively, could it have been an answer for our poorly performing urban schools where teacher-centered lessons still are the norm?

What would a true Open Education classroom look like if we were able to go back to a British elementary school in the Sixties?

We would likely find a classroom similar to traditional classrooms in terms of square footage, but instead of rows of desks, we would find a room arranged into learning stations. Individual students, and sometimes pairs or trios of students, would be working at the learning stations, and if we were able to stay long enough, we would see that movement from one learning station to another was not predicated upon a required sequence; rather, movement in most cases would be according to the wishes of each student. Students would be free to choose the activity in which they wished to engage, and engagement would be high, which means behavior problems would be minimal.

Perhaps the most significant thing we would observe would be the behavior of the teacher. Instead of being the focal point of instruction, we would see the teacher monitoring, intervening to clarify and support, and assessing; however, while the instruction is not teacher-centered, the teacher is the essential center of the workings of the Open Education classroom because:

- Every activity in every learning center has been designed by teachers to lead students to mastery of specific learning objectives via discovery—active learning—followed by opportunities to practice and apply.

- The teacher monitors student engagement with learning activities in order to intervene when students need learning support or to recognize specific achievement.
- The teacher maintains precise records regarding individual student involvement with specific learning activities in the learning stations.
- The teacher assesses students individually to determine when specific objectives are mastered.
- Individual student assessment along with precise record keeping provides the information the teacher needs in order to know when to redirect students—while there is “choice” for the students, there is also a responsibility for the teacher to make sure that by the end of a school year, each student has mastered the intended curriculum.

If you consider the above in light of the Three C’s, you can see that the approach not only provides students with a significant freedom to choose learning activities (control), the attention of the teacher and the carefully constructed activities increase the likelihood of student success (competence), as well as the opportunity for students to interact with the teacher individually (connection).

Additional Reading about Open Education:

[Open Education: The Classroom, Philosophical Underpinnings, et al :](http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2303/Open-Education.html#ixzz3edojWISI)

<<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2303/Open-Education.html#ixzz3edojWISI>>

The [Plowden Report](http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/plowden/plowden1967-1.html) :

<<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/plowden/plowden1967-1.html>>



### *The Three C's: Control and the Rubber Wall*

There is an academic point of view that the “open classroom” was a victim of the ideological wars that have beset Education for decades. Many of us in our profession have heard another variation of this: the pendulum. That is, we swing from progressive to traditional and back again *ad infinitum*. I suggest there may be another way of looking at this: our profession, and therefore our practice, is confined by a rubber wall.

The wall represents where we are at a given point in time, and for perhaps millennia, where we are is in some version of the traditional, teacher-centered model, where the teacher’s role is perceived as filling the student with information and understanding (reference the Yeats/Plutarch quote on the title

page of this book). For some reason—perhaps wisdom—a time will arise when there will be an attempt to apply a more progressive approach to education.

I think of these forays into progressive education as a mass of concerned educators running smack into the rubber wall. Their momentum pushes it into another position, but it takes a great deal of energy to keep it in that position. Eventually, progressive innovators get tired of pushing, and the rubber wall of traditional education snaps back. Sometimes the whole wall may get moved a tiny bit, but the millennia-long tradition of filling the pail remains. There is no pendulum, only a very persistent, albeit flexible, rubber wall.

As a culture, we Americans seem to lack the collective will—or perhaps lack the collective wisdom—to do what is necessary to move the supporting structure that holds the wall in place, which would be no small feat because that structure is comprised of the collective paradigms of millions of educators and policy makers. To move the location of the foundation of the wall—and not just stretch the wall out of position temporarily—we have to change the paradigms of those millions.

Possible? Probably not as exemplified by what happened with Open Education.

The rush against the rubber wall by the proponents of the Open Classroom could not be sustained—the wall could not be moved—because, I hypothesize, the majority of teachers who were expected to implement it detested it, and not because there was anything of ideology associated with their extreme dislike. They hated it because too many (most?) teachers were insufficiently trained and supported.

Put into a situation where they did not know how to be competent, teachers reverted to the traditional approaches that they believed had worked in the past, which allowed teachers to tell themselves they were doing what they were supposed to be doing. Before policy-makers put the nails in the coffin, the rubber wall of teacher practice had already begun to snap back.

Another example of the rubber wall may be one cause (of several) underlying our deplorable performance as educators with millions of disadvantaged children: our failure to base instruction—regardless of whether or not the approach is traditional or progressive—upon what it is we want students to know and be able to do.

I know the above claim may, at first blush, sound ludicrous after thirty years of Standards-based Education, but having spent many years as a curriculum-assessment specialist and as an administrator and consultant, I have learned that teachers—especially subject area teachers in content areas such as science and social studies—prepare lessons based upon topics suggested by teachers' interpretations of standards.

Even with what started out as evangelical fervor on the part of curriculum change advocates (of which I was one), the rubber wall of topic-based lesson design is so firmly entrenched at the secondary level that the rubber wall has only modestly stretched. In fact, what might have been perceived as movement was only a tease. After thirty years of the statutory requirement to base lesson design upon standards (what it is curriculum guides declare students should know and be able to do), the majority of secondary teachers still see a topic,

design a lesson that addresses what each teacher individually finds essential about that topic, and then, if required to document the standard allegedly addressed, teachers scan the list of standards provided to them and pick those that seem to be related.

**This approach** (which I suggest is very, very typical) **is analogous to an archer who shoots an arrow at a barn and then paints a bullseye around it!**

Teachers need to be educational archers who use the objective (or standard) as the bullseye and then work hard to shoot the arrow (the lesson) so that it strikes the center of the bullseye. If that were to happen universally, it would be evidence that we have not just stretched the wall. It would mean that we have moved the structure that has been holding the wall in place.

The “wall” of how curriculum is used is a likely reason why progressive approaches like Open Education have failed. If standards—what we expect students to know and be able to do—are not used as the basis for design of guided discovery (the arrows in the metaphor), it is unlikely that children, via active learning, will have a high probability of mastering them (hitting the bullseye). Would you agree that it is unlikely a nine-year-old will somehow have the wherewithal to find the bullseye via unguided discovery (*ala* Piaget)?

I advocate that educators join a ***RADICAL MIDDLE*** approach to education. The Radical Middle would appear to be anathema to today’s Americans who, collectively, seem to feel most comfortable when polarized.

In the Radical Middle, we would be encouraged to embrace the characteristics of active learning that derive their strength from the Three C's, and we would be freed to embrace the aspects of traditional education, which includes the expectation that there are specific things students need to know and be able to do.

Doing what needs to be done to benefit our most disadvantaged kids would require the fervor of the protests of the Sixties and early Seventies. We would need to act with sufficient heart, knowledge and skill to move the location of the rubber wall. I am not advocating a return to Open Education, but I am advocating that educators apply what we know OR SHOULD KNOW about motivation and lesson design in our practice.

Let's move the rubber wall—permanently! *Become an activist for the Radical Middle!*

**EMpathy IS a process that eludes  
the teaching of it**



### *The Three C's: Connections*

Any principal can verify what I often observed as a high school principal: the same students who are disengaged and frequently misbehaving in one classroom, are highly engaged and cooperative in another classroom down the hall. The very same students.

There are some key variables that could explain this phenomenon: different physical location, different time of day, different combination of students, different subject matter, and different teachers.

When I considered each of the variables as I observed various classes, my nonscientific sample of one seemed to indicate that the location or time of day did not appear to be a factor in those classrooms where students were

consistently engaged. The students about whom I am writing often traveled together, so I had to rule out the mix of kids in a class as a factor. I also found examples where students were consistently engaged regardless of the subject matter.

The key variable was the teacher.

The importance of the teacher is something that has been statistically verified. As reported by the Center for Public Education, Tennessee's Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) and Student Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project, as well as the Texas Schools Project from the University of Texas at Dallas, have provided these conclusions:

- Teachers impact student learning more than the school, class size, student ethnicity, or students' family income.
- Teacher impact on student learning is greater for poor and/or minority students than for more affluent, white students (all students do benefit from effective teaching).
- The impact of effective teachers on student learning accumulates over time (years).

There is no question that effective teachers employ instructional practices, which research (including teachers' own action research) indicates works with the students they teach.

Regarding the matter being discussed here—the active engagement of students—I can attest (thanks to my nonscientific sample of one) that many teachers, whose students exhibited high levels of engagement, were not always employing instructional best practices. If the employment of instructional best practices did not appear to be a significant factor, what could explain why one teacher would generate 143 behavioral referrals in a year when another teacher two rooms away—teaching the same students—generated 5 referrals?

It was and remains clear to me that the teachers who were engendering consistent student engagement were applying the basic tenets of Self-determination Theory, i.e. they had created classrooms that employed the Three C's:

- *Control*—provided opportunities for students to have some degree of choice regarding their learning experiences
- *Competence*—provided challenging tasks that were structured in a way that increased the likelihood students would master learning objectives
- *Connections*—the teacher connected with each student in an emotionally meaningful way

In a 1994 op ed piece in Ed Week ([Trust as a Starting Place](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1994/02/09/20holt.h13.html?qs=Trust+as+a+Starting+Place))<sup>14</sup>, Gary Holthaus provides a brief but apt description of a classroom where a mutual trust between teacher and students creates a synergistic learning environment, and while Holthaus makes some suggestions about what a teacher might do to

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<sup>14</sup> <<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1994/02/09/20holt.h13.html?qs=Trust+as+a+Starting+Place>>

foster that trust, there is an insinuation that trust—at least on the part of the teacher—is positive personal baggage the teacher brings to the job.

Standing in front of a classroom full of disadvantaged students and proclaiming with conviction, “I really trust that you all are going to do what you need to do to learn,” is not going to cut it. “The lady doth protest too much, methinks.”

So how does a teacher create a climate of trust? How does a teacher connect with each student in an emotionally meaningful way, especially with disadvantaged students of color?

In *[A Qualitative Examination of the Impact of Culturally Responsive Educational Practices on the Psychological Well-Being of Students of Color](#)*<sup>15</sup>, researchers suggest that the application of such practices is associated with decreased psychological distress and increased well-being. Perhaps one of the most significant personal characteristics a teacher can possess when applying culturally responsive educational practices...oh, let's be real...when dealing with all children in every learning environment, the teacher's most significant personal characteristic is empathy.

According to Edith Stein, empathy is a process that eludes the teaching of it (as cited by Carol Davis in *What is Empathy, and Can Empathy Be Taught?*)

However, Davis does acknowledge that empathy is something that can be developed in individuals by providing socialization and modeling experiences

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<sup>15</sup><[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249704867\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Empathy\\_in\\_Teaching\\_Culturally\\_Diverse\\_Students\\_A\\_Qualitative\\_Study\\_of\\_Teachers'\\_Beliefs](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249704867_The_Role_of_Empathy_in_Teaching_Culturally_Diverse_Students_A_Qualitative_Study_of_Teachers'_Beliefs)>

that facilitate empathy to occur. In addition, providing individuals with opportunities to identify behaviors that block empathy can also help facilitate its occurrence. All of which begs the question...

*How often are students in education schools, or practicing teachers, provided with intentional opportunities designed to facilitate empathy?*

(Do we all hear crickets?)

One of my favorite recent discoveries is a program called *Roots of Empathy*. It has been shown to increase empathy in elementary students with a concurrent improvement in school climate and student achievement. It provides students with opportunities to experience empathy similar to what Davis is suggesting for adults, but with a fascinating twist. You can learn more about this program by viewing the video of a [PBS News Hour report](#)<sup>16</sup> or by viewing a [short video](#)<sup>17</sup> prepared by the folks at the *Roots of Empathy* program.

If you are a classroom teacher, increasing your capacity for empathy is not a silver bullet. Your bottom line still remains student achievement (albeit probably measured by an inappropriate tool like a standardized test), and real achievement—students mastering what it is they should know and be able to do—means not only practicing empathy and [culturally responsive educational practices](#)<sup>18</sup>; it means putting into practice what you know research says works with your students. It means providing your students with some sense of

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<sup>16</sup> Using Babies to Decrease Aggression, Prevent Bullying:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvelYfCZCZs>>

<sup>17</sup> <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=102&v=fNxxkCt9Pm3o>>

<sup>18</sup> Communicating Cross-culturally: (one view of) What Teachers Should Know at:

<<http://iteslj.org/Articles/Pratt-Johnson-CrossCultural.html>>

control in what it is, or how, they learn or demonstrate mastery, and it means teaching in a way where you are not engaged in “the filling of a pail,” rather, you are lighting a fire.

It is the quality of teachers—not the baggage students bring with them to school—that is highly correlated with student achievement.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> [Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: Research Review](http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/Teacher-quality-and-student-achievement-At-a-glance/Teacher-quality-and-student-achievement-Research-review.html?css=print) at:  
<<http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Staffingstudents/Teacher-quality-and-student-achievement-At-a-glance/Teacher-quality-and-student-achievement-Research-review.html?css=print>>

*...where  
teachers do have  
high expectations  
for their  
students...*



*...those high  
expectations impact  
the three things that  
fire the intrinsic  
motivation in  
each of us to  
learn*

## *The Three C's: Competence (and Teacher Expectations)*

As described in a previous chapters, intrinsic motivation is influenced by three things: having an opportunity to feel as though one has some **control** over one's life, being **connected** to another significant being, and being provided with opportunities to feel **competent**. These are basic components of [Self-Determination Theory](#)<sup>20</sup>, with which far too few educators are familiar.

As described by a [Morning Edition story](#)<sup>21</sup>, conveying to students that a teacher believes they can learn is accomplished in a myriad of subtle ways, one of

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<sup>20</sup> <<http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org/>>

<sup>21</sup> Teachers' expectations can influence how students perform:

<<http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2012/09/18/161159263/teachers-expectations-can-influence-how-students-perform>>

which does not include the teacher telling the students, “Class, I truly believe you can learn.” I suggest that in those classes where teachers *do* have high expectations for their students, those high expectations impact the three things that fire the intrinsic motivation in each of us to learn:

### Control

Teachers with high expectations do not coerce, threaten, or provide tangible rewards to produce desired behaviors, they simply teach with enthusiasm and skill. In the absence of external rewards or punishments, there is an implication that students do have the choice to participate in the class, i.e. students feel the freedom of controlling their own individual involvement.

### Connection

Teachers with high expectations provide a classroom culture where even the most reticent of students cannot help but feel a personal connection with the adult in that tiny world.

A strong memory I have is the distrust in the eyes of many (most?) of the economically and educationally disadvantaged children who met me for the first time in my seventh and ninth grade classrooms, but I did not figure out how to begin to cut through that distrust until a year after I had returned to teaching (after a six-year hiatus as an human resources manager in what my non-educator friends continually reminded me was “the real world”).

The usual, often principal-required, first-day ritual of going over classroom rules and procedures had bored me to death during my original stint in the

classroom, and I was certain students were more bored than I because every teacher did the same thing. If any students come to the first day of the school year enthusiastic about learning—especially middle school students—I suggest that enthusiasm is often diminished by the persistent drone of teachers telling them about rules and consequences from the beginning to the end of that first day.

As I was considering my first week’s lesson plans the year I returned to teaching, it occurred to me that basic classroom rules and procedures were fairly uniform across all classrooms, and by seventh grade, there would not be one student who did not know what those rules were likely to be (especially those students who consistently challenged them!). I asked myself, if they already know the basic rules, why not do something on our first day together that challenges their intellect and lets them know what they're in for with me as a teacher?

I decided to flip my day 2 lesson with that of day 1 (rules and procedures), and the student response during my first period lesson on my first day back to the classroom told me I was onto something.

I began by telling the students, “We’re not going to talk about rules and procedures today because you’ve been in school long enough to know the basics. We’ll talk about rules tomorrow. Today we’re going to do science.”

Then I asked this question: “Does air have mass?”

For the next six years, my last years as a classroom teacher, I began each year in the same way (sometimes changing the question, e.g. “Can listening to music change your pulse rate?”). After welcoming the various student points of view, which always included contradictory positions, I noted that some students thought (e.g.) that air had mass. I then asked the class, how could we prove it? And we did prove it, based totally upon input from students. I suggest the experience allowed students to realize they had collectively met a significant intellectual challenge and been recognized for doing so by their teacher.

In other words, my students had the opportunity not only to feel competent, but to feel the high level of my expectations.

Because humans have a natural proclivity for problem-solving, what the students suggested each year had an uncanny resemblance to the basic components of The Scientific Method. In the pre-standards world, teaching students the Scientific Method was the instructional objective on which I had based that first day’s lesson. At the end of each lesson on that and subsequent "first days," I was able to identify specific components, among the procedural steps the students had identified, as comprising a process that had a name: The Scientific Method.

*Sidebar: Constructivist teaching occurs when students are involved in meaning and knowledge construction instead of passively receiving information; how many things are taught—e.g. presenting the steps of the Scientific Method and then giving students a canned experiment that models the process—is the opposite of how humans naturally learn.*

Because of that simple change in lesson plans, I noticed far fewer expressions of distrust the following day. Students were more willing to connect with me, which was an ongoing challenge that I do not believe I failed to achieve, but it took time (sometimes weeks, and with some individuals, months).

Those students with histories of academic and discipline problems took the longest with whom to forge a connection, which is understandable. School, to many of them, was a place where they did not feel competent, a place where they believed their failures were not of their own doing but were inflicted upon them by adults they did not trust.

The approach to building that trust, to encouraging that connection, involves doing what every teacher knows s/he should do: be firm (there ARE rules and procedures), be fair, be compassionate (NEVER, EVER use public humiliation or yelling as a way of being “firm”), and be persistent and tenacious: strive every day to present instructionally sound, standards-based lessons that challenge, reinforce, and when needed, remediate; in other words, develop and present lessons that convey high expectations for all students.

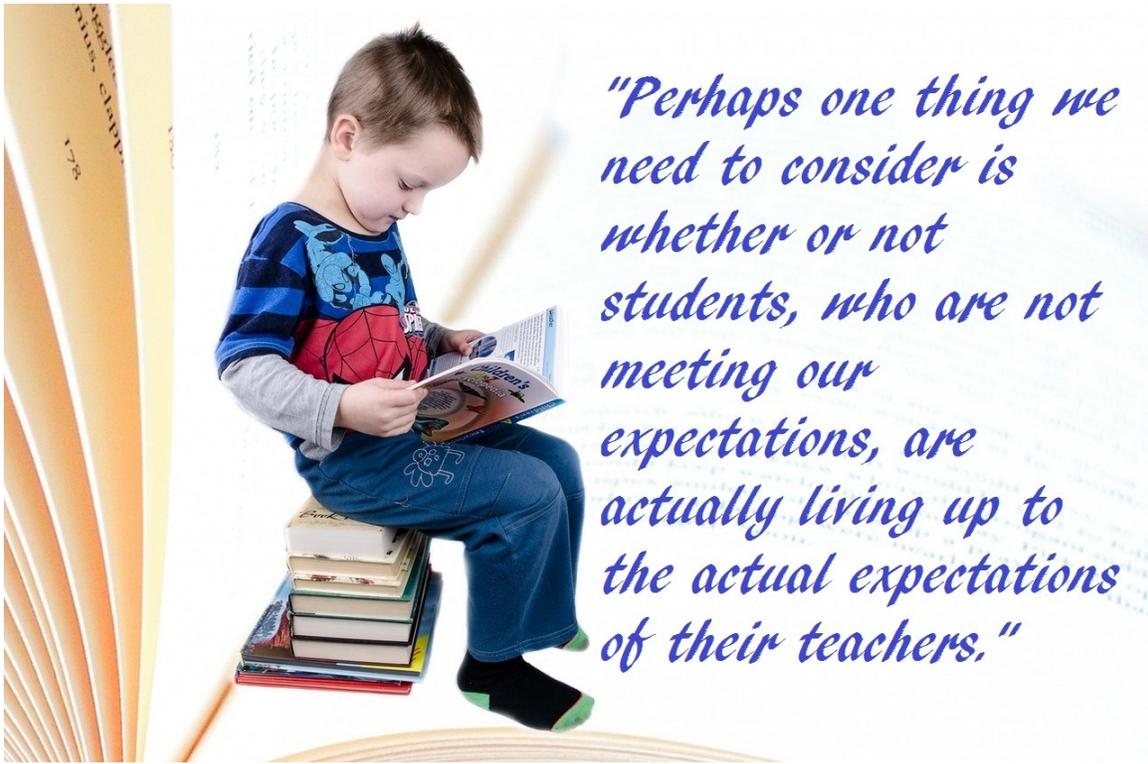
### Competence

High expectations from teachers may be rare occurrences for many students, especially those students who are submerged in disadvantaged circumstances. When students sense that a teacher has high expectations for them as individuals (experiencing high expectations is a “feeling” or affect phenomenon), those high expectations, I suggest, contain a strong subliminal message to them that they can interpret as, “this adult actually thinks I can do

these challenging things; maybe I actually *can* do what I'm being expected to do; maybe I'm *not* as stupid as some teachers have seemed to think I am.”

It is very possible that sensing high expectations from an adult with whom a child feels emotionally connected can begin to foster a sense of competency inside the child's mind, which brings about a self-fulfilling prophesy of manifest competence.

*Afterword: I fully realize there are students who are burdened with serious emotional challenges. Borderline Personality Disorder among students who have been exposed to significant trauma is one such challenge that is difficult for a competent classroom teacher to overcome without significant professional support for the student, which is seldom available in the most challenged of schools; “...even the most reticent of students cannot help but feel a personal connection with the adult in that tiny world” is a strong statement—it is important to me that you know I have personally experienced exceptions to that strong statement.*



## *Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement*

Let's consider two experiences:

- In [\*A Vision for Wilmington Schools\*](#)<sup>22</sup> (Delaware), Matthew Albright of the News Journal reported that a redistricting proposal "...drew outrage from teachers -- who felt they were being blamed for poor performance, when poverty was the real issue..."
- At the conclusion of a Mastery Charter School (Philadelphia) faculty meeting, I observed what I was told was the traditional way that such meetings concluded: the assembled faculty and administrators raised

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<sup>22</sup> <<http://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/education/2015/03/06/vision-city-school/24534621/>>

plastic cups filled with sparkling cider, repeated the Mastery Mission Statement (with zest), and then shouted, “No Excuses!”

You may find it interesting that the disadvantaged students of the outraged teachers have consistently failed to show sufficient progress on Delaware State Testing Program exams, while the Mastery teachers’ students (from the most economically-challenged neighborhoods in Philadelphia) are continuing to show significant growth on Pennsylvania System of School Assessment exams.

I posit that the underlying and most significant reason for the difference in these students’ performance is teachers’ expectations.

The relationship of teacher expectations to student achievement has an intuitive feel to it: if you were a parent in an economically-challenged neighborhood (heck, in your economically-challenged world), who would you want to teach your child, a teacher who proclaims they’re not responsible for your economically-disadvantaged child’s performance, or a teacher who proclaims, “no excuses!”

I would not be writing this post if I had simply intuited the relationship between expectations and achievement; I’m writing it because that relationship has been one of the most intensely studied and verified phenomena in classrooms (since 1964!).

If I’ve piqued your curiosity, I strongly encourage you to visit the following links:

- An NPR, Morning Edition story presents the evidence and a research-supported approach to changing teacher expectations: [\*Teachers' Expectations Can Influence How Students Perform\*](#)<sup>23</sup>.
- A [\*Wikipedia entry for Jane Elliott\*](#)<sup>24</sup>, the teacher who explored how expectations related to racism can influence student behavior, and [\*The Eye of the Storm\*](#)<sup>25</sup>, which documents Elliott's experiment.

If the relationship between teacher expectations and student achievement is such a well-documented phenomenon, you may be asking yourself, why aren't educators doing what needs to be done to change their own expectations? I refer you to a previous chapter (*The Knowing-Doing Gap and the Nonscientific Sample of One*), in which I quote Francis Cummins Lockwood (1913):

*We must review with profound respect the infinite capacity of the human mind to resist the introduction of useful knowledge.*

Another more important reason is that changing expectations must occur by changing teacher behavior. There are countless ways a teacher interacts with students every day, and each nuanced way can convey expectations. As the *Morning Edition* story explains, just *telling* professionals about the link between expectations and achievement does not change teacher behavior. What is required is an involved, supported, self-analysis by teachers of their daily behavior. I suggest that school districts and state departments of

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<sup>23</sup> < <http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2012/09/18/161159263/teachers-expectations-can-influence-how-students-perform>>

<sup>24</sup> < [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane\\_Elliott](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Elliott)>

<sup>25</sup> < [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WamPOPjd\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WamPOPjd_E)>

education have demonstrated, thus far, that they do not have the organizational will and/or understanding needed to pursue something that is known to be the “thing” most likely to improve student achievement. (Note: the L.A. County Office of Education, the originator of TESA or [Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement](#)<sup>26</sup> training is a notable exception.)

Concern for students within the Wilmington, Delaware, city limits has prompted politicians to respond to voices in the community that decry student achievement that does not meet expectations. A major caveat related to the concern is that student achievement is measured by standardized tests that have no business being used for that purpose, but putting that aside, it appears that leaders believe redistricting will provide an opportunity to take better advantage of school district, community, and parental support for what has been a divided city educationally since a [1978 desegregation decree](#)<sup>27</sup>.

It would be my hope, as someone who served as a teacher and leader in Delaware beginning in 1974, that the members of the 2015 Wilmington Education Improvement Commission—and any other similar group of leaders across the country—will realize that simply drawing new district lines and reassigning leadership will not bring about improved student achievement.

Perhaps one thing we need to consider, before anything else, is whether or not students, who are not meeting our expectations, are actually living up to the actual expectations of their teachers.

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<sup>26</sup> < <http://www.lacoe.edu/Home/CommunityServices/ParentCommunityServices/TESA.aspx>>

<sup>27</sup> < <http://colossus.mu.nu/archives/221158.php>>



## *The Myth of Educational Funding and More*

Here is an eye-popping statement from the 2014 Cato Institute publication, [\*State Education Trends: Academic Performance and Spending over the Past 40 Years...\*](#)<sup>28</sup>

*“The performance of 17-year-olds has been essentially stagnant across all subjects despite a near tripling of the inflation adjusted cost of putting a child through the K–12 system.”*

(Note: If you're curious about the relationship between funding and student achievement in your state, the above report provides charts for each state.)

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<sup>28</sup> < <http://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa746.pdf>>

In the midst of conservatives calling for the evisceration of the welfare state because they are citizens who, apparently, “claim they love America, but clearly can’t stand Americans<sup>29</sup>,” and in the midst of progressives who believe, apparently, that throwing money at an educational system, which is failing to serve the children who need it most, will magically resolve the problem, the Cato report raises this simple question in my mind...

*What the hell is going on?*

Here are three starting points for pursuing answers and for prompting discussions at the highest levels of government and at kitchen tables, Little League games, random meetings at supermarkets, after church or synagogue chats...you get my drift...

First: The knowing-doing gap among educators at both the leadership and classroom levels is dysfunctionally large. There is a body of research that verifies **too many educators—both leaders and teachers—are unlikely to implement the professional practices they know will increase student achievement.** (Refer to the chapter, *The Knowing-Doing Gap and the Nonscientific Sample of One*, and a brief summary from the Washington State ASCD: [\*What is the Knowing-Doing Gap?\*](#)<sup>30</sup>)

Second: A high proportion of educators (and parents) I have encountered over the past four-plus decades (via my nonscientific sample of one) is seriously **deprived of an understanding of what intrinsically motivates**

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<sup>29</sup> Click this [link](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112346/quotes) for origin of quote: <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112346/quotes>>

<sup>30</sup> <[http://wsascd.org/downloads/February\\_2011\\_-\\_Critical\\_Question\\_Series.pdf](http://wsascd.org/downloads/February_2011_-_Critical_Question_Series.pdf)>

**human beings to learn.** In fact, by the time students reach the fifth grade, educators and parents have “atta-boyed,” gold-starred, stickered, dollar-billed, and otherwise rewarded the intrinsic motivation to learn right out of our children (Refer to *What Happens to Four-Year-Olds* and each of *The Three C’s* chapters).

Third: There are decades of research that verify **a direct relationship exists between student learning and teacher expectations.** Despite this research-based reality, my nonscientific sample of one has provided me with example after example of teachers who, often with pity tinged their voices, have pleaded with me to lower my expectations because “those kids” cannot learn due to the baggage they bring with them to school.

The solution is conceptually *NOT* at a rocket-science level of complexity.

Education is at a Nike moment. *JUST DO IT!*

- Eliminate the knowing-doing gap—do what we know works instructionally, especially with disadvantaged children
- Apply the three C’s to jumpstart intrinsic motivation; *The Three C’s (Children Are Not Pigeons!)* chapter provides an overview
- Attack low teacher expectations

There are two scary and politically dicey challenges to overcome...

*Nowhere does data support the notion that paying educators more has ever had a proportional, positive impact upon student achievement.*

Look into where the huge increase in funding has gone over the past forty years, and you will discover the greatest portion has gone toward increasing the number of educators and their compensation. As long as the rules of the game are not changed—if teachers are given free rein to teach how they wish to teach—student achievement, especially that of disadvantaged children, will not change no matter how much money is directed toward educator compensation.

There are examples where student achievement has shown significant gains in relatively short periods of time.

One set of examples is associated with the Renaissance School Initiative in the School District of Philadelphia. The initiative involves offering ineffective public schools to charter school organizations with the goal of bringing about substantive change. One such organization, Mastery Charter Schools, has taken on several failed Philly schools. When charter organizations take over a school through the Renaissance School Initiative, they must accept the same students from the same neighborhood in the same building. What is different? The management of the school and the adults in classrooms.

One Mastery Charter example is Simon Gratz High School. The year before Mastery took over Gratz, the school was designated one of the fifteen most dangerous high schools in America. I was told that when a Mastery team visited the school the spring prior to the Mastery takeover, the team encountered students urinating in the halls and smoking dope in the stairwells. Few Gratz students were meeting or exceeding cut points on the required state exams.

But in the third year of Mastery operation, the school climate I observed was very close to what any parent would want it to be, AND according to a report in the Philadelphia Inquirer, Gratz was in the top ten (not top ten percent, the top ten) of the several hundred schools in the Delaware Valley in terms of the improvement in the school's raw School Performance Profile scores (a rating system devised by the Pennsylvania DOE that incorporates performance on the state tests).

What were the apparent variables responsible for the improvement at Gratz? Educator compensation was not one; rather, the two apparent variables were different management and different faculty.

I cannot address the matter of whether or not Mastery staff members understand the particulars of motivation research, but I can attest (via my nonscientific sample of one) that in the Mastery Charters with which I am familiar, all faculty are expected to and do apply research-based strategies, AND I observed continual examples of teachers who believed their kids could learn (the same students previously failed by previous SDP faculties).

A second scary, dicey, political challenge is what to do about standardized testing.

*Such tests should never have been used, nor should they continue to be used, to evaluate student and school performance because standardized tests are intended to rank and sort, not evaluate student and school performance in a standards-based environment.*

As long as standardized test results are the focus of policy makers, those tests will be the focus of instruction, i.e. the focus of instruction will be on a very shallow level of skills and knowledge (refer to the chapter, *Standardized Tests: Opt Out or Not?*). Further, the use of standardized test results to bully teachers will NOT change teacher practice (but it might chase effective teachers into other professions!).

How then can educational funds be directed—and by extension, how should *any* major initiative be structured—in order to eliminate the knowing-doing gap, change educators' understanding of motivation, and ensure that teacher expectations are what they need to be?

One: Politicians and policy-level educators must provide the professional development necessary to create a cadre of school managers that have a strong and clear understanding of: (1) motivation theory, (2) the relationship between teacher expectations and student achievement, and (3) effective practice, including standards-based assessment and grading practices.

Two: Teachers must be provided with intensive training in: (1) motivation theory, (2) the impact of teacher expectations, and (3) effective instructional and assessment practices; also, it is essential that teachers be provided with ongoing support to insure fidelity of implementation of effective practice in every classroom.

Three: School Managers must be held accountable for the implementation of effective practice in every classroom to include a mandate to observe and verify fidelity of implementation on a FREQUENT basis.

Four: School managers must have a mandate and the skills needed to develop and implement meaningful, compassionate improvement plans for non-compliant teachers; teachers who cannot or will not comply with expectations should be directed to another profession.

The above four strategies did not originate with me. I am simply repeating what is known—it is up to politicians and policy makers to do what needs to be done.

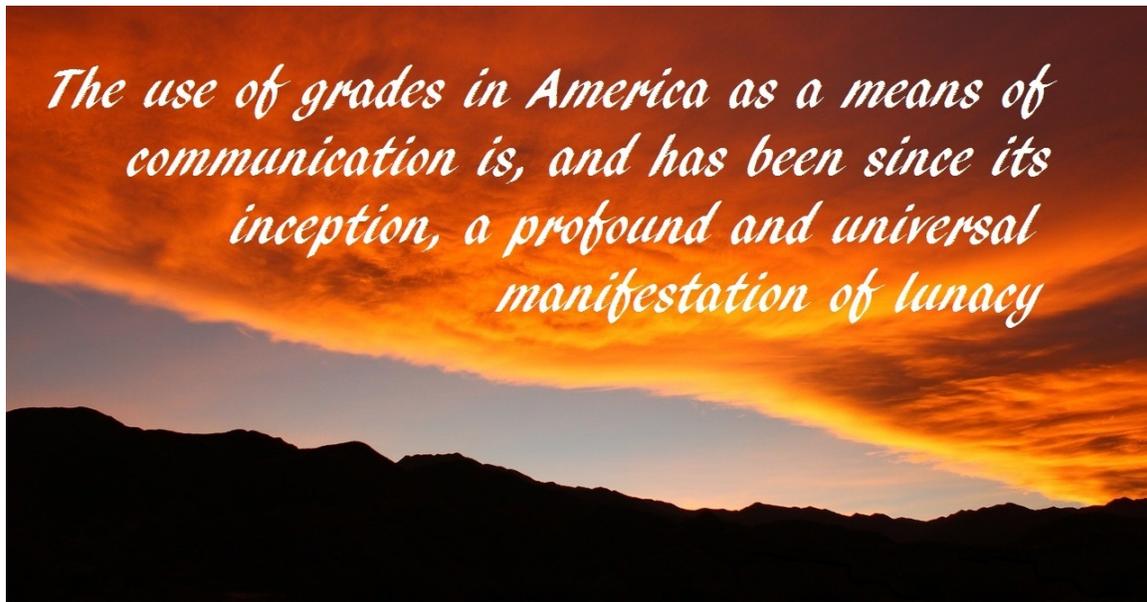
Whether teacher unions, or the politicians who want their support, like it or not, it is not poor neighborhoods, not large class size, not a lack of parental involvement, nor insufficient teacher compensation that are insurmountable obstacles our children—especially disadvantaged children—cannot overcome to learn at the level at which they should be learning.

The current obstacle that needs to be—and can be—overcome is the synergy of politicians', policy-makers', and educators' failure to ensure that what is known to work is implemented with fidelity. Until that obstacle is overcome, increasing educator compensation, massive redistricting, improving infrastructure et al will not result in an increase in measured student achievement. Politicians, policy-makers, and we educators need to wake up and accept the reality that right now...

*“We have met the enemy, and he is us.”<sup>31</sup>*

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<sup>31</sup> Pogo (Walt Kelly)



*The use of grades in America as a means of communication is, and has been since its inception, a profound and universal manifestation of lunacy*

### *Grading: An Exercise in Universal Lunacy?*

I once heard Rick Stiggins describe grading as the “process of abstracting a great deal of information into a single symbol for ease of communication.” The caveat he provided is that accurate communication is only possible if message senders (e.g. teachers) and receivers (e.g. students, parents, colleges, employers) assign the same meaning to any given grade.

Apart from the apparent and collective insanity of accepting a process where everything a student does over a long period of time can be communicated by a single symbol, it is astonishing to me that our culture acts as though a mutual understanding about the meaning of grades actually exists between message senders and receivers, when, in fact, it seldom (if ever) does.

*The use of grades in America as a means of communication is, and has been since its inception, a profound and universal manifestation of lunacy.*

You can obtain support for this claim by asking a group of parents and teachers who “share” the same students to write down what an “A” means. I have done this numerous times when investigating grading policies, and the results are always similar to the actual results from one meeting recorded in the chart below. Please note that there are more responses than numbers of contributors because several contributors provided more than one descriptor.

<u>6 Teachers</u>	<u>12 Parents</u>
<b>Performance at a level that indicates a superior level of achievement in the class</b>	The highest grade that can be given
<b>Above average to the point of being superior in that given course of study</b>	Excellence
<b>90% or better</b>	93 to 100
<b>Comprehends and can articulate learning target</b>	Outstanding performance
<b>They met and exceeded the standard</b>	Stands out above most of the students
<b>Did everything expected to an above standard rating</b>	Doing very well in the class

<b>Above standard</b>	Very good
<b>Met virtually all goals and objectives relating to both academic achievement and employability skills</b>	"A" means that the child is doing very well
<b>Can interact well with material</b>	Above average
<b>Good attendance</b>	Child is a "natural" at the subject
	Really works hard
	Has exceeded criteria learned for that subject
	Fully understands what is being taught
	They understand what is expected
	Demonstrated mastery of the concepts being taught
	Met the objective criteria for that class
	The student has done all and more for those 90 days than the teacher or instructor has asked
	Invested time and effort into the subject

	Attendance is high - goes hand in hand - must be there to learn and/or achieve
	Leadership capabilities
	Applying him or herself fully.

It is often the case that there are no duplicate descriptions, which is evidence that message senders and receivers do not share an accurate understanding of what a grade is communicating.

Further compounding the matter are the differences among teachers' grading policies—the formulas that teachers actually use to generate the single symbol that is a grade. One of the first observations I was able to make during investigations of grading was that teachers seldom use the same formulas. Even if there is a base similarity, teachers contrive to add little tweaks to their individual policies, tweaks which can have a profound difference in the grade a student is awarded.

(Note: this is where many teachers will declare that grades are not awarded, they are earned; actual investigation of grading policies provides evidence that challenges this assertion.)

Here are a few *actual* examples of common tweaks I have observed that differentiate one teacher's grading policy from another *in the same school*:

- Homework completion: some teachers do not incorporate this in grading policies; others give “zeros, which can significantly impact final marking period “averages;” still others weight homework completion to varying degrees.
- Attendance: the degree of variance in the weight given to attendance from teacher to teacher was from zero up to 20%.
- Behavior: I observed very few examples of teachers that incorporate behavior into final “averages;” however, it does occur, and when it does, the application is often very creative and unique to the teacher.
- Extra points added to the final marking period “average” for the number of cans of food contributed by a student to a canned food drive.
- Extra points awarded to the final marking period “average” for not asking to use the lavatory pass during the marking period.
- Extra points added to the final marking period “average” based upon the teacher’s subjective judgment regarding how hard a student has worked, which is often applied to the final “average” of a student who the teacher believes is working above the student’s teacher-perceived aptitude.

The first bullets (homework and attendance) are, at first blush, perhaps not inconsistent with a student’s responsibilities and might be reasonable if universally applied and communicated to all, but differential use of "tweaks" of any kind among teachers means that *two students, who have mastered*

*exactly the same learning objectives to the same degree, may receive two different grades if one student has a teacher that (e.g.) awards “bonus” points for contributing cans of food, and the other student’s teacher does not.*

Such differentiation is far more common than message receivers know, and if they do know it, their acceptance of it is yet another piece of evidence supporting the view that using grades is an exercise in lunacy.

One investigation I conducted involved the review of the grading policies of nineteen high school social studies teachers in the same school district. No two grading policies were exactly alike, and the diversity among the policies (especially related to the weighting of various components in grading formulas) was broad.

The diversity among teachers’ grading policies is why grades are meaningless for policy makers and politicians desperately seeking valid and reliable measures of accountability. If grades were meaningful, inappropriately using standardized test results to make high stakes decisions would not be a concern. In other words, all we would need to do to determine the degree to which students and educators were meeting standards would be to examine the grading distributions of teachers, schools, and school districts.

*(If you’re an educator, may I assume you’re taking a few seconds to chuckle before reading further?)*

The fact that we *CANNOT* use grading distributions for such purposes is tacit proof of the meaninglessness of grades, and by extension, our continued use of grades to communicate between teachers and parents and other message receivers, is proof of a profound and universal manifestation of lunacy.

Just for fun, I'll share another set of responses from a teacher/parent meeting.

Listed below are responses to the question, what does a "C" mean?

<u>5 Teachers</u>	<u>14 Parents</u>
<b>Works to potential or slightly under</b>	Average (4 + 2)
<b>Met standard</b>	A standard, general population score (Most students earn C's)
<b>Met the standard of acceptance for that course of study</b>	The student has only met requirements of an average student and needs to do more
<b>Understands content to a minimum</b>	Able to deal with info/tech activities given to them, but does not necessarily stand out from the rest of the classroom
<b>Succeeded with basic skills, but have not moved on beyond that</b>	Means parent needs to inquire if this is the best his/her child can do
<b>While making progress, does not yet approach mastery</b>	For some students, C is the best he/she can earn

<b>Met assessment with a standard grade</b>	Met criteria learned for that subject
<b>Passes</b>	Has met some, but maybe not all of the criteria
<b>Few discipline problems</b>	Represents what the teacher has asked for from the student
	May be starting to get the concept, but can't do enough
	Doesn't understand the class completely
	Passing at period of marking when grades are given out
	Middle of grades
	Does not mean failure
	Needs to do better
	Room for much improvement
	There may be difficulty in a number of areas; study, comprehension, etc.
	Means parent should speak with instructor for the instructor's view

	Has not put in enough effort
	More time needs to be applied
	Probably not a good leader
	Means parent should inquire how he/she can assist them

The above represents sound evidence, not only of the disconnect between message senders and receivers, but the disconnect *among* message senders as well as *among* message receivers.

There is no question in my mind as to whether or not awarding grades will continue to be, arguably, the most sacrosanct of teacher prerogatives, and I do not question the zero likelihood that message receivers will demand a change in the status quo, but as professionals, I do believe we educators have a moral imperative to at least attempt to improve the situation. The imperative is, in fact, moral because of the impact grades have on the lives of children, both in the present and in their future.

This moral imperative can be (and sometimes is) addressed by both bottom up and top down approaches:

- Individual teachers can create and communicate to message receivers grading policies that are standards-based, are succinct and clear regarding

the components of the formula used to derive a grade (including the weight of each component), and are totally free of extraneous factors that have no relevance in communicating the degree to which students have mastered standards (e.g. bonus points for cans of food).

- Principals can require teachers to develop and implement a universal grading policy, which would be communicated to all message receivers; implicit in this charge is the need for the principal's guidance and deep support for the teachers' efforts.
- Superintendents who have the wisdom to understand the need for clarity of communication can require and provide deep support for the development and application of a universal grading policy to be implemented among all district schools by all teachers.

The above is difficult because of the walls of paradigms that stand in the way of creating common grading policies, but we only need remind ourselves that eradicating the lunacy of how we now use grades is both a moral and professional imperative.



## *Standardized Testing and the Emperor's New Clothes*

As a child, my favorite fable was Hans Christian Anderson's "The Emperor's New Clothes." Here is the ending as translated by Jean Hersholt:

*...Everyone in the streets and the windows said, "Oh, how fine are the Emperor's new clothes! Don't they fit him to perfection? And see his long train!" Nobody would confess that he couldn't see anything, for that would prove him either unfit for his position, or a fool. No costume the Emperor had worn before was ever such a complete success.*

*"But he hasn't got anything on," a little child said.*

*"Did you ever hear such innocent prattle?" said its father. And one person whispered to another what the child had said, "He hasn't anything on. A child says he hasn't anything on."*

*"But he hasn't got anything on!" the whole town cried out at last.*

I suppose I was in the second grade when the fable was read to me, but even at that age, the fable made me aware that children can have great power if they are honest, and equally important, I was provided with the insight that adults, especially important and powerful adults, are willing to go along with something preposterous because they are afraid to be the “only one” to stand up for a truth—especially if they had been outspoken in supporting something very questionable.

In the Nineties, there were adults, as brave as the little child in the day of the Emperor, who cried out, “the use of standardized test results for high-stakes decisions in Education is ill-advised!” Unfortunately, the great and powerful policy-makers of the land—convinced that fear of embarrassment of poor student performance on standardized tests would coerce educators into teaching to standards—ignored the voices of truth. And the “whole town,” or nearly so, seemed to go along.

In the September 27, 2000, edition of Education Week, a piece by Alfie Kohn was published: [Standardized Testing and Its Victims](#)<sup>32</sup>. If you are concerned about the role of standardized testing in our schools, I believe you will find reading Kohn’s article to be a very provocative and productive use of 10

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<sup>32</sup> <<http://www.alfiekohn.org/article/standardized-testing-victims>>

minutes of your time; further, Mr. Kohn has reminded me that the article is a brief adaptation of his book, *The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000). He encourages anyone who is interested in a more comprehensive treatment of the issue to refer to the book.

Standardized testing is becoming—once again—a more frequent topic of conversation, especially when associated with the political and culture-war clown shows that dominate media conversations. “What do you think of standardized testing?” has recently replaced “What do you think of charter schools?” as the most frequent question asked of me at social gatherings.

What I think of standardized testing is exactly what Kohn laid out in his article—ALMOST FIFTEEN YEARS AGO! When I read it in 2000, I found his thoughts to be aligned with those I had already encountered by reading, speaking with, or listening to James Popham, Bob Marzano, Rick Stiggins, Fenwick English, Doug Reeves and other prominent educational thinkers. Kohn, in my opinion, did a masterful job of distilling the matter down to its essential truths, i.e. he provided the most concise description of—if I may—the naked emperor.

It is not known how long it took for “the whole town” in Anderson’s fable to cry out, “but he hasn’t got anything on!” I do know that it has been fifteen years since Kohn’s article was published in one of the most well-read of educational periodicals, and I remain astonished that we haven’t heard the cry.

Perhaps it is coming. For the sake of our children—especially disadvantaged children of color—it is time for “the whole town” to cry out:

*“But standardized testing, while bad news across the board, is especially hurtful to students who need our help the most!”*



## *Standardized Tests: Opt Out or Not?*

During the four-plus decades that I have been involved with Education, I cannot think of a time when parents have had such a significant opportunity to influence educational policy. If you are a parent in a state that provides the opportunity to have your child opt out of state testing, doing so along with other parents—or not doing so—can have a dramatic impact on whether or not children will continue to be subjected, ultimately, to the pressures created by high stakes testing.

Before a parent makes a decision regarding this matter, it is important to consider two key things.

One, there are consequences for a school if the number of children being opted out causes the testing participation rate to fall below 95%, and two, any parent considering opting their child from testing should understand why standardized tests should not be used as they are currently being used to rank and sort students, teachers, schools, and districts.

If you are a parent or just an interested citizen, I encourage you to read the key facts that follow, which were taken from Alfie Kohn's piece, *Standardized Testing and Its Victims*, which was cited in the previous chapter. If what you read inspires your activist self, you should read Kohn's book, *The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools*, before you start making signs!

Here are the key facts from Kohn's article that every parent should know:

Fact 1. "Our children are tested to an extent that is unprecedented in our history and unparalleled anywhere else in the world...Few countries use standardized tests for children below high school age—or multiple-choice tests for students of any age."

Fact 2. "Non-instructional factors explain most of the variance among test scores when schools or districts are compared...four such variables (are the) number of parents living at home, parents' educational background, type of community, and poverty rate..."

Fact 3. “Norm-referenced tests were never intended to measure the quality of learning or teaching...The main objective of these tests is to rank, not to rate...not to gauge the quality of a given student or school.”

Fact 4. “Standardized-test scores often measure superficial thinking...as a rule, it appears that standardized-test results are positively correlated with a shallow approach to learning.”

Fact 5. “Virtually all specialists condemn the practice of giving standardized tests to children younger than 8 or 9 years old.”

Fact 6. “Virtually all relevant experts and organizations condemn the practice of basing important decisions, such as graduation or promotion, on the results of a single test.”

Fact 7. “The time, energy, and money that are being devoted to preparing students for standardized tests have to come from somewhere...Anyone who doubts the scope and significance of what is being sacrificed in the desperate quest to raise scores has not been inside a school lately.”

Fact 8. “Many educators are leaving the field because of what is being done to schools in the name of ‘accountability’ and ‘tougher standards’...Prospective teachers are rethinking whether they want to begin a career in which high test scores matter most.”

One final contribution from Kohn’s article is a quote from then Senator Paul Wellstone (Democrat, Minnesota); I offer it here because I think it still rings true:

*Making students accountable for test scores works well on a bumper sticker, and it allows many politicians to look good by saying that they will not tolerate failure. But it represents a hollow promise. Far from improving education, high-stakes testing marks a major retreat from fairness, from accuracy, from quality, and from equity.*

There is an additional, conceptual problem I have with the use of standardized testing.

For six years, I was an assessment specialist in a Delaware school district, and in that role I oversaw the development of proprietary, end-of-course exams for high schools in the district. The underlying principles behind these exams were the principles that underlie standards-based educational practices.

For over a quarter century, standards-based education has been endorsed by state statutes as the approach educators must pursue when teaching our children; yet, the actions of politicians and educational leaders betray their failure to understand...

*THE SORTING OR RANKING OF STUDENTS IS  
CONTRARY TO THE PRINCIPLES OF STANDARDS-  
BASED EDUCATION!*

For those who may not know, standards are written descriptions of what all students should know and/or be able to do. Teachers are expected—by statute—to design instruction that leads all students to mastery of designated standards. The "Common Core" has been a ping pong ball paddled between

Progressives and Conservatives, but the discussion is NOT about whether or not teachers should be basing instruction upon specifically identified things that students should know and be able to do; rather, the Common Core debate has been about what entity should decide what the standards will be.

The problem facing educators and policy makers is that the assessments needed to determine mastery do not lend themselves to sophisticated statistical analysis. Let's look at the following Pennsylvania standard for 8<sup>th</sup> graders as an example:

*Sidebar: in Pennsylvania, what follows is called "Eligible Content," which means it is something that, ostensibly, could be assessed by a high stakes test.*

*Distinguish between a scientific theory and an opinion, explaining how a theory is supported with evidence, or how new data/information may change existing theories and practices.*

As someone who has written test items for a testing company, I can tell you that it is impossible for a student to "explain" anything by answering a multiple choice question. Choosing one of four or five options is not an explanation. Explaining is an action that a student must take to make clear to an assessor an idea, a solution, or a problem. The above standard explicitly requires an explanation, not a choice.

The only way to accurately assess the above PA Eligible Content would be to expect students to distinguish in writing between a scientific theory and an opinion, as well as to write an explanation of how a theory is supported and

how theories are impacted by new information. This standard describes a very important expectation that all citizens should be able to fulfill.

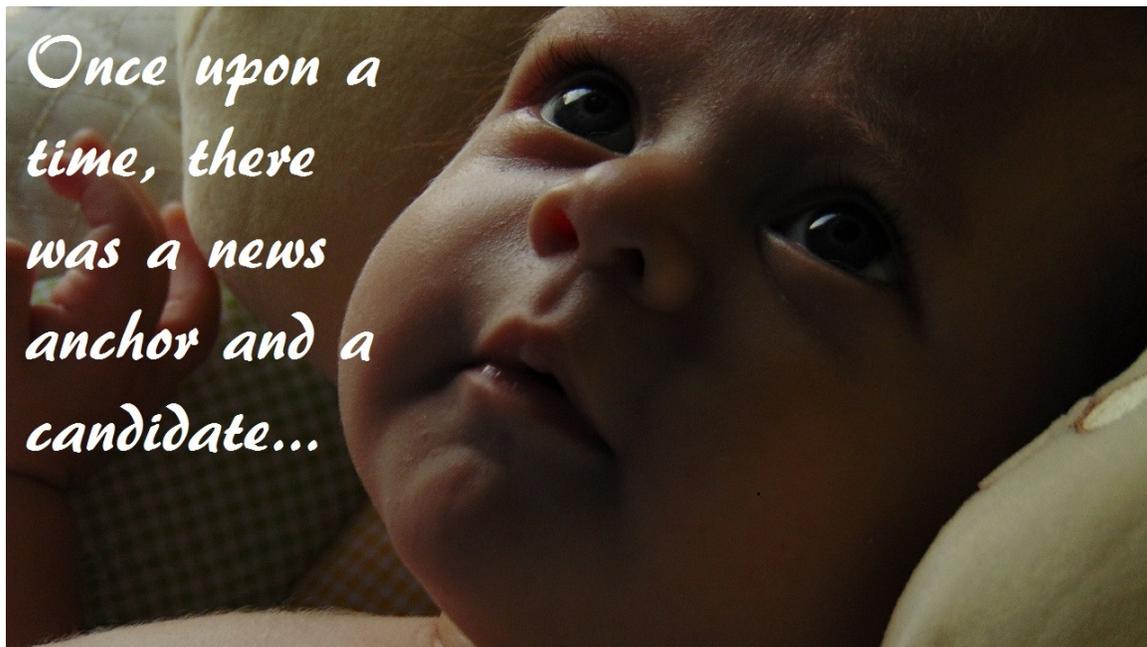
Written (or oral) assessments are employed in effective standards-based classrooms by teachers who understand the importance of aligning instruction and assessment with a designated standard, but the cost associated with the process of analyzing thousands of written student responses for dozens and dozens of standards is prohibitive for state departments of education.

It is sad to say, but cost *is* one reason our children are being subjected to the burden of high stakes testing in their current form. Another reason is the unforgivable ignorance of too many policy makers who do not understand the incongruity of using tests in a standards-based educational environment that are designed to sort and rank students. A third reason is the understandable unfamiliarity of parents with the inappropriateness of making high stakes decisions using tests designed to rank and sort students, and in a social context, silence can and is often interpreted as consent.

Whether or not standardized tests continue to be used in the current manner depends upon the will of the people. I doubt that clamor in the form of protests or a barrage of emails would influence politicians to pull the plug on standardized testing, but a critical mass of parents simply opting their children out of testing could send a loud message that departments of education could not ignore.

If you are a parent, you may wish to give this matter some thought.

*Forward: The next two chapters are posts from my defunct Education Follies blog. I include the first because, as an educator, there is a special place in my heart for children, for the sanctity of life, and for the sanctity of a woman's right to make choices regarding her own body; the second chapter is included because, when I was a principal, there was not a day that passed during which I did not ask myself: "Is this the day I'm going to die?"*



*We have a sacred duty to protect human life at all stages of development...or do we?*

*It is easy to submerge oneself in one's profession, but when that profession deals with the expressions of the greater society, those signs directly or indirectly have a bearing on that which an educator must ultimately face.*

Once upon a time there was a news anchor and a candidate...

News Anchor: Senator, you've stated your view on abortion on many occasions; would you mind restating it for our viewers?

Candidate: I'd be honored to do so. As I've indicated, time and again, I support the right to life and oppose abortion because I believe that human life is sacrosanct, that we have a sacred duty to protect all human life, regardless of the stage of human development.

News Anchor: When you say "stage of human development," Senator, you are including fetuses?

Candidate: Of course. I believe life begins at conception.

News Anchor: And your strong belief in the sanctity of life is founded in your Christian faith?

Candidate: Absolutely.

News Anchor: Is it fair to say, given your belief that life begins with conception, there are many stages of development in the life of a human?

Candidate: Certainly.

News Anchor: You would agree, for example, that a six-year-old human is a child in the ladder of human development?

Candidate: I'm not sure where this is going, but yes, childhood is a stage in the development of a human's life. Adolescence, young adulthood, the elderly are all stages in the development of human life.

News Anchor: Thank you for clarifying that. I'd like you to clarify something else. It is a matter of public record that you have voted on numerous occasions to support military action in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Candidate: I'm one of this country's strongest advocates for using our power to stand up for democracy and freedom around the world.

News Anchor: I think our viewers would concur with that assertion.

Candidate: Thank you.

News Anchor: Given your strong understanding of the military, I'm sure you know that in every war or other military action, including the ones you have publicly supported with your words and votes, hundreds, even thousands, of innocent noncombatants—who, I might note, represent all developmental stages in human life—die as the direct or indirect result of the actions you have supported.

Candidate: Collateral damage is one of the unfortunate consequences of war.

News Anchor: You've just stated that human life is sacrosanct, that we have a sacred duty to protect all life regardless of the stage of human development. Are the lives of innocents killed by actions that you have supported not sacrosanct?

Candidate: I'm not saying that. Those lives are sacred, but there are times, unfortunate as they may be, when people die in the defense of democracy and freedom.

News Anchor: So are you saying that we have a sacred duty to protect the life of a fetus, but we do not have a sacred duty to protect the lives of innocents caught in the crossfire of war?

Candidate: It's an entirely different issue.

News Anchor: I'm not so sure. There was no ambiguity when you said we have a sacred duty to protect all human life. Are you saying that a fetus within the womb of an American woman is more important than the life of an Iraqi six-year-old, who is killed by an American airstrike that you supported with your votes and words?

Candidate: I'm not saying that.

News Anchor: Let me change the subject slightly. When you were governor, you were an outspoken supporter of capital punishment. Is the life of a convicted murderer less sacrosanct than that of a fetus?

Candidate: I would say so, yes. Someone who takes another's life deserves to feel the wrath of the State.

News Anchor: You've also stated that you're proud to have never voted for anything at the state or federal level that supports a welfare state, including, as you've stated, support for the Affordable Care Act.

Candidate: Very proud of those votes. Obamacare and welfare are lynchpins of the Entitlement Nation that Liberals have created. Most Americans work

hard for what they earn, and it's time we stopped asking those Americans to support those who don't seem willing to pull their fair share of the load.

News Anchor: Let's focus on those Americans who you would characterize as not "willing to pull their fair share of the load."

Candidate: Let's.

News Anchor: Is it fair to say that we're referring to those people generally characterized as being poor?

Candidate: Well, not all poor folks exploit entitlement.

News Anchor: But most do?

Candidate: A significant number.

News Anchor: Are you aware that the life expectancy of an American child living in poverty is appreciably less than that of a middle class American child?

Candidate: I am.

News Anchor: But you oppose providing support that would possibly add years to the lives of not just poor children but to all persons who are unable to access the quality of life available to the majority of Americans.

Candidate: I'm opposed to placing that responsibility on the backs of hard-working Americans.

News Anchor: On whose backs would you place that responsibility?

Candidate: The problem with the poor is, they just need to decide not to be poor, and then there'd be no need to answer that question.

News Anchor: (Looks at camera for a beat and then back to the candidate) When you say that all life deserves protection, aren't you equivocating?

Candidate: My views are clear and defensible.

News Anchor: But aren't you asserting that under certain circumstances—war, capital punishment, and poverty being three—human life is not worth protecting.

Candidate: I'm not saying that.

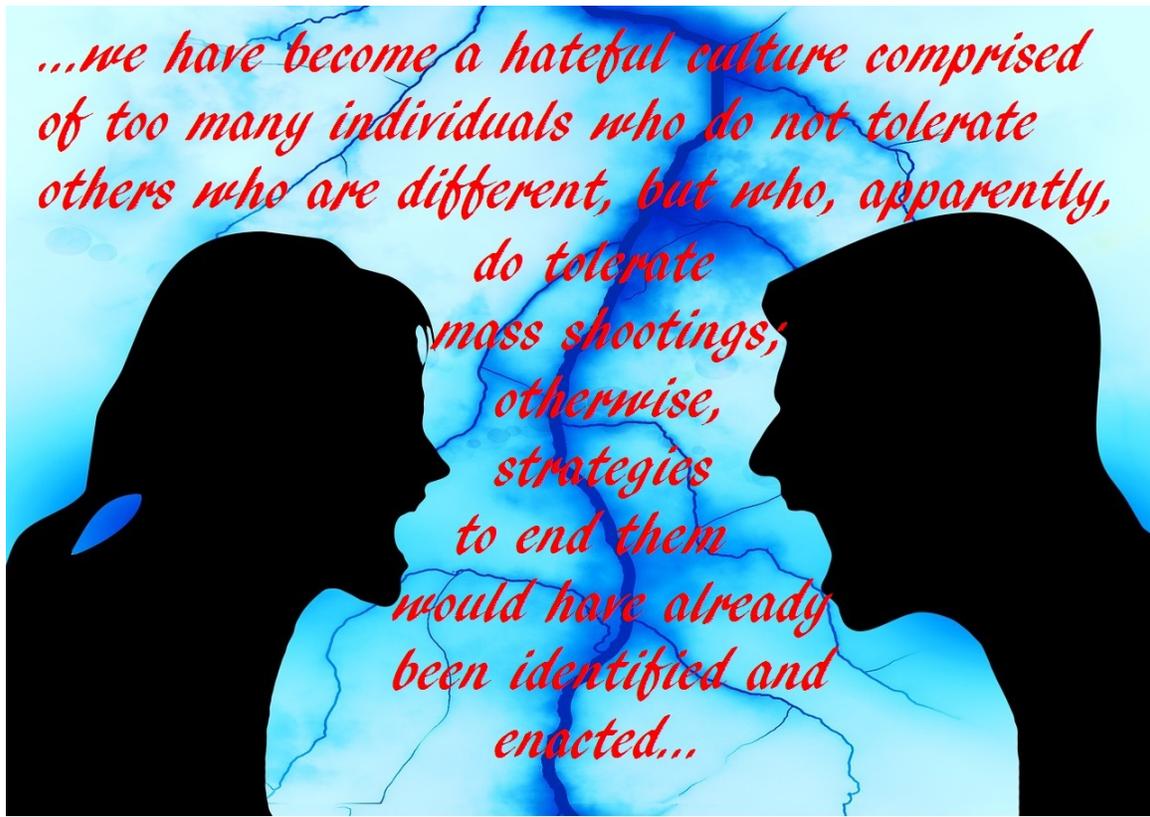
News Anchor: But your support of military action and capital punishment, and your opposition to the welfare state, support outcomes that you clearly know will not protect human life. Doesn't that indicate you believe not all humans' lives are sacrosanct, that influential persons—perhaps yourself being one—have the ability to determine the types of lives that we don't have to be concerned about protecting?

Candidate: You're totally distorting what I'm saying. You began by asking me about abortion. My views about abortion are clear, and most people understand that abortion is totally different from those other situations because a human fetus is defenseless and needs our protection.

News Anchor: Isn't a six-year-old Iraqi child confronted by an errant, thousand-pound bomb, or a very sick child whose parents cannot afford health care, just as defenseless as a fetus?

Candidate: Frankly, I don't intend to respond any further to this line of questioning, which seems to me to be nothing more than badgering from someone who is clearly attempting to make some kind of misguided, Liberal-leaning point.

News Anchor: Thank you, Senator, for making your views on the sanctity of human life quite clear. (Turns toward camera) And now, let's take a look at today's weather across the nation...



*If the ROOT CAUSE of mass shootings is not mental illness or the availability of guns, what could it be?*

Prior to the beginning of the last chapter, I wrote that when I served as Principal of a high school there was seldom a day that went by when I did not, at some random point in the day, wonder if that was the day I would die. I did not think this because of threats of retaliation—my relationships with faculty, students, and the community were sound. I thought it because of the seemingly random nature of mass shootings and the likelihood—given the nature of most educators—that I might have to put myself, physically and emotionally, in

harm's way to protect my kids. I did not fear going to work, or even fear death. It was just a reality of my day-to-day life. I do not know how many of my colleagues across the country have asked themselves the same question, but I suspect it is a greater proportion than a layperson might suspect.

We Americans live in a country where we seem to mutually accept hatred and contempt shouted at us from the media, sometimes from elected officials, sometimes from Christian religious leaders, and sometimes from our friends. That hatred and contempt vilifies individuals from a sitting President to Conservative and Liberal political leaders to "others" who are different from those doing the shouting. Despite the restraint some exercise because of what is resented as political correctness, vitriol is publicly expressed with a clarity and tone that would not have been accepted even 30 years ago.

This is not a question of political correctness; it is a matter of common decency and respect for one another. Add a large dose of violence and killing in the form of TV and movies, and even music, plus the participatory violence and killing that is simulated in video games. The result is a violent, hateful, ambient world that "normal" folks can hear without being impacted in a dysfunctional way. Some folks suffering from mental illness cannot ignore the din—they will obsess on it, and in some cases, manifest their obsessions by killing.

*Is it possible that any individual or entity that supports the constant spewing of mocking intolerance, hatred, violence, and/or killing is responsible to some degree for nearly every mass shooting in this country?*

Despite my personal aversion to guns, I believe mass shootings cannot be avoided by focusing undue energy on gun control—there are far too many guns to even consider controlling them; rather, we have become a hateful culture comprised of too many individuals who do not tolerate others who are different, but who, apparently, do tolerate mass shootings; otherwise, strategies to end them would have already been identified and enacted.

What is so hard for me to understand is, intolerance is often expressed the loudest by individuals who, if asked, would claim to be Christian. It is the only religion of which I am familiar enough to have an opinion, and for the life of me, I cannot find anything in the teachings of Jesus that would encourage or justify the hatred and intolerance of some people who claim to follow him. I am still waiting for someone to explain and justify this apparent hypocrisy to me.

Can you agree that it is time for us as a national community to...

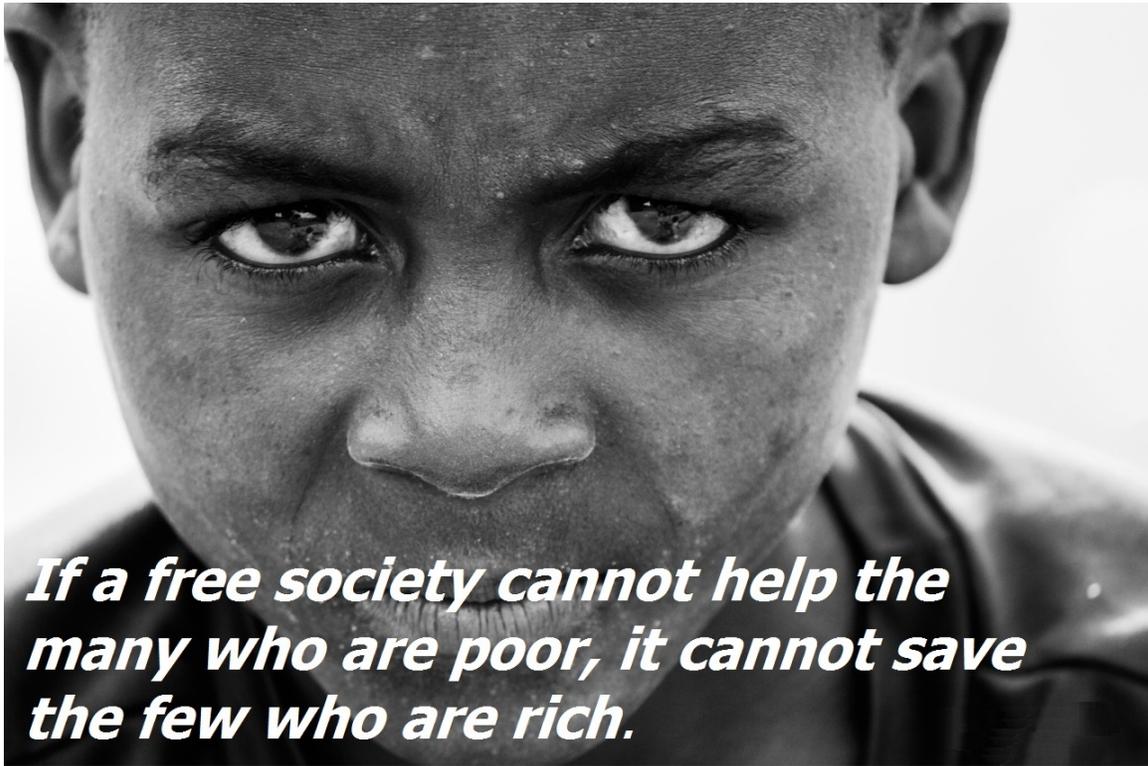
- ...identify and elect individuals, *regardless of political affiliation*, who testify to—by word and deed—tolerance and a willingness to work with others of different views?
- ...do our best, as individuals, to avoid being sucked in by, or repeat, the vitriol shouted by the Left and the Right, or by bigots of any ilk?
- ...exercise, individually and collectively, the rational, tolerant thinking that might describe a “*Radical Middle?*”

- ...realize that the flood of divisive language and hateful actions being disgorged by Americans is doing more to destroy our country than anything of which Osama Bin Laden could have imagined?

At times like this, my age shows: I find myself being comforted by listening to John Lennon sing, “All you need is love...” but then I realize, I don’t know what that means. A child would interpret the lyric as, “yes, I do need love,” but an adult might think beyond the self and think of love in a more global way, an antidote of sorts for all that is wrong with our world. But can love be enacted in any way other than by the expression of love between one person and others? Can institutions act out of love, and if so, what might it look like in the form of political will or policy? Can corporate business models reflect love, or is capitalism, by definition, the antithesis of love?

Much to think about.

All my love to you...whatever that means...



## *Education and the Welfare State*

After listening to and reading many comments about the U.S. being an out of control welfare state, I realized I did not have a reasoned, empirical point of view on the matter and decided to begin examining the matter in light of public education.

According to Wikipedia, “a welfare state is a concept of government in which the state plays a key role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of its citizens. It is based on the principles of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life.”

The above description would appear to encompass the role of public education in the Twentieth Century, and for the children who live in affluent districts, public education may still be fulfilling the expectations of the welfare state. For millions of disadvantaged students—not so much.

Like many millions of Americans, I am descended from European immigrants who, looking for a better life, immigrated to our shores only to discover, in many cases, poverty rivaling or exceeding that which they had escaped. It was public education—an extension of the welfare state—that promoted “the economic and social well-being” of my grandparents by helping them become literate and by preparing them for the world of work. They benefitted from “equality of opportunity,” and benefitted from programs targeting “equitable distribution of wealth” during the Great Depression and the years that followed.

Without public education, my grandparents would have been “unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life,” i.e. if private schooling was the only option available to them, their families could not have afforded the cost of a private education, and all the benefits that accrued from being educated would be beyond their grasp.

*Millions of us have benefitted from the extension of the welfare state that is public education.*

I have been reflecting upon criticism of the welfare state in the context of the above description and am left with these questions: If someone is diametrically opposed to the existence of a welfare state, does that person believe...

- ...government should not play a key role “in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of its citizens?”
- ...the role of government should not be “based on the principles of equality of opportunity or the equitable distribution of wealth?”
- ...there is no “public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life?”

The last bullet was once referred to as “paternalism,” a criticism to which Lester Frank Ward responded in 1895:

*The charge of paternalism is chiefly made by the class that enjoys the largest share of government protection. Those who denounce it are those who most frequently and successfully invoke it. Nothing is more obvious today than the signal inability of capital and private enterprise to take care of themselves unaided by the state; and while they are incessantly denouncing "paternalism," by which they mean the claim of the defenseless laborer and artisan to a share in this lavish state protection, they are all the while besieging legislatures for relief from their own incompetency, and "pleading the baby act" through a trained body of lawyers and lobbyists. The dispensing of national pap to this class should rather be called "maternalism," to which a square, open, and dignified paternalism would be infinitely preferable.*

It is interesting that the Father of the Welfare State in America (Ward) provides a description—now one-hundred-ten-years-old—that is a precise description of contemporary America.

Today, the “class that enjoys the largest share of government protection,” the class that is “incessantly denouncing paternalism,” is comprised of: (1) a class of mostly white men who belong to the 0.1% of the American population that controls 90% of America’s wealth, and (2) the newly-anointed persons that are corporations, which include banks, hedge funds and other large equity corporations, the oil and gas industry, and agri-business—to name a few.

One-hundred-ten-years-ago, Ward identified the wealthy as denouncing the “the claim of the defenseless laborer and artisan to a share in this lavish state protection.” The Fox News graphic of a hand bursting forth from the heartland, over which “ENTITLEMENT NATION” is emblazoned, insinuates that the wealthy of today, via their media conduit to the hoi polloi, are still denouncing the claim of the “defenseless.”

Ward’s description of using “a trained body of lawyers and lobbyists” to dispense “national pap” to the wealthiest individuals and corporations by “besieging legislatures for relief from their own incompetency” rings as true today as it did one-hundred-ten-years-ago. Relief is often in the form of reduced taxes and increased subsidies, e.g. welfare for corporate entities. The resources for such relief have to come from other entities, such as funding for public education.

The very rich do not need public education. A large proportion of their children forsake public schools for private schools. Politicians who receive pap from the wealthy are strong advocates for choice and charter schools, which institutionalize the sense of privilege that the wealthy take for granted, leaving

urban public schools as a proven "Port of Last Resort" for the most challenged of disadvantaged children.

My grandparents needed public education a century ago. Today's disadvantaged children need high quality education more—not choice, not charters, but effective, research-driven, community schools that are accountable in meaningful ways to parents and citizens. All children—especially in a welfare state—should be entitled to such an education.

To me, perhaps the most ironic aspect of Fox News' derogatory characterization of the "Entitlement Nation" is the demographic composition of Fox News' viewers. According to [The Atlantic](#), in 2015 over half of those viewers were 68 or older. I would be very surprised if the vast majority of them have not benefitted in some way from public education. In addition, according to the Social Security Administration, 90% of Americans over 65 receive Social Security Benefits. In other words, approximately half of Fox News' viewers, viewers likely to be critical of the welfare state, are certain beneficiaries of it.

The concepts are still sound that influenced the "progressive" Roosevelt presidents to support creation of a welfare state, which included support for public education, but there are serious challenges in how the welfare state, including public education, is being implemented in America. The challenges are systemic and could be overcome if those in power made the commitment to deal with them, but that would require a portion of the collective wealth being apportioned to that task. Those in power too often are under the influence of powerful players who do not want any of the collective wealth of

the welfare state directed toward revision of systems that would impact anyone but their wealthy selves.

*Woe to the disadvantaged.*

If those who cannot support, for moral reasons, government playing a “key role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of its citizens...based upon the principles of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life,” perhaps they should look at this key governmental role from the perspective of their own self-interest. As President John Kennedy said in his Inaugural Address...

*“If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.”*

Lest you think this was political hyperbole, keep in mind that when Franklin Roosevelt signed into place one of the cornerstones of the American welfare state—Social Security—he was in the midst of the greatest and most disruptive poverty in American history. It was 1935. Only seventeen years before, one of the most powerful nations on earth—Russia—was dismantled by thousands of desperate, angry poor.

Keep the Russian Revolution in mind when you consider, the last time the gap in wealth between the 0.1% and the rest of us was as large as it is now occurred in the years just before the beginning of the Great Depression. And no disadvantaged citizenry of any country in history, it could be argued, has been better armed than today’s disadvantaged Americans.

*No country is immune to cataclysmic revolution.*

Education has the potential to be a part of a cure for the current malaise of the poor, but not as it is currently being administered to the disadvantaged children of America, and if nothing changes, if the knowing-doing gap among educators does not decrease, if the gap in wealth continues to increase, if the haves win battles over the have-nots for a greater portion of "lavish state protection," if the wealthy continue to blame the poor for what is wrong in America...

*...then woe to us all.*



## *Race, Class, and the Second Law of Thermodynamics*

*I found myself increasingly frustrated during my last years in Education by the universal lack of awareness on the part of my colleagues, regarding the good work and research that had been laid down in years past. That frustration juxtaposed with current (recurrent!) problems prompted several of my Education Follies posts, which are previous chapters in this book. In preparation of my blog posts and this book, I have not only looked at past good work and research but have also looked at my personal archives and found tidbits like this chapter. It was originally written as an op ed piece in 1996, but I never submitted it, perhaps because I had recently begun to climb the administrative ladder and was not willing to make waves.*

*Shame on me for my professional cowardice! What follows is my attempt to make amends. As you read it, keep in mind that it was written twenty years ago. Also consider that if written today, "community schools" would be amended to read "neighborhood and charter schools"...*

The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that the entropy (disorder) of the universe is always increasing, which is why *all systems move toward less ordered states unless energy is used in opposition*. Life itself can be described as an intricate and complex series of chemical reactions within an organism, which require energy to maintain a steady, ordered state, i.e. life.

Unfortunately (from a purely anthropocentric point of view), entropy ultimately and always wins.

It could be argued that human systems also follow the Second Law—not scientifically but conceptually. Without the input of energy, families, classrooms, schools, communities and nations move in the direction of disorder and termination.

Author Jonathan Kozol<sup>33</sup> has contrasted schools and communities ravaged by entropy (my characterization) with schools having more than enough energy to maintain healthy and desirable steady states. In Savage Inequalities, Kozol identifies East St. Louis, Illinois, and other school systems as examples of what occurs when there are insufficient resources (e.g. community will, leadership, money, able professionals) to direct and apply the energy necessary to maintain

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<sup>33</sup> You may wish to peruse Kozol's article in The Nation: [Overcoming Apartheid](http://www.thenation.com/article/overcoming-apartheid)  
<<http://www.thenation.com/article/overcoming-apartheid>>

or increase the order within school systems. Kozol also describes school systems (e.g. Fairview Heights in Illinois) that are prototypes of systems with the wealth and persistence to defy entropy's menace.

The advantaged citizens living within the boundaries of school systems like Fairview Heights will always have an undaunted competitive advantage over less advantaged neighboring districts, such as Fairview Heights' immediate neighbors to the west in East St. Louis. The energy needed to maintain the Fairview Heights system can be purchased with the surplus wealth of its citizens. East St. Louis and the other urban systems about which Kozol reports have no surplus; there is more than likely a deficit.

The energy required in places of poverty needs to be extracted from the sinew and will of an unsophisticated populace that needs every ounce of available energy just to survive. Education in such places is damned because the affluent and advantaged have the power and volition needed to oppose policies that would transfer the measure of a community's energy—wealth—to less prosperous neighbors.

Biologically speaking, there is a powerful selective advantage that accrues to those who conserve energy for their own use, which is why, apart from issues moral and ethical, I find segregation puzzling. Segregation defies "social entropy" and, therefore, randomness; i.e. diversity. Natural diversity does not require the expenditure of energy—entropy would deliver diversity without any effort on anyone's part; yet, people resist, which begs the question...

*Why do people support an anti-entropic system like segregation, one that requires far more energy than would be needed to allow for the random distribution of different races and ethnic groups in and among communities?*

Perhaps our aversion to those who are different—an aversion that requires the expenditure of what is limited energy to segregate groups—is a vestige of an earlier time when our ancestors were instinctively led to battles between neighboring clans to acquire and preserve territory for hunting and gathering. Such behavior in our primate cousins remains essential to species survival.

Jane Goodall was one of the first, if not the first, to report behavior akin to racism—antagonism directed against an "other" based upon the assumption that one's own group is superior—in perhaps our closest biological relative, the chimpanzee. Until 1974, the chimp, as observed by Goodall and her associates, served as a pacifistic model for humanity. In that year, the males of the Kasakela group began a systematic war against a group of chimps that had broken away from the Kasakelans. The only apparent reason for the brutal murders of every male of the splinter group was that each did not belong to the Kasakela clan.

It could be argued that segregation—the systemic manifestation of racism—draws its power from something deep within our biological nature. Masked by the apparent need to raise our collective importance above the world of fang and claw, modern humans do not wish to think that significant and collective behaviors are driven by biology. But what better explanation can there be to explain why, despite the most important teachings of America's dominant

religion, the advantaged in our country—the greatest proportion of whom claim to belong to that religion—have succeeded in isolating the poor and disadvantaged?

As an affluent culture, it appears we are waging the same war as did our Kasakelan cousins, and although we are *usually* less physically savage than those cousins in waging that war, the results are savagely the same.

There have been times when humans have defied the territorial prerogative and stood for equality, but those events tend to be so rare and so significant as to be considered defining moments in the history of civilizations: the *Magna Carta*, the *Declaration of Independence*, and the *Emancipation Proclamation* are three.

*Brown v. Board of Education* and its spawn are such a “moment” in aggregate. Despite over forty years of judicial and legislative support for desegregation reinforced by the landmark Supreme Court decision, the most common response of Delaware legislators to Judge Sue L. Robinson’s 1995 decree—which declared that the 1978 decision requiring court supervision of New Castle County schools was, in effect, no longer needed—was a call for the return to community schools (and an end to nearly two decades of “forced” busing).

Clamoring for community schools may be entropy at work (i.e. less energy need be expended than that needed to maintain extensive busing over significant distances); however, I suspect this entropic excuse is a subterfuge masking fantasies of suburban schools where all children are at least middle class and mostly fair-skinned.

If it comes to pass that community schools become a reality, it will not be long before segregation is once again visible in New Castle County school systems. When certain neighborhood schools in or near Wilmington garner a particular level of color and/or of poverty, middle class families will fly to schools where most children look like and/or share the same advantages as their own children.

When that occurs, the complexion of schools in and around Wilmington will begin to resemble that found prior to the 1978 desegregation decree. The physical conditions of schools and the competence of faculty are likely to be equal for a time because of loud and frequent pressure from community advocates, which means such schools will aspire to the separate but equal maxim that *Brown* adamantly denied.

A Sixty Minutes segment (11/5/95) depicted black educators from a southern school district advocating for separate schools for black students. They argued that those children would be better educated in a segregated school. The position of those educators was not singular. In The Burden of Brown, a Wilmington community advocate was quoted as follows...

*Jea P. Street, a social worker at the Hilltop Lutheran Community Center, recalled that when he attended Wilmington High School in the 1960's, "I didn't have any talent for basketball, but I went to all the games because the social life was the best I've known." With dispersion, there was less participation in school activities, and Street maintained that blacks had been "systematically deprived of fun...I don't like to oppose change or modern*

*times,” Street continued, “but as far as I can see, we need schools that are in close touch with their communities. If the communities are predominantly black, the schools should be predominantly black. That’s fine with me. Some of the most successful people I know went to predominantly black schools.” Street acknowledged that “anti-busing white people will love to hear a black person say this. They hate busing because they don’t like blacks. I see how much damage dispersion has done to the black community.”*

Apparently, it is not only a significant number of white folks who are unhappy with “the burden of *Brown*,” however, what those who clamor for community schools are ignoring—regardless of their rationale, class, or race—is perhaps the essential point of Chief Justice Warren’s decision in *Brown*...

*To separate (children in elementary and secondary schools) from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone.*

But separate the races and classes will be, albeit lawfully, if community schools are reborn. People cannot be restrained from living where they want to live, and where they live will be dictated by the rules of class ultimately laid down by those with the power of affluence and advantage.

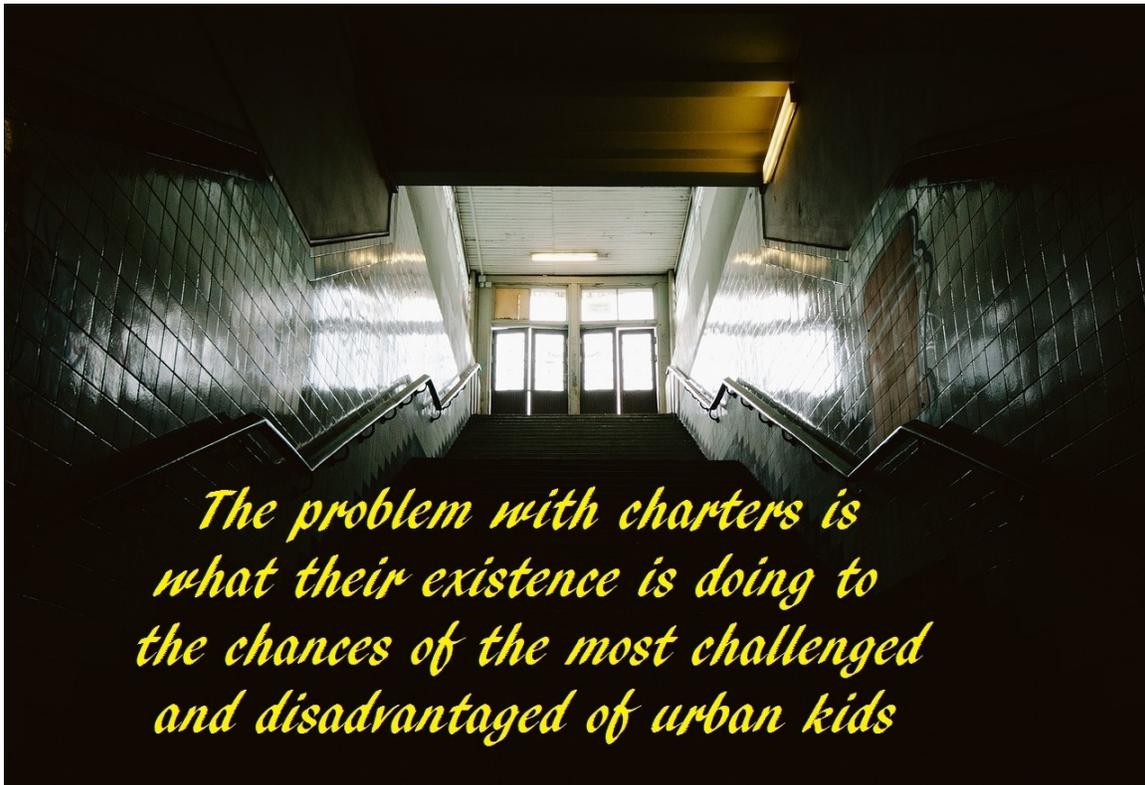
**If institutionalized segregation is eradicated, what victory is there if segregation ultimately reigns?**

The history of humanity—from the Pharaoh’s’ treatment of Hebrews to the treachery in the Balkans—validates how difficult it is for us to accept as equals, or even tolerate the sight of, persons who are different from us. The emphasis on diversity over the past years has exacerbated the problem. Rather than identifying and emphasizing differences, we should be working very hard to accentuate the characteristics common to all humanity: the importance of family, the wish to provide a better life for our children, the need to be valued individually and loved, the need to feel protected and safe, the wish to be treated fairly.

Reformers like Kozol are tilting at windmills, and we are blessed to be able to benefit from the inspiration of their courage, insights, and persistence, but those efforts are likely to prove futile. History teaches that the energy made available to eradicate “savage inequalities” is likely to be far less than the energy mustered by Kasakelans desperate to dominate and separate themselves from those who are different.

Unfortunately for us all, the debilitating effects of race and class segregation will encourage the continued growth of an underclass, which will ultimately overwhelm the energy resources of the advantaged. Unless we nurture a collective morality that is committed to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” for all, we cannot long delay inevitable societal chaos and disorder, which has been the fate of civilizations for millennia. The following from JFK’s Inaugural Address is worth repeating:

*“If a free society does not help the many who are poor,  
it cannot save the few who are rich.”*



*The problem with charters is what their existence is doing to the chances of the most challenged and disadvantaged of urban kids*

### *Whether or Not Charter Schools Are the Answer Depends Upon the Question*

It should not astonish me—but it does—how often Education is a topic of conversation among lay persons, and when educators are in their presence, we are often asked our opinions. Many of us bask in our temporary roles as spokespersons for our profession, even though we know the questions are likely born of simple courtesy in the practice of polite conversation.

Over the past few years, the number of lay people with whom I speak is increasing who bring up the topic of charter schools. Just this past week, my wife beckoned me to join her from across the room. There was a twinkle in her

eye, so I was not surprised when she introduced me to Bill (not his name) and said, “Bill here tells me he thinks charter schools are the answer, and I told him you were an educator and might want to talk with him about it.”

My wife is *not* an educator, but she has been the only lay person in some gatherings of educators where she has been subjected to the endless droning that can result when we begin to discuss our profession. Bill had introduced education into his chat with my wife. I was the cavalry summoned to rescue her.

“*Do* you think charters are the answer?” Bill asked as my wife hustled away.

“I think it’s the answer for the kids that get into good ones,” I replied.

“Oh?” he said with some surprise.

“I just spent a year,” I continued, “working with twelve charter schools in Philly that were deemed to be in serious need of improvement according to DOE, and I can tell you I’d recommend ten of them to any parent as positive options for their kids.

“Not every charter is effective. Not so many years ago, the average state test scores in Pennsylvania were appreciably higher in non-charter schools than in charters. Just like with traditional schools, there’s a great deal of variability in the effectiveness of charters.

“The problem with charters is what their existence is doing to the chances of the most challenged and disadvantaged of urban kids.”

“But isn’t that the point?” Bill asked. “Don’t charters help those kids?”

“Those that can get into a good one. Unfortunately, many of the kids who need those opportunities never get the chance. Sometimes it’s random—some schools may use lotteries for admissions—or kids may not live in a catchment area that is served by a charter school a city has selected to run a failed public school. And then there’s the matter of parents who themselves have been failed by public education, parents who may lack the understanding of what opportunities are out there for their kids.”

“I guess there are just too many poor parents who don’t care about their kids,” Bill said.

“I’m not saying that. My experience has been that there are way too many parents who don’t care about their kids in all classes of people. I think, like I said, it’s just a matter of understanding. If I were a fly on the wall at dinnertime in the home of a very advantaged teenager—whose parents care about them—I’d probably be hearing them discuss what went on in school that day, what further thinking had gone into that next summer’s college tours, how they were doing on the project due next Tuesday, things like that.

“Advantaged parents bring this stuff up at dinner because they’ve lived the process. They discuss these things with their peers at work, at the club, at cocktail parties. They know how important this stuff is. It’s what an advantaged middle class parent just does.

“Parents who may not have completed high school, who have multiple jobs because they need them to provide for their family, and who seldom have the time to sit down to dinner with their kids because of those jobs, aren’t likely to have the understanding of all it is they should probably be doing. And I’m talking about parents that care deeply about their kids. They may not...literally...have the time to learn about charter school opportunities for their kids, or just as important, things like the processes needed to apply.

“Sure there are kids who don’t have a chance to get into a charter because how they’re parented is akin to neglect, but my nonscientific sample of one tells me that’s not the primary reason, but even if it were, those kids are part of a massive number of disadvantaged kids who won’t have the opportunity to get into a really good charter school.

“Which leads to the biggest problem with the concept of charter schools. Until there are enough seats for all disadvantaged kids in effective charters, it means those that don’t get that opportunity are left behind, often in substandard schools run by overwhelmed administrators, many times taught by inexperienced youngsters or by too many older teachers who don’t believe the kids can learn because of the baggage they bring to school.

“About five years ago, an old-timer told me he thought Osama bin Laden, on his best day, would never have dreamed of a better way to create a cadre of well-armed, angry, and disenfranchised urban terrorists than what was happening in urban education, and what he was talking about was how the

most challenged and disadvantaged students were being concentrated in schools that were overwhelmed by their presence.”

Bill looked at me for a beat like I had lost my mind, but he recovered, and because he was apparently struggling to come to grips with a point of view that was contrary to a strong paradigm he held, he took another tack.

“But doesn’t the existence of good charters create competition that makes public schools better?” Bill asked.

“That’s what charter proponents have been saying from the very beginning,” I replied.

“Well?”

“Bill, think about it. When there’s competition, there’re winners and losers. ‘A rising tide floats all boats’ might be a workable concept here, but I’m not aware of any studies that reinforce the claim that competition with charters makes traditional schools better. In Philly, my sense of things is that charters compete against each other, not against traditional schools.”

“So what you’re saying is that you’re opposed to charters,” Bill said.

“Not at all. Remember, I got to know twelve charters the state said were ‘failing,’ and I’d still recommend ten of them to any parent. They are really good schools with compassionate, knowledgeable faculty and sound leadership. What I’m upset about is the notion that as a culture we don’t have what it takes to demand that ALL schools are that good.”

“Is it a money thing?” Bill asked

“Resources are important...to any school, charter or traditional...but keep in mind that most increases in education dollars in any district or school go to salaries, and there are no studies I’m aware of that show a causative relationship between salaries and student achievement. It’s not money, it’s will.”

“Will?”

“Our collective will as a society to demand that educators practice what studies tell us works in classrooms. It means the will to insist that managers manage based upon what we know about motivation, not just motivation of kids, but motivation of the adults that teach those kids.”

“You’re talking accountability,” Bill said.

“I am, but not the failed systems that states try to implement, accountability with a capital 'A.' I’m talking about the accountability that does use essential metrics to measure student performance, but not in a way that uses standardized test scores in meaningless ways. I’m talking about accountability with a small 'a,' the most important accountability, accountability that results when enlightened leaders create collaborative school cultures where teachers understand their moral imperative to do what research says they should do for their kids, where ‘trust is a starting place,’ where kids know their teachers believe they have the capacity to learn tough stuff.”

“So the answer isn’t charters?” Bill asked.

“It depends on the question, my friend.”

“You mentioned standardized tests...” Bill began.

I laughed and replied, “I think I need another beer.”



*Imagine how improved race relations might be if we had spent the last fifty years discussing the things we hold in common as human beings instead of being consumed by a focus on diversity.*

## *Race Relations and Social Dominance*

In [\*Delaware's 'uncomfortable' conversation about race\*](#)<sup>34</sup>,” recently published in the (Wilmington, DE) [\*News Journal\*](#), reporter Jessica Masulli Reyes provides insights into challenges faced by citizens concerned with diminishing the racial divide that exists in New Castle County, Delaware, insights that can be extrapolated to many communities across America.

Her observations are helpful, but they are not new. Growing up in the Fifties and Sixties near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, I was raised by a white mother who insisted I join her at the March on Washington in 1963 (a seminal moment in

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<sup>34</sup> <<http://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/local/2015/12/04/delawares-uncomfortable-conversation-race/76571618/>>

my life). By then, I knew race wasn't just an issue in the South. As far as housing was concerned, the Harrisburg area was as segregated as the most segregated in the South: there were no black families or individuals living among the 40,000+ citizens that populated the communities on the West Shore of the Susquehanna River; blacks lived on the East Shore in city ghettos and in a small neighborhood next to the city limit.

Unlike the South, racial biases of the white residents of Harrisburg were hushed—in polite society, such things were not discussed. The community in which I was raised reflected Dick Gregory's characterization: "In the South, they don't mind how close I get, so long as I don't get too big. In the North, they don't mind how big I get, so long as I don't get too close." For decades, real estate practices ensured the latter in Greater Harrisburg.

As readers my age will recall, because of the high percentage of regular attendance, the influence of churches, especially those of Protestant persuasion, had more influence in the white community than—it could be argued—they have today. In Harrisburg, a bit more than a decade after the World Council of Churches resumed its effort to unify "the church" globally, ecumenicalism was a big deal, and by the early Sixties, segregation became a focus of conversation among congregations with an ecumenical bent. Thanks to the insistence of my mother, I attended many of those conversations as a teen.

What I recall as distinctly different about those conversations compared to conversations related to race that I have experienced over the past fifty or so years is that in the early Sixties there was never mention of the word or concept

of diversity; instead, the focus of those conversations was something that enlightened me and has stayed with me all my life. As a white teenager, I knew there were racial differences between myself and black kids of the same age, but like the adults who engaged in the ecumenical conversations, the differences seemed to be accepted as cultural window dressing. Apparently, diversity was deemed insignificant in the greater discussion.

What the conversations focused upon was identifying the important things that we all shared regardless of our race: the importance of family, the wish to provide a better life for children, the need to feel valued individually, the need to feel protected and safe, the wish to be treated fairly.

Participants in those conversations did not walk away with a better understanding of how diverse we were; rather, many of us came away with a clearer understanding that regardless of race, there are things more important than cultural window dressings. We learned that what we hold in common, regardless of our race, includes those things that each of us wants to experience unimpeded, things that fall within the parameters of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

*Sidebar: Imagine how improved race relations might be if we had spent the last fifty years discussing the things we hold in common as human beings instead of being consumed by a focus on diversity. I suggest that “diversity training” may be one of the most influential but least productive things we could have done to address the challenge of race relations in America.*

Reyes' article also triggered my recall of a program—[\*Courageous Conversations about Race\*](#)<sup>35</sup>—implemented in a school district in which I was employed. I highly recommend the program to school leaders. It is far more involved and complex than can be described by this chapter, but I do want to share the most significant insight I gained from the program. It is related to something that shouts loud and clear from Reyes' article: (many, some, all of?) the white folks cited seem clueless about the insidious influences that accrue to the victors of history.

My specific insight was related to a charge we were given by the Courageous Conversation facilitator; we were to answer this question:

*What does it mean to be white?*

Given that I was white, I was astonished to find that I could not answer the question. For weeks, the question would pop into mind at odd moments, and I would think about it without result. Months later, the answer arrived without warning as I was getting ready for my day as an assistant principal...

*What it means to be white is to never, ever, have to answer the question, what does it mean to be white?*

When I realized this, I gained a perspective of social dominance that has been very helpful to me in my role as an educator. In [Gary Howard's](#)<sup>36</sup> We Can't Teach What We Don't Know, I encountered very detailed and insightful explanations of how social dominance influences educational systems. He

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<sup>35</sup> < <http://www.schoolimprovement.com/experts/glenn-singleton>>

<sup>36</sup> < <http://ghequityinstitute.com/>>

draws his conclusions from “research findings in the areas of minimal group paradigm, social positionality, social dominance theory, and systems of privilege and penalty.” If you are an educator and have not encountered the book, I highly recommend the read.

What Howard identifies in the context of education is directly relevant, I suggest, to the greater challenge of race relations today. Here are some of Howard’s observations, which I have paraphrased, regarding the impact of social dominance in education that I have attempted to extrapolate to the greater challenge:

- Racial issues cannot be resolved without understanding and acknowledging the impact of Social Dominance. In Reyes’ article, Delaware Supreme Court Chief Justice Leo E. Strine, Jr., encouraged a panel to avoid using the term “white supremacy.” Clearly the words, if capitalized, refer to specific groups that practice the politics and acts of hatred, but the root of racial issues in America is specifically related to the force of Western White cultural domination, i.e. white supremacy.
- Inequities are perpetuated by “three highly interrelated and mutually reinforcing dynamics of dominance: the assumption of rightness, the luxury of ignorance, and the legacy of privilege,” all of which were at play when I realized that what it means to be white is never having to ask oneself what it means to be white.
- The *assumption of rightness* allows members of the dominant culture to accept without question that problems associated with race are the fault

of “the other” and not a result of actions by the dominant culture. An example of this is the constant reference to the election of an African American to the Presidency by certain members of the media. The implication? Look, a black is in the White House. If you are black and still complaining of racism, the problem is in your own mind because if we white folks were racist, there would not be a black President.

- The *luxury of ignorance* allows members of the dominant culture to insulate themselves from the realities experienced by others who are not white, especially those folks who live in poor communities. Howard presents this dilemma from the perspective of a white educator: “One of the dilemmas of White dominance is that we are often blind to the negative impact that our imagined goodness and narrow sense of normalcy have on others who do not share the demographic advantages that have favored our group. We see ourselves as doing good work by serving “those kids,” often without connecting emotionally and personally with our students’ actual lived experiences.”
- The *legacy of privilege* refers to those things that folks experience based solely upon their being part of the dominant culture. An example of this is the flight of white families and educators away from schools where demographic change results in a significant increase in the proportion of poor urban children, especially those who are Black or Latino. Politicians have created options of “choice,” such as charter schools and vouchers, which respond to the wishes of the dominant culture to insulate their children from “the other.” New Castle County, Delaware, for anyone

who is interested, provides one of the best examples of the impact of the legacy of privilege—white flight—that has continued to exist since a desegregation decree was issued by a Federal court in 1978.

While “White flight” in New Castle County was initially akin to a knee-jerk reaction to the court decree, families of color, whose economic success has provided access to the legacy of privilege, have taken advantage of the options provided to the dominant group, i.e. flight from public schools in New Castle County. This suggests that dominance of class is compounding the deleterious impact of racial dominance; white flight has become green flight.

Make no mistake, the race-related issues we face today lie squarely upon the foundation of social dominance of which members of the dominant culture are almost universally unaware. In his book, Howard eloquently directs the following to educators, but the import is significant for all (emphasis is mine):

*It is important to ask ourselves as White educators how our own social positionality and history of dominance might be implicated in the disproportional distribution of privilege and penalty in contemporary educational systems, not because we stand accused but because **we should be committed to equitable opportunities and outcomes for all of our students..***

## *The Brandywine Experience*

*In 2007, I was hired as Principal of Brandywine High School (BHS) in New Castle County, Delaware. The school had recently been designated as one of three high schools that were the first in Delaware to be restructured under the auspices of what has been called the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which was a reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.*

*The failure of BHS' black students and special education students to meet, year after year, the absolute or growth-related achievement targets specified by the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) meant that DDOE was required by NCLB to identify and designate BHS for restructuring.*

*The reason I was appointed principal was solely because the then superintendent believed my previous experience in Education had provided me with the skills needed to write and implement a restructuring plan. This was significant because the DDOE did not provide any specific guidance or templates that could be used to direct the development of a restructuring plan. We three principals of the schools under restructuring were very much on our own.*

*Because I had worked as an assistant principal at BHS for a year prior to my appointment as Principal, I had a deep understanding of the causes of the malaise that threatened to undermine the ability of the faculty to function as a cohesive and effective educational entity. I also understood that much of what I have described in previous chapters represented prevalent actions, attitudes, and aptitudes among the BHS Faculty at the beginning of my tenure. From September 2007 through June of 2009, I approached my task as a change agent, knowing those understandings represented the challenges with which I had to deal. The following chapters are some of my personal accounts of that time.*



## *My First Faculty Meeting at Brandywine High*

*Lay people, including politicians and parents, make judgments and recommendations for school improvement based upon what they have encountered in the media or heard discussed by friends and colleagues. What these “outsiders” often do not realize is that there can be underlying causes of dysfunction in a school that are far deeper and more complex than funding, curriculum, governance structures, or instructional practices.*

*For those of you who are administrators, the faculty meeting described below is significantly different from the “talking emails” that constitute too many faculty meetings. It may reinforce your current use of meetings designed to grow a collegial faculty, or may encourage you to consider such a meeting. It is also important to note that what follows is not a transcript of the*

*meeting; rather, I always created “scripts” of what I wanted to address prior to meetings, which forced me to be certain of my content and provided a document I could share with absentees. It was not uncommon for me to adapt the “script” during a meeting, so what was ultimately presented may have varied a bit from what follows.*

Good Afternoon and welcome to the beginning of our new adventure.

As compassionately as possible, I’ve tried to be frank with you over the past year, and I’ve decided there is no way to proceed in my new role other than to continue to try and be as frank, empathetic, and considerate as I can be.

I apologize if some of what I’m about to share makes some of you uncomfortable and realize that those of you who are new to our school may find some of this unsettling. It’s my hope that each of you will reflect upon what I’m about to share, not with the goal of your agreeing with me but so that you can honestly say you’ve measured your own values and opinions against those of mine and those of your colleagues. It’s my hope that wherever you arrive conceptually, it’s not a close-minded rejection *or* acceptance of my views or those of your colleagues but is, rather, a carefully considered judgment that you own, which will guide you as you contribute to helping us become a more cohesive and effective faculty.

It’s my further hope that in the months to come, each and every person in this room will come to feel connected to this school family in a real and powerful way to create a synergy that makes each of us more effective as we pursue our vision of embracing, inspiring, and challenging each of our kids each day. If you cannot see yourself being happy in a collaborative faculty focused on this

vision, then I will support you in helping you find a position in another school where you will be more content. No one should have to work in a place that is not compatible with how we view ourselves as educators.

The past six months have been very difficult for many of us. Some of us have been able to focus on our duties and not be directly or dramatically affected by the events that have unfolded during that time, but even those of us who have tried to distance ourselves have been drawn into or affected by controversies and interpersonal squabbles—some of which, seen from a distance, were petty or not related directly with our mission as educators.

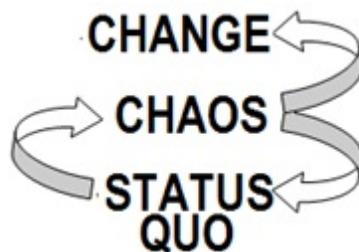
The emotional nature of what has transpired, the residue of which is waiting for us to begin to address right now, has, to one degree or another, affected each of us. It has left some of us confused or slightly distracted and others angry, even vengeful. Some of our colleagues resorted to desperate and dangerous measures of slander against a former principal and against colleagues. Other colleagues have sought to foment dissent by whispering gossip instead of bringing concerns forward for discussion. Others of our colleagues retired before they had planned to retire rather than face another year here with us.

These behaviors can result from fear of retribution. They can result from fear of having to dramatically change how one has gone about the business of teaching. They can also result from individuals who are hurting because they feel unappreciated, which causes them to engage in passive to aggressive sabotage as a way of hurting back.

If we look at what goes on in almost all of our classrooms, we would not see disarray or commotion. As we walk the halls, things are certainly different from what I experienced as a student decades ago, but the halls are not turbulent.

We do not have a chaotic school—in fact, what I see in our classrooms and hallways is something good upon which we can continue to build—but in terms of our functioning as a staff, our collective behaviors indicate that we have been a staff in chaos. Chaos is a loaded word, but chaos is what we are, I hope, on the verge of leaving. Synonyms of chaos include disorder, confusion, anarchy, and commotion; some of you feel one or more of these things.

From my perspective, most if not all of those words apply to what we have been living through, not in terms of the operations of the school or classrooms, but in terms of our functioning as a staff. While this sounds like I'm identifying a desperate situation, I'd like to suggest what organizational developers have known for decades: significant organizational change is always preceded by chaos...



Of significance is the arrow going from chaos back to the status quo. It is most common for this to occur.

Change has so many energy-requiring, ego-challenging, conflict-producing actions that biology often overcomes human rationale—like all organisms, we take the avenue of least resistance and resort back to what we have known, a place that has the comfort of familiarity but where the underlying causes of chaos are not addressed, which means a return to the status quo guarantees that chaos is too soon likely to rear its ugly head again.

Change requires that we exercise the one quality that separates us from other organisms: we have the intellectual capacity to foresee and to reason. Despite the energy required, despite the need to change some of our personal paradigms, despite the inevitable conflict that may arise, we have the capacity to choose change if doing so means we will ultimately be at a better place.

We have the opportunity and the capacity to leave chaos behind. The questions we must ultimately answer are...

**Do we return to the status quo or do we change?**

**No matter whether we change or return to the status quo, what would you like to see as the key characteristics of our school?**

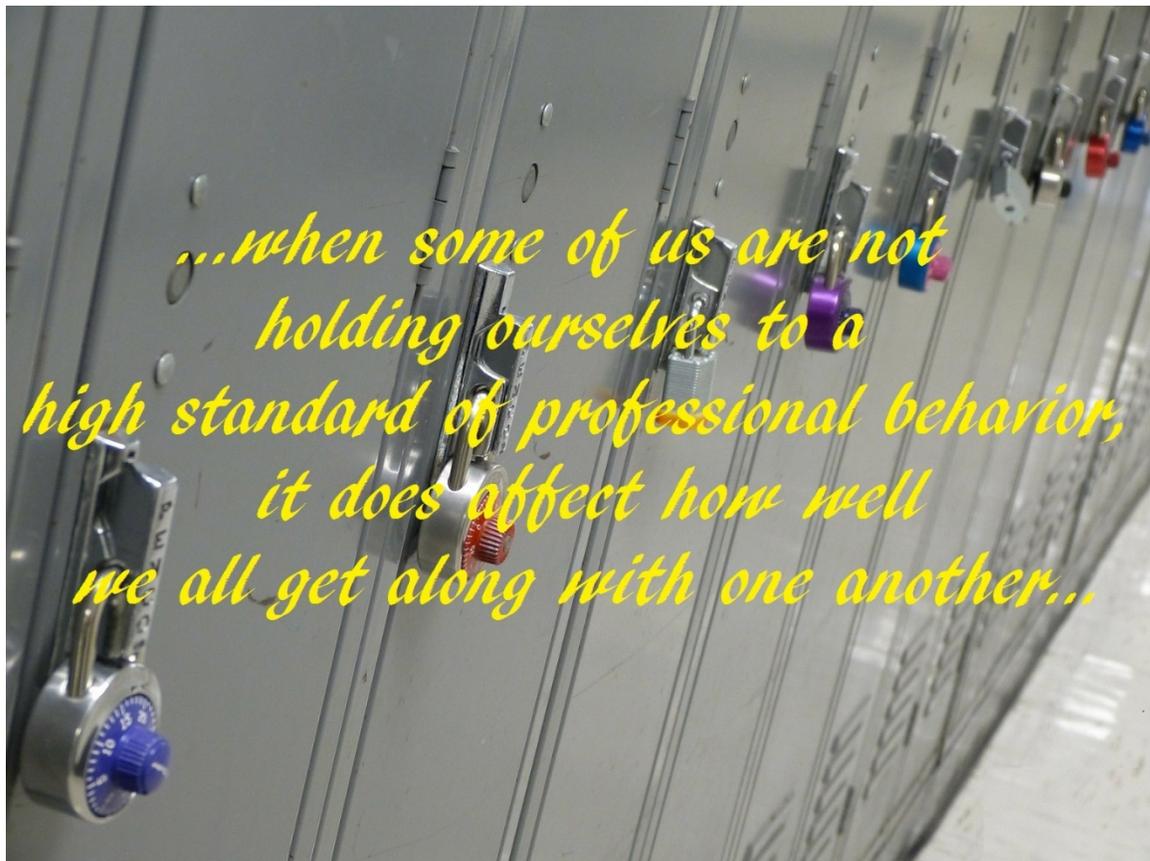
I want us to begin to answer these questions today.

Take five minutes to reflect upon what I've shared thus far in relation to the two questions. Please record your thoughts, perhaps in bullets, on the pages you've been given. You will be initially sharing with your shoulder partner at the end of the two minutes, but what you record will be compiled and distributed to all of us anonymously—do not put your name on the paper. We

will review the compilation at the next faculty meeting. During this time, refrain from sidebar conversations—this is a silent, individual activity. Five minutes is a long time; stay with your thoughts. You’ll be sharing some of them at the end of this time. Please begin.

*After five minutes...* You will now have sixty seconds to share with your shoulder partner. I will tell you when the other partner is to share—do not begin sharing until told, even if it means you will be sitting quietly with your thoughts for a few seconds. Remember, when your partner is sharing, your responsibility is just to listen and not comment. Each of you will be sharing your responses to the questions on the screen. If you are new to Brandywine, share the qualities that you hope to experience in our school. The partner who is sitting closest to me should begin now.

*After all have shared...* Please take the next five minutes to discuss with your shoulder partner what you’ve shared and then make any clarifications in your written responses that reflection may require. At the end of this time, your responses will be collected.



## *The Second Faculty Meeting at BHS*

*During the first meeting, we had begun to address the causes of the malaise that threatened to undermine the ability of the faculty to function as a cohesive and effective educational entity. NCLB regulations did not accept those underlying causes as foci of restructuring plans, and even if it did, the restructuring plan would not be implemented until the following year. It was my determination that circumstances for some of our students were sufficiently desperate that beginning to address them immediately was essential.*

*Please recall what I shared as the preface to the previous chapter: what follows is not a transcript of the meeting; rather, it is the "script" of what I wanted to address during the*

*meeting. Also remember that it was not uncommon for me to adapt a “script” during a meeting; however, what follows accurately reflects the content shared.*

Good Afternoon...

The first bullet on our agenda is to confirm that we have begun to address the “wishes” raised at the end of our last meeting, both in initial discussions during department meetings and in the beginning of implementation of some of the actions you’ve confirmed you want to see come to pass.

These wishes, these goals, will become an integral part of the development of our restructuring plan in the weeks ahead, but I want to focus on one of them today: the matter of professional behavior.

As you know from our departmental and other conversations, you have identified a concern about the professional behavior of faculty members, or said another way, you’ve expressed the wish that all faculty members be held to identified standards of professional behavior, and as I’ve shared with you at the department meetings I attended, I have the same concern.

We need to devote time to actually clarifying specifics about what those standards are here at Brandywine, but until then, I think each of us has an understanding of basic standards to which we should hold ourselves personally accountable.

I also think each of us knows that when some of us are not holding ourselves to a high standard of professional behavior, it does affect how well we all get along with one another.

Talking about this in a faculty meeting may be especially uncomfortable for some of us, and as we proceed, I ask that we do not personalize the discussions that we will be having today. I'm sorry if this meeting is upsetting to some of you, but this matter is something that has been part of private conversations for months. At the root of those conversations are negative feelings that are standing in the way of our becoming a more collaborative and collegial staff.

I want to begin by looking back. I hope those of you who were here last year will recall the e-mails I sent to you that summarized [Marvin Marshall's approach to discipline](#)<sup>37</sup>. Those of you who took the time to get into that work will recall that he classifies behavior into a four-level hierarchy, and I want to review them by using an example with which most—if not all—of you are familiar if you've traveled south in our state.

If you have, you can imagine an isolated, pan-flat, rural intersection of two-lane roads at two in the morning. There are no stop signs at that remote intersection; it's winter, the corn is long gone, and one can see for miles. Imagine a car traveling at high speed toward the intersection, and suppose the driver of the speeding car thinks it's cool to be driving without lights on a moonless but starry night. He decides to blow through the intersection; also imagine there are kids in an old pick-up approaching the crossroad who think the same thing. I think we could classify these behaviors in Marshall's Hierarchy as ***anarchy***.

Now let's add stop signs to all four corners and look at three other scenarios.

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<sup>37</sup> <<http://marvinmarshall.com/the-raise-responsibility-system/hierarchy>>

A driver, at two in the morning, seeing no headlights on the crossroad approaching the intersection, ignores the stop sign without slowing because she wants to get home as quickly as possible. I think not stopping at the stop sign would fall into Marshall's hierarchy as a kind of *bullying*, where an individual uses a position of power to do whatever she feels like doing with no consideration of how her actions might impact others.

This position of power can be *assigned* power (like that of a teacher or principal), *assumed* power (a physical or intellectual presence that intimidates), *anonymous* power (the belief that one won't be caught—the driver who ignores the stop sign or sends a hurtful letter anonymously is using anonymous power), and *delusional* power (believing one's own sense of the truth brings entitlement; simply stated—arrogance.)

The next scenario involves another driver who knows it would be “safe” to run the stop sign but stops because he is afraid there might be a State Trooper sitting somewhere in the dark—this driver *stops because of a potential negative consequence*.

In a fourth scenario, a driver, who also knows it would be safe to run the stop sign, stops simply because it is a stop sign. Stopping at a stop sign is required by statute, and this driver stops because she thinks *stopping is the right thing to do*. It's important to note that no one else is aware that she stops; in other words, she is not stopping in expectation of being recognized or rewarded for doing the right thing.

Stopping at the stop sign is the desirable action. If someone does this because they are *afraid* of being ticketed (or just because someone in the car will know they did the right thing), they are doing so because of *external motivation*. I think we can use Marshall's Hierarchy to classify this type of desirable behavior as ***compliance***.

If a driver stops at the stop sign because she believes it is the right thing to do, she is doing so because of *internal motivation*. Not only is the behavior desirable, the motivation represents the goal we all have for our students—we want them to make choices because they know they are good choices for both themselves and others, and not because they fear consequences—or as is often the case, for the external reward of praise.

Marshall's Hierarchy classifies this type of behavior, where the motivation is internal and pure, as ***democratic***. Because the decision is a function of intrinsically motivated self-discipline, and to keep the Hierarchy terminology aligned grammatically, I've added the word ***autonomy***. So here we have Marshall's Hierarchy of Social Development referencing our examples...

*(PowerPoint slide content on next page)*

**Cross an intersection without lights at high speed**

**A**narchy

**Ignore stop sign**

**B**ullying

**Stop because of potential consequence**

**C**ompliance

**Stop because it is the right thing to do**

**D**emocratic Autonomy

The few of you who began to experiment with Marshall's Hierarchy in your classrooms last year took the time to teach the Hierarchy to your students, with your students generating examples for each level.

Once you were satisfied that the students understood the Hierarchy, you have addressed unacceptable behavior—or have reinforced desirable behavior—by asking students to classify the behavior they just exhibited—and you've told me that the students refer to the Hierarchy to do just that by using the “A” “B” “C” or “D” symbols suggested by each of the levels in the Hierarchy.

Those of you using this approach have learned it takes the onus of judgment from the adult and places it where it belongs: the student judges him or herself against a known hierarchy.

You have learned this simple action ends the undesirable behavior and reinforces desirable behavior; and based upon our non-scientific samples of one, we think improved classroom climate—at least more compliant behavior and a decrease in undesirable behavior—has been the result of teaching and reinforcing an understanding of the Hierarchy.

We'll be talking more about Marshall's Hierarchy in relation to student self-discipline in the weeks ahead, but what does this have to do with professional behavior? I think each of us can apply Marshall's Hierarchy to what it is *we* do. For example, how would I classify my *own* behavior if I (*On PowerPoint slide*)...

- **Arrive late or slip out early because I have something personal to do that I place above the expectations of the State or District**
- **Read my email, play solitaire, have sidebar conversations with my friend, or otherwise disengage during faculty or professional development meetings**
- **Use pejorative words with colleagues behind the backs of and about colleagues with whom I disagree**
- **Call in sick on professional days when I'm not actually sick because I believe what I want to do that day is more important**
- **Tell the Superintendent I refuse to do something he directs me to do, such as refusing to allow you to implement the district-approved curriculum**

- **Decide to discourage you from implementing research-based instructional practices because those are not the practices with which I am familiar**

If these were *my* behaviors, I think I would have to classify them as *bullying* to one degree or another. I know you know I've used these behaviors as examples because each mirrors behaviors brought to my attention by individual members of this faculty as problematic. These are also similar to behaviors I have directly observed being practiced by some of you.

I know—and you know—these types of behaviors have resulted in dissension and discontent. Perhaps at least one reason for this is that no one likes a bully! It's my opinion that bullying on the part of anyone—student, teacher, administrator, or parent—has no place in our school.

*(Pregnant Pause)*

When I was a student, and later a teacher, I never liked *general harangues* from a principal or a teacher about something problematic that was practiced by only a few. I always felt it was an act of cowardice on the part of a principal or teacher who did not have the guts to talk directly with the individuals concerned.

What I'm sharing about bullying is not an indictment of every one of us. All of us engage in behaviors every day that we could categorize as *compliance* or *democratic autonomy*, but none of us are perfect, and some of us are less perfect than others; however, I want you to know that from this point forward—and I want you to call me on this publicly if I ever fail to deliver on this promise—if

inappropriate professional behavior continues within our school family, I will talk directly with the colleague concerned and will not bring it up as part of a *general harangue*.

Of course I would hope that I never have to have those individual conversations, but I will have them when needed.

In other words, if some of us need cops waiting by the intersection to provide the extrinsic motivation needed to do the right thing, I and the assistant principals will be those cops, but my wish, my objective, is that we all work together to create a workplace where we don't need cops, where we all make the best choices because the choices we make reflect the right things to do, that we learn to work together effectively because it is the right thing to do. If we *don't* do this, if we *don't* become a more collegial, collaborative community, Brandywine will never be the school that it can be.

Just as important as what I'm asking of you is this: I and my assistants need to acknowledge there are behaviors, in which administrators have engaged over the past ten years or more, that have hampered collaboration and collegiality. Let me restate that: there are professional behaviors that administrators have exhibited, over the past ten or so years, which have stood in the way of building a collaborative and collegial community. It is those administrative behaviors that I would like you to think about next.

In the context of Marshall's Hierarchy, take five minutes to reflect upon what *administrators* may have done or not done during your tenure at Brandywine that has placed obstacles in the way of collaboration and

collegiality. If you're new to Brandywine, reflect upon counter-productive administrative behaviors you've experienced, wherever you've been.

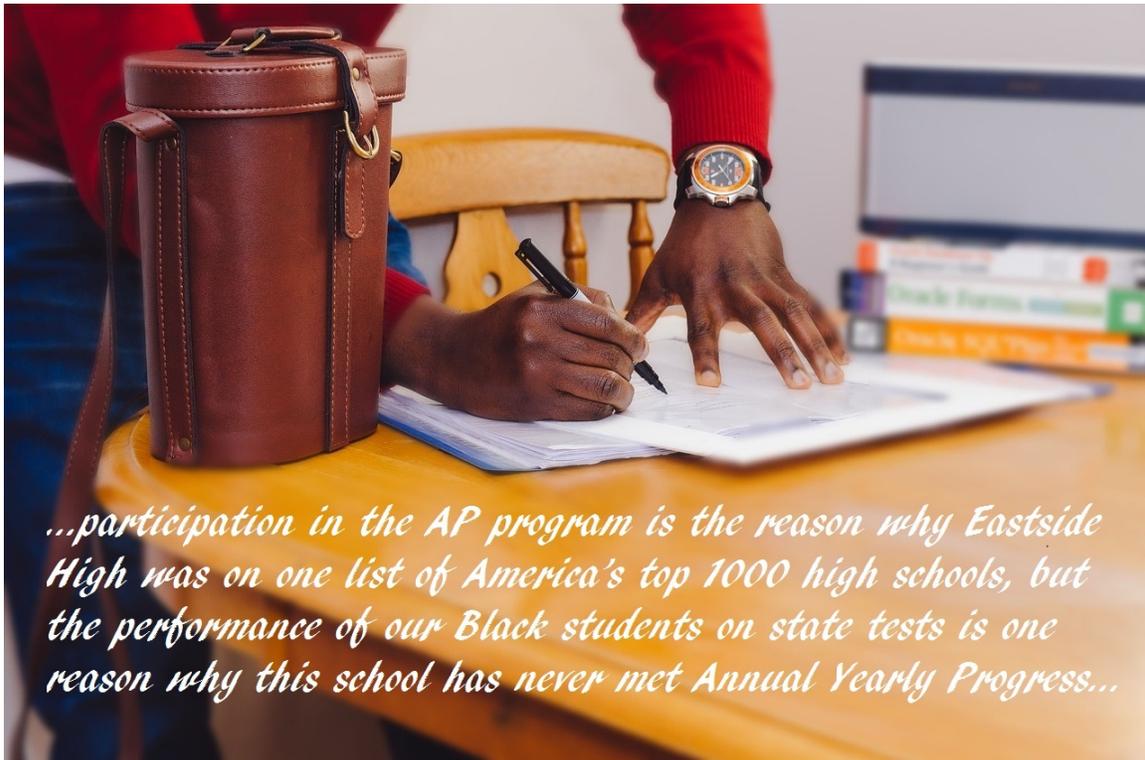
On the sheet addressed to me, please record those obstacles as well as your thoughts about what you think we should consider that might address those administrative obstacles—do not record your name on the sheet. You will be sharing your thoughts with your shoulder partner (*On PowerPoint slide*)...

- **What have administrators done or not done during your tenure at Brandywine that have placed obstacles in the way of collaboration and collegiality?**
- **What possible solutions might address those obstacles?**

This is a silent, individual activity. Please resist the urge to have sidebar conversations. Please begin.

*After five minutes ...* You will be sharing with your table partner for sixty seconds. I will tell you when the other partner is to share—do not begin sharing until told to switch, even if it means you will be sitting quietly with your thoughts for a few seconds. Remember, when your partner is sharing, your responsibility is just to listen and not comment. The partner who is sitting farthest from me should begin now.

*After two minutes ...* For the next five minutes, I would like the quad to discuss responses to the second question. This is to be an unstructured discussion, except for this: if you reach consensus regarding responses to the second question, I would like you to list them on the 4X6 card provided on the table—these will be shared with the entire staff if we have time. If not, they will be compiled, shared electronically, and then discussed during department meetings. Please begin.



*...participation in the AP program is the reason why Eastside High was on one list of America's top 1000 high schools, but the performance of our Black students on state tests is one reason why this school has never met Annual Yearly Progress...*

## *The White School and the Black School*

*What follows is the "script" I prepared prior to my third meeting with the Brandywine High School Faculty. As described below, it was a change from the original script. Please remember: what follows is not a transcript of the meeting. Also remember that it was not uncommon for me to adapt a "script" during a meeting, and at this meeting, I determined I did not need to share much of what is between two asterisks below because the two examples actually presented before this point clearly succeeded in getting the faculty's attention; however, the details and concepts between the asterisks were shared with key individuals in informal meetings during the following weeks when needed to reinforce the necessity of joining the white and black schools into one educational entity.*

Good Afternoon...

I am dispensing with the agenda that was mailed to you two days ago because of something I had to deal with at the end of the day yesterday, and I'm going to begin by sharing my perception of the history of Brandywine.

I'm doing this for two reasons: one, so those of you who have been here far longer than I will be able to decide for yourself whether or not my perceptions are reasonably accurate, and two, we have twenty-two faculty who have three or fewer years of tenure here at Brandywine. I want to be sure they are aware of some key points in our history.

Most of you know that Brandywine earned a reputation, during its first three decades, of being perhaps the best high school in the state, based upon the number of graduates who went on to prestigious colleges and universities. Over a third of you were hired during that time, and I think you would concur that reputation is why Brandywine is still referred to by a few as "The Academy." Would those of you who have a long tenure here or in the state agree with me that my understanding is accurate? (*Expect affirmation from the faculty*)

It's my assumption that many of you hired in the last twenty years applied to Brandywine because of that reputation. Is that a fair statement? (*Expect affirmation from the faculty*)

Then it's fair to say that for many of you, your experience and your perception of Brandywine is related to the reputation of excellence that has been cultivated

about Brandywine High School over the years. And then last summer the state drops a bomb. DOE announces that because we have never met NCLB targets for black students or for special education students—neither absolute targets nor growth targets—we are one of only three high schools in Delaware that had to restructure for the first time in the state's history.

Why were our advantaged parents, our politicians, and concerned taxpayers so stunned when that news made the headlines? I believe it was because Brandywine's administrators and staff—and more significantly, the school district leadership—expended a great deal of effort and resources over the years to emphasize the achievements of individual students who reflected the legend of “The Academy,” and to bury or diminish as much as possible any data regarding our failure to raise the achievement of our black kids or our special needs kids.

As a result, what some of you have known for years ended up being a surprise for a lot of people. I think there is a lesson to be learned here: it's always best to acknowledge challenges because such challenges are best addressed in the light of day. There should not be any need for pressure from the outside to address failures, but apparently, there has not been sufficient pressure, fear, embarrassment—call it what you want—from the *inside* to address those failures.

Public acknowledgement that this school needs to restructure has changed all of that, but what I was told yesterday confirms that at least some of you believe

restructuring is not the result of *our* failure, but the result of the changing demographics of our catchment area over the last twenty years.

For those of you who don't know, that change began with a court-ordered desegregation decree in 1978, which was followed in 1990 by the closing of Claymont High and the shifting of many of its students to Brandywine.

But changing demographics is not the point of my tossing today's agenda—at least, not totally.

What I want to address is what I believe to be the deepest root cause of why this school is being restructured: race.

*(Pause for effect)*

Most of us are middle class and white, and we're not comfortable talking about the insidious impacts of racism. Most of us who are white cannot recognize forms of racism even though they're right in front of us every day. I know that many of you in this room are probably angry with me for bringing it up, that I'm overreaching or exaggerating because you don't see the racism, and because you don't see it, you don't believe it exists.

All I know to do to open eyes is to share a few things with you, the first of which is what happened yesterday, a bit after four. I was in my office when three of our black kids, two seniors and one sophomore, told one of our assistant principals that they overheard three of you, after school, discussing our being forced to restructure. I'd have already discussed this with you three if the kids had revealed who you were, but they would not.

According to them, the three of you sounded angry, and one of you said, “If it wasn’t for the damned black kids, we wouldn’t be in this mess and have to restructure;” the kids claimed the conversation proceeded in that vein. I have no reason to doubt their claims, especially since they said they “didn’t want to get anyone in trouble.”

The reason why they came forward was because they were worried they were being blamed for what they knew was a very disturbing situation for everyone, including those three kids. They wanted to be proud of their school, and with the public proclamation of restructuring, their pride has taken a hit.

Now keep in mind that if it wasn’t for the thirty-seven percent of our student body that is black, our student body might be thirty-seven percent smaller, and forty-two people in this room would be unemployed, but you know employment isn’t what I want to address.

What we need to address is this: we wouldn’t be in this “mess” if *we* had done everything that was needed in order for all of our kids to learn, but more on that in a moment.

Some of you may be thinking, “This guy has his shorts in a knot because of one incident,” but you need to know this type of thing isn’t an isolated event. My predecessor shared a letter with me when I arrived at Brandywine last year.

It concerns the four officers of last year’s Junior Class. Those of you who know them, know them to be four of our brightest graduates, and they have matriculated at prominent colleges this fall. They were, I’m told, the best class

officers in recent memory, and for what it's worth, I found them a remarkable team with whom to work. The letter in question was pointedly focused on the fact that all four students were Black.

The letter built the case that it was highly improbable that a student body, which was only 37% black, was likely to elect four black kids as officers, and then went on to accuse (my predecessor) of having rigged the election.

The letter was signed anonymously: *The Fine Families of Brandywine*.

(My predecessor) was certain who it was who had sent the letter, but of course, that opinion was not sufficient to confront who it was he thought had written the letter. If you read the letter, you would find that it is well-written, with vocabulary typical of a college graduate. In other words, this letter was likely not the work of a stereotypical racist.

(My predecessor) felt sharing the letter with you would have been like opening Pandora's box. When I became Principal, I knew I *would* be sharing the gist of the letter—I just wasn't certain when—until yesterday. It's time.

Race has been an educational issue in this state since before the founding of this country: slavery, reconstruction, and then segregation; the expenditure of Pierre du Pont's private funds in the years following 1920 to build 89 schools for black kids because our state legislature initially refused to improve those schools; our state's inclusion in *Brown v. Board of Education*; the massive deseg order for our county I've already mentioned, which led

to significant white flight—now green flight—from public schools to private and religious schools, and now to places like Wilmington Charter.

There are a lot of white folks who think race is no longer an issue, but I can assure you that the letter (my predecessor) received is proof that racism is alive and well in our school community.

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But there is more proof that I want to share with you, proof that I discovered within the first month of my arrival here, proof that has been right here in front of us for years. There are two schools in Brandywine High: the White school and the Black school.

- Even though 61% of our students are White, 2% are Asian, and 37% are African American, 4% of the students in our honors and AP courses are Black, and 88% of the students in our general classes are Black.
- The number of AP courses offered has doubled over the past twelve years, but there is already an undercurrent of conversation about dropping Contemporary Dance, which you know is an elective course that is highly subscribed by black students.
- If you're a typical black student, your average class size is 23.6; if you're white, your average class size is 20.8.
- The parents of white students are granted the privilege of selecting their children's teachers, and in some cases, certain white parents have been

contacted and offered that option directly. Black parents do not know that such an unofficial option exists, perhaps because it does not exist for them.

- If you're a typical black student, the curriculum you receive is a watered-down, and frankly, boring version of that taught to the typical white student.
- Student participation in the AP program is the reason why Brandywine was on one list of America's top 1000 high schools, but the performance of our black students on state tests is one reason why this school has never met Annual Yearly Progress and is why the school is being restructured.
- 83% of significant disciplinary infractions are written up for black students; 92% of suspensions are issued to black students.
- The G.P.A. of white and Asian students is 3.07; that of black students is 2.15.

\*

It is because of this data that I have no problem identifying the existence of two schools in our school. And one other thing: some would consider the latter data points as proof that our black kids aren't as smart as our white kids, that they're not as well-behaved as white kids, but I'm here to tell you that we're going to be spending a significant amount of professional development time

exploring decades of research that indicates teacher and school expectations have a significant impact on student achievement and behavior.

And we're going to be looking at the data from urban high schools around the country where the percentage of disadvantaged black students is far higher than here at Brandywine, and where parent involvement is just as low, but where those students are performing at far higher levels than our disadvantaged black students.

You know, students who are not meeting expectations, or students who perform higher than they are expected to perform, are often just living up—or down—to the actual expectations of their school.

We're also going to be examining how we implement the Discipline Code here at Brandywine. As administrators, are we holding all students—regardless of race—to the same expectations? Will the numbers indicate that we're being more lenient with some students than we are with others?

We're also going to be looking more critically at referrals themselves. If there is a significant difference between the referral rates of teachers teaching the same students—and I can tell you there is—we need to understand why, so that we can help correct whatever is at the root of that significant difference.

This does not mean we're going to be turning a blind eye to inappropriate behavior; rather, we're going to be opening our eyes to all inappropriate behavior and how we deal with it.

We're also going to be exploring the reality that the culture we create in our classrooms and in the school as a whole, including the nature of instruction and the expectations we have for all students, has a direct bearing on student behavior.

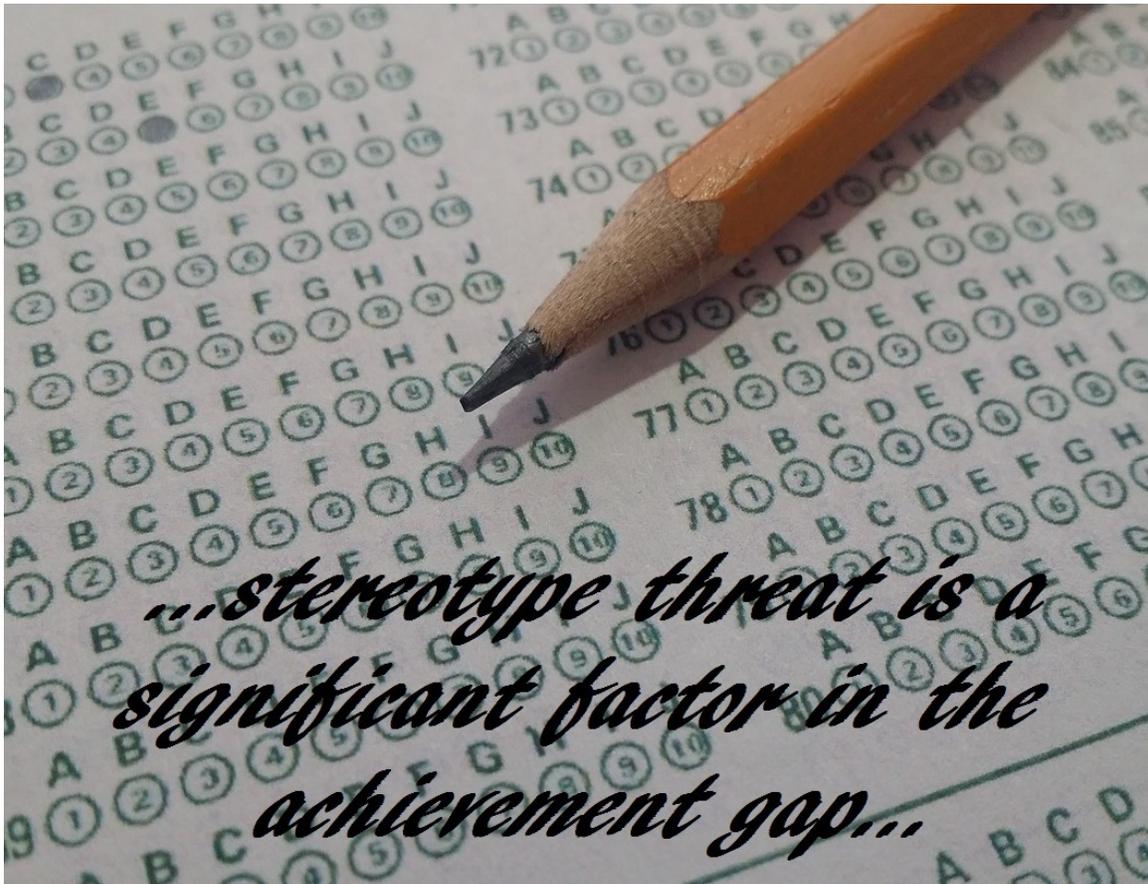
This means we're going to be spending a great deal of energy on culturally responsive teaching<sup>38</sup>. We'll be reflecting about how the cultural frames of reference that black kids have are not just different from mainstream white culture—their frames of reference are *oppositional* to the mainstream—which means we have an extraordinary challenge *and opportunity* to be cultural translators, to be the people who help our black kids cross mainstream cultural boundaries here at Brandywine.

If we increase our cultural responsiveness, if we take on the challenge of being cultural translators, if each of us takes a long look inside to see if there are latent vestiges of racism within us and then deal with them, if we raise our expectations for all of our students and couple that with the instructional strategies needed to support those expectations, we will not only meet Annual Yearly Progress, we will create a school of which we can all be proud because we're going to see all of our students soar.

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<sup>38</sup> *If you are interested in "cultural frames of reference," I highly encourage perusal of Understanding Cultural Diversity and Learning by John U. Ogbu in Educational Researcher, Vol. 21, No. 8 (November 1992).*

*Afterword: Five months after I had shared the de facto racism and teacher expectation differential I had observed with a mostly receptive faculty and administration, Brandywine students took the state tests. Despite the fact that there were no systemic changes in governance during those five months, no significant changes in the alignment of curriculum with state tests, no significant changes in instructional practices, and much less professional development than I had promised; in other words, the only observed changes during the five months were in the expectations and behaviors of adults toward historically under-performing students, **black students and special education students met and exceeded the NCLB/AYP targets for growth for the first time in the School's history.***



## *Stereotyping Effects*

*I distributed the following to BHS teachers for their perusal and reflection:*

The following excerpts are from *The Threat of Stereotype* by Joshua Aronson in [Educational Leadership](#), November 2004, beginning on page 15. Please let me know if you would like a copy of the entire article...it and the references cited can provide you with more information about what research indicates explains much of the “gap” between black and white students’ average achievement test scores:

“In our first experiment, we had African American and white college students take a challenging standardized verbal test. In the control condition of the experiment, we presented the test in the standard way—as a measure of intellectual ability and preparation. In the experimental condition, we sought to reduce stereotype threat by removing the relevance of the stereotype. We told our test takers that we were not interested in using the test to measure their ability, we only wanted to use it to examine the psychology of verbal problem solving...The test was the same, the students were equally talented, and students were allotted the same amount of time to complete the test. When we looked at student performance, the results surprised even us.

“On the test that we presented in a nonevaluative manner, the black students solved, on average, twice as many items as on the test that we presented in the standard way. The manner in which we presented the test had no effect whatsoever on the white students. In another set of studies, we found that merely asking students to indicate their race on a demographic questionnaire prior to starting the test had a similarly debilitating effect on black students. When they thought we were interested in their race, their test scores plunged...

“...conditions that threaten basic motives—such as our sense of competence, our feelings of belonging, and our trust in people around us—can dramatically influence our intellectual capacities and motivation...

“Since the publication of our initial report a decade ago, *nearly 100 studies* on stereotype threat have been conducted, both by us and by researchers around the world, showing that *stereotype threat is a significant factor in the achievement gap...*

“Everyone is vulnerable to stereotype threat. Studies show similar effects for women on math tests, Latinos on verbal tests, and elderly individuals on tests of short-term memory...

“...cooperative classroom structures in which students work interdependently typically produce immediate and dramatic gains in minority students’ grades, test scores, and engagement because such environments reduce competition, distrust, and stereotyping...

“...When we teach students to reconsider the nature of intelligence, to think of their minds as muscles that get strengthened and expanded—smarter—with hard work, we find that their negative responses to stereotype threat diminish...

“Studies also show the value of *simply teaching students about stereotype threat*. Learning that their test anxiety results from a common response to stereotyping helps students interpret their struggles in a less pejorative and anxiety-producing way and *results in higher test scores*. Similarly, exposing minority students to role models who have triumphed over similar academic struggles with hard work and persistence markedly improve the students’ study habits, grades, and test scores...”



## *First Step on the Path Forward*

*This memo was emailed to the BHS Faculty as a prequel for a faculty meeting. The intended purpose of the meeting was to reach consensus regarding an understanding of what rigor should look like in every classroom.*

Subject: First Step on the Path Forward

Doug Reeves writes, “Educational leaders...fail to distinguish between initiatives that represent genuine improvement and those that are merely new. (They) demonstrate a resolute unwillingness to evaluate initiatives and discontinue them. The school system has become an organizational pack rat, fearful that if anything is thrown away it might be needed someday.”

As a school, we are perfectly positioned to address problems with teaching and learning that have been verified by the several hundred walkthroughs performed under the auspices of the District, but I fear what is likely to happen is the birth of yet another initiative by a culture that apparently views the writing of initiatives as an end and not a beginning; initiatives, I would argue, that are seldom referenced by administrators as they make decisions related to teaching and learning.

Within our school there exists documentation for at least 9 different initiatives that deal in whole or in part with teaching and learning. The *Board Policy on Curriculum and Assessment*, which identifies specific standards and responsibilities that are at least tangentially related to teaching and learning, is yet another “plan” a principal must add to the others as he/she contemplates how to improve teaching and learning.

The preceding tells me the only product likely to come from the cumulative reflection upon initiatives is yet another documented initiative. I am worried that adding another initiative without performance measures to which administrators would be held accountable, and doing so without eliminating all other related initiatives, will result in what I believe is a fog of intent that does not allow leaders to effectively focus on resolving problems. As Reeves writes, “our failure to focus, to make difficult and wise choices, to link individual decisions on resources, projects, and tasks—in brief, our failure to exercise strategic leadership—undermines our mission...”

When history indicates that the finished draft of an initiative is treated as an end by administrators—a situation evidenced by an absence of performance measures attached to initiatives, or in the case of school instructional plans, where listed performance measures are not used to hold schools accountable—this is evidence of a compliance culture, which remains a pervasive and dysfunctional characteristic of public education across the country. As a result of the lessons provided by our school’s history, I would argue that many key players in our school are ready and poised to throw off the cloak of compliance and to move ahead courageously and strategically.

Before the above can occur, that which is at the origin of every concern we have identified—from low-level questioning to lack of engagement to an absence of bell-to-bell instruction—must be addressed. I believe the origin of our discontent regarding teaching and learning is a total absence of agreement among our staff (and perhaps an absence of understanding on the part of many of us) regarding what is an appropriate level of rigor to be expected of administrators, teachers and students.

As an organization, we have not provided sufficient opportunities to reflect upon rigor individually or collectively. Most individuals, including myself, cannot recite with conviction a description of appropriate rigor with examples that has general application to what it is we do, and if there are individuals that can do so, I suggest that they likely do not agree. I would argue that no systemic problem related to teaching and learning can truly be resolved until the matter of appropriate rigor—the degree to which we hold ourselves and students accountable to meeting specific professional and learning behaviors—

is clarified, quantified, qualified, communicated and expected. Doing so should be our first step on the path forward.

Sidebar: Rigor is a word frequently used by educators, and to most it conveys something like *the degree to which we will hold students and educators alike accountable for high levels of performance*, particularly when it comes to *expectations related to writing, problem solving, creativeness, and critical thinking*. I use “rigor” because I have been unable to find a word to replace it. Why would I want to? Because as an educator, I would not want to create a classroom described by the following definitions from [Mirriam-Webster](#)<sup>39</sup>:

1(a1): harsh inflexibility in opinion, temper, or judgment; severity

1(a2): the quality of being unyielding or inflexible; strictness

1(a3): severity of life; austerity

1(b): an act or instance of strictness, severity, or cruelty

So for further clarity, rigor as used on these pages is defined as:

*High levels of performance that have been delineated and described for, and are expected of, students and educators when related to the practices of writing, problem solving, creativeness, and critical thinking.*

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<sup>39</sup> < <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rigor>>



## ***School Restructuring Plan Caveat***

*As noted, I was hired specifically to craft a NCLB-required restructuring plan for Brandywine High School. When I submitted the final draft to the Superintendent, I included the following caveat as the prologue to the plan. It is offered here as a cautionary tale for those educational leaders charged with changing educational systems in response to the disappointing performance of disadvantaged students.*

### **Caveat for the Brandywine High School Restructuring Plan**

Elmore (cited by Fullan in *Turnaround Leadership*, pp. 26-27) claims, “It appears from early research that school systems that improve are those that have succeeded in getting people to internalize the expectations of standards-based

accountability systems, and that they have managed this internalization largely through modeling commitment and focus using face-to-face relationships, not bureaucratic controls. The basic process at work here...is learning new behaviors and values that are associated with collective responsibility for teaching practice and student learning...Internal accountability precedes external accountability and is a precondition for any process of improvement...(Schools that succeed) have a clear, strong internal focus on issues of instruction, student learning and expectations for teacher and student performance...There is a high degree of alignment among individual teachers about what they can do and about their responsibility for improvement of student learning. Such schools also have shared expectations among teachers, administrators, and students about what constitutes good work and a set of processes for observing whether these expectations are being met.”

As of the date of the completion of the initial draft of the enclosed restructuring plan, I can make the following observation—of the extensive formal and informal dialogues I’ve had with Brandywine High School parents, staff and student leaders, only two individuals (staff members) have focused on matters related to targeted students, and one of those two was afraid we would be expecting too much of our most challenged students. There has been no evidence of internalized commitment and focus upon issues of instruction, learning, or expectations of teacher and student performance related to the targeted students upon which this restructuring plan is focused. Apart from input from the two staff members indicated, all comments, questions, and suggestions have been related to apprehension about the negative impact

restructuring might have on advantaged students. I suggest that a significant underlying cause of public education's failure to effectively teach all students is the all-encompassing, insidious focus on elite, advantaged children by those persons most able to influence the educational system: advantaged parents and educators. When advantaged and disadvantaged students are in competition for resources distributed via governance structures, political will rises to focus systems on what is best for advantaged students.

Fullan cites a study about a high school similar to Brandywine with an economically bifurcated student body, which had appropriate reform interventions ready for implementation. In response to the school's plan, middle-class white parents mobilized to support their own ends, which served to thwart the goals of raising the bar and closing the gap for African American and Latino students. (Oakes and Lipton cited by Fullan in *Turnaround Leadership*, pp. 41-42). In response to uninformed speculation about restructuring, a mobilization of advantaged parents is taking the form of threats to choice their children away from Brandywine High School. These threats have preoccupied the thoughts of many Brandywine staff, whose responses seem to indicate appreciably more concern about losing advantaged students than in how best to educate disadvantaged students.

Because it is the degree of internal commitment of Brandywine educators and the greater community to educating targeted students that will determine whether or not Brandywine High School will be successful in leaving no child behind, a significant amount of time and energy must be employed by BHS administrators and by teacher leadership in face-to-face relationships that

model focus and commitment. The goal of these relationships is to create a “high degree of alignment among individual teachers about what they can do and about their responsibility for improvement of student learning” and to achieve “shared expectations among teachers, administrators, and students about what constitutes good work and a set of processes for observing whether these expectations are being met.” If we cannot attain this goal, implementing significant changes in governance structures focused on targeted students will not bring about the sustained, substantial, positive improvement that is our goal.



## *The Plan*

*What follows is the ninth, and I believe the last, draft of the Brandywine High School Restructuring Plan that I was hired to prepare, write, and ultimately implement. This draft was submitted to the Superintendent, and with only minor changes, it was approved by the Brandywine School District Board of Education for implementation beginning July 1, 2008.*

*It should be noted that Brandywine and three other Delaware high schools were the first in the state to be restructured, and when the principals of the three schools were assigned the task of restructuring, the Delaware Department of Education provided ZERO guidance: no directions, no format, no forms, nothing. We three principals were on our own. Once the three high school plans were submitted, the Delaware DOE reviewed them. What they found in our plans was the apparent basis of procedural conversations with outside consultants, the result of which was a cumbersome, useless, on-line tool into which we had to translate the plans we had designed that had already been approved—by the district school boards—for*

*implementation. That process may be the best example of a clown show from among the many I have encountered in my years dancing in the Education Follies.*

*In 2008, the US DOE's only [options for restructuring](#)<sup>40</sup> involved four draconian choices, and one somewhat less so—Option 5: changes in governance structures—which was the one selected by the Superintendent and endorsed by the School Board. It should be noted that across the country, very few schools being restructured selected this option. In time, the US DOE no longer endorsed such an approach—we made it just under the wire.*

*While the writing of the following plan was my solitary task and accomplishment, it is based upon input generated by discussions among and review by BHS community stakeholders. The input represents hundreds of person-hours on the part of students, colleagues, parents and others, and it also represents massive communal consternation by all. I cannot recall anything that might be construed as positive emotional support for the leadership challenge of restructuring, save for the brief monthly visit of a consultant provided by DDOE to “support” my efforts. The most common emotional attitude I encountered was one of resignation on the part of the BHS faculty and staff. The collective effort and the ultimate effect of this plan are the inspiration for this memoir's main title: Education Follies.*

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<sup>40</sup> See page 7ff, of School Restructuring Options Under No Child Left Behind, U.S. DOE  
<<http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED496104.pdf>>

## **Brandywine High School Restructuring Plan**

Prepared by Jeffrey L. Byrem, Principal

February 25, 2008

### **Introduction:**

Brandywine High School (BHS) has been directed by the State of Delaware to restructure because, over the past five years, “cells” of disadvantaged students, special education students, and/or African American students have not consistently met the minimum level of performance (Adequate Yearly Progress or AYP) established by the State as per dictum of the No Child Left Behind Act. Of the five options available to the Brandywine School District (BSD), the School Board selected the following for BHS:

*Undergo major restructuring of the school’s governance arrangements that makes fundamental reforms to improve student academic achievement in the school and that has substantial promise of enabling the school to make AYP.*

The governance arrangements that will be addressed by the BHS Restructuring Plan are: personnel (staffing), practices, procedures, and systems.

In addition to not having met AYP, data indicates there is an achievement gap between the students indicated above and regular education, advantaged students who are, for the most part, White; however, DSTP<sup>41</sup> matched comparison data

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<sup>41</sup> Delaware Student Testing Program

for advantaged students indicates that the [NCE scores](#)<sup>42</sup> of those students who performed at high levels in eighth grade in reading and math have, on average, declined after two years at BHS. In other words, despite measures of success that indicate a degree of instructional effectiveness (e.g. overall high results in DSTP, AP, and SAT scores when compared to state and national averages), improvement must occur across the board if we are to create a climate and system that increases the likelihood all students will be engaged in the pursuit of standards of excellence. Note: in this plan, students who have not demonstrated success on academic measures will be referred to as *challenged students*.

Richard Elmore (cited by Michael Fullan in *Turnaround Leadership*, pp. 26-27) claims, “It appears from early research that school systems that improve are those that have succeeded in getting people to internalize the expectations of standards-based accountability systems, and that they have managed this internalization largely through modeling commitment and focus using face-to-face relationships, not bureaucratic controls. The basic process at work here...is learning new behaviors and values that are associated with collective responsibility for teaching practice and student learning...Internal accountability precedes external accountability and is a precondition for any process of improvement...(Schools that succeed) have a clear, strong internal focus on issues of instruction, student learning and expectations for teacher and student performance...There is a high degree of alignment among individual teachers about what they can do and about their responsibility for improvement of

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<sup>42</sup> In educational statistics, a normal curve equivalent (NCE), developed for the United States Department of Education by the RMC Research Corporation, is a way of standardizing scores received on a test into a 0-100 scale similar to a percentile-rank, but preserving the valuable equal-interval properties of a z-score. *Wikipedia*: <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normal\_curve\_equivalent>

student learning. Such schools also have shared expectations among teachers, administrators, and students about what constitutes good work and a set of processes for observing whether these expectations are being met.” The qualities delineated by Elmore are not part of the BHS culture; rather, BHS is comprised of a hardworking staff that cares about student achievement, but it is a staff that has not reached consensus regarding expectations of themselves as professionals or consensus regarding expectations of students.

Staff consensus and individual, internal accountability will not be brought about by changes in “the school’s governance arrangements” alone; rather, the restructuring strategies that are identified below will provide the support and structure needed if we are going to be successful in meeting, not only our moral obligation to leave no child behind, but in meeting our moral responsibility to create a school in which all children are equally valued, and where each student has the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. The identified restructuring strategies involve governance structures that will impact how BHS faculty and staff will engage in face-to-face relationships that model focus and commitment. The goal of these relationships will be to create a “high degree of alignment among individual teachers about what they can do and about their responsibility for improvement of student learning” and to achieve “shared expectations among teachers, administrators, and students about what constitutes good work and a set of processes for observing whether these expectations are being met.” It is necessary for BHS to reach consensus regarding the kind and quality of responsibilities professional educators should exhibit and regarding the quality of academic performance expected of students, because doing so will help us

meet our essential goal of sustained improvement in the academic achievement of all students, which is aligned with the following components of the Brandywine School District's Strategic Plan:

- Ensure Academic Excellence for All
- Develop Challenging Curricula for Grades K-12
- Provide Highly Effective Educators
- Tailor Instruction to All Students' Needs
- Monitor Progress and Learn from Successes

Providing appropriate, non-instructional support for challenged students is necessary if their collective achievement is to improve over time and if that improvement is to be sustained. Research indicates that challenged students are likely to excel if they feel connected to the school and the adults with whom they interact on a daily basis. School data reveals these students are more likely than are other students to run afoul of the District *Student Code of Conduct*, which means they are more likely to be suspended and miss classroom instruction. BHS needs to address governance structures that decrease the likelihood that challenged students will be involved in behavioral problems. Challenged students are more likely to find themselves in situations in which they would benefit from the intervention of an adult skilled in conflict mediation and resolution. Further, challenged students are more likely to need the support of agencies outside of the school to address family and community issues that can interfere with their opportunities and motivation to learn. Because of this, BHS needs to provide

staff who are skilled in conflict resolution and knowledgeable about outside agencies and the services they provide.

In order to marshal human resources needed for implementation of restructuring strategies, how school instructional time is structured needs to change. A change from a seven-period, rotating schedule to a 4X4 block schedule is being recommended because the block schedule allows for more efficient utilization of human resources within established funding limitations, while also providing an array of other factors that support attainment of the essential goal of sustained student achievement.

Sustained improvement of student achievement is dependent upon a school improvement process that is teacher run and data driven. There have been attempts in the past to implement a District-recommended school improvement process, and while those attempts have produced School Improvement Plans, the specified plans have not been significantly implemented. Changes in teacher and student leadership have been put into place that are first steps in the development of a school improvement process that will be data driven and implemented by teachers.

In summary, the BHS Restructuring Plan is composed of changes to governance structures that will support the attainment of this essential goal: *There will be sustained improvement in the achievement of all students.*

The four components of the BHS restructuring plan, which are focused upon the essential goal of sustained improvement in the achievement of all students, are:

- 1) increase student support (*governance structures: personnel and organization*),
- 2) increase instructional efficacy of teachers (*governance structures: practices and personnel*),
- 3) enhance human resource utilization (*governance structure: systems*), and
- 4) develop an effective school improvement process (*governance structure: procedures*).

### INCREASE STUDENT SUPPORT

Staffing restructuring is needed to address the specific needs of disadvantaged, challenged students through student advisement, individual counseling, connections with DFS<sup>43</sup> and other child and family support agencies, as well as through more effective implementation of disciplinary practices in order to reduce time lost to suspension. All students will come to know of and utilize resources, human and technological, that are provided to support their learning, and teachers will be informed of these services so they can make appropriate referrals. Key elements of restructuring related to student support follow:

- a. **Add a Social Worker/Counselor** to the School Counseling Department. Responsibilities would focus on coordination of the Student Advisement Program, individual counseling for challenged students in crisis, coordinating school and agency services for students in crisis, and working with school disciplinary staff to coordinate interventions for challenged students.

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<sup>43</sup> (Delaware) Division of Family Services

- b. **Implement a Student Advisory Program** for challenged students utilizing faculty and staff volunteers, as well as volunteers from the community. The purpose of the program is to provide adults genuinely interested in and focused on the well-being of individual students. Advisors will be expected to monitor student performance, serve as a liaison between student and teacher when issues arise, as well as a liaison between the school and home on behalf of the student.
- c. **Add a Dean of Students** who would have primary responsibility for fair and equitable implementation of the Code of Conduct in collaboration with the administrative and school counseling staffs. The focus of this position would be on minimizing the number of student incidents through early intervention, parent contacts, and certain implementation of the Code when it is violated.
- d. **Add two interventionists** bringing the school total to four. Having more interventionists trained in crisis intervention will reduce student conflict that can result in lost time through out of school suspension, as well as provide a more visible adult presence in the halls and on the grounds of BHS to serve as a deterrent for inappropriate behavior.
- e. **Implement an in-school alternative to suspension program.** Anecdotal information from students indicates that this will serve as a significant deterrent regarding Code of Conduct violations. Not only should the deterrent reduce the amount of lost class time due to out of school

suspensions, an in-school deterrent provides an opportunity for students to continue with their schoolwork in a school setting.

### INCREASE INSTRUCTIONAL EFFICACY

The academic achievement of challenged students is directly related to the degree to which the BHS faculty is able to implement research-based instructional strategies in a standards-based context. Given that a standards-based culture does not exist at BHS, the following concepts must be introduced to and/or reinforced with the faculty and staff members:

- Student success must be based upon the mastery of standards and not upon class rank or any other measure that compares students to other students.
- Standards represent expectations of what students should know and be able to do, expectations that are clearly stated and understood by both teachers and students.
- When designing instruction and assessment, teachers must have a laser-like focus on student mastery of standards.
- Standards are established by the State (and tested by the DSTP) and by other organizations (e.g. ETS for SAT and AP testing), but standards should be clarified by teacher teams at the district and school levels; teachers at the school level must reach consensus about the expectations implicit to each standard, because as Benjamin

Bloom's mentor, Ralph Tyler, asserted, "one cannot teach what one cannot describe."

- Student achievement improves significantly in schools where teachers collaborate to reach consensus on standards and to design strategies for instruction and assessment.
- A rigorous academic curriculum is essential for all children—*a rising tide floats all boats*; this is substantiated by student results in high-performing, high poverty schools.
- Teaching literacy is more important than any other aspect of learning and is the responsibility of teachers in all content areas.
- Studies confirm frequent non-fiction writing in all subject areas is associated with high achievement; students should be expected to perform writing that is descriptive, writing that is persuasive with evidence, and writing that requires students to compare and contrast.
- Differentiation is the daily task of teachers, and clearly stated academic standards are the essential starting point for differentiation.
- Multiple opportunities for success—various modes of assessment—are associated with high student achievement.
- Statistically, teacher efficacy has been shown to be more than twice as important as all demographic factors combined (i.e. teacher efficacy is

twice as important as the sum of all “baggage” that students bring to school).

- An individual student’s positive self-esteem comes from meeting high expectations, not from mastery of learnings associated with the soft bigotry of low expectations.
- When working with students who have yet to experience success in school, we must exhibit what Doug Reeves calls “a relentless optimism...a persistence that will not take ‘they can’t do it’ for an answer.”

Intensive professional development and follow-up support regarding implementation of effective instructional strategies must be provided for our teachers. As part of our anticipated move to block scheduling and the interest in improving instructional practice, BHS has plans for activities focused on the following topics that will be implemented prior to the end of the 2007-2008 school year:

- Standards-based lesson design
- Culturally Responsive Classrooms
- Inclusion

Plans are presently under development that will provide opportunities for teachers to visit schools that have successfully implemented block scheduling. This will allow our teachers to dialogue with colleagues in other schools who

have successfully designed and implemented 90-minute lessons that are required when teaching in the block. What is learned during these visits will serve as the basis for lesson design workshops that will be held during the summer of this year. In order to reinforce the proposed plans as well as to address the implementation of concepts related to standards-based instruction, the following restructuring strategies are being proposed:

- a. Add an Instructional Coach.** This position would be occupied by a master teacher who had demonstrated significant time as a successful practitioner in a standards-based environment. The Instructional Coach would be responsible for identifying professional development needs at both the school and individual level and would coordinate professional development activities that meet those needs. The Instructional Coach would be expected to observe classrooms as a “critical colleague” and be expected to model instructional practices as well as assist teachers in lesson design. An essential component to effective professional development is the support that can be provided by this staff member. Without this support, the opportunity for improvement provided by professional development is seldom sustained. This position would be a one-year position with the goal of developing sufficient capacity among the BHS faculty to allow the faculty to collectively fulfill this role of support after one year.
- b. Add a Literacy Coach.** This position would be occupied by a master teacher with expertise in the teaching of reading and literacy. The Literacy Coach would be responsible for identifying professional development activities related to the implementation of literacy teaching strategies across the

curriculum. The Literacy Coach would be expected to observe the implementation of literacy strategies as a “critical colleague” and be expected to model instructional practices as well as assisting teachers in identifying when literacy strategies need to be implemented within lesson plans. Again, support is essential to sustained implementation of what is learned through professional development, and that support will be provided by this staff member. This position would be a two-year position with the goal of developing sufficient capacity among BHS faculty to allow the faculty to collectively fulfill this role of support after the second year.

- c. Insert structured, collaborative time into the schedule for faculty.** Once each month, a late start for students will allow time for teachers to address critical instructional issues. This time will not only allow teachers to collaborate with one another and with the instructional and literacy coaches, but it will also provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate with appropriate District staff and outside consultants. One of the keystone characteristics of effective schools is the degree to which faculty collaborate. There is a synergy associated with collaboration that allows for the development of highly effective lesson plans and instructional strategies. Further, collaboration is essential for the development of consensus regarding clarity of academic expectations for students.
- d. Increase classroom time for administrators.** The addition of a Dean of Students, a Social Worker/Counselor, and two additional interventionists will greatly increase the amount of time available for the principal and assistant principals to spend visiting classrooms. This will allow

administrators to more effectively monitor and support the implementation of key instructional strategies, as well as provide for greater accountability of staff regarding the implementation of effective instructional strategies and standards-based lesson design.

### ENHANCEMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCE UTILIZATION

**Block Scheduling.** Given the limited resources available for implementation of the above restructuring strategies, a change in a key governance structure—how we organize instructional time—is required. Block scheduling “frees up” units that can be used to hire the staff identified above<sup>44</sup>. Moving to block scheduling is justified by this reason alone; however, there are several additional advantages related to implementation of the block that will enhance the educational experience of all students:

- ✓ Longer class periods allow for more in-depth instruction.
- ✓ Certain science, fine art, and technical course lab activities can be completed during a single period instead of splitting the activities over two different days.
- ✓ Students can earn eight credits each year instead of the seven previously possible. More credits allow students to accelerate course sequences and to explore courses beyond required or ‘pathway’ courses.

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<sup>44</sup> In the present system, most teachers teach 5 one-credit sections per year (approximately 20% teach 6 sections), which totals 444 sections. In the block, teachers teach 3 one-credit sections per semester or 6 per year, which totals 510 sections or a surplus of 66 sections. This is the equivalent of 11 staff members. The funding for these staff members can be used to hire the support staff required for restructuring as well as to add sections that can serve to reduce class size in other sections.

- ✓ Freshmen and sophomores will be able to complete up to four credits of math instead of the present two credits, which will better prepare all students for DSTP testing.
- ✓ Being able to take 32 credits instead of just 28 provides the opportunity to develop programs with local colleges that would allow our students to earn college credits before they graduate from high school. BHS hopes to implement such a program during the 2009-2010 school year.
- ✓ Students will be given more writing assignments because teachers will be able to devote more time to the work of individual students and will have the time to provide more specific feedback to them.
- ✓ Block scheduling provides teachers with more time to plan and collaborate. When teachers share their insights and expertise while planning lessons, and when the time is available to refine lesson plans, students benefit.
- ✓ Fewer class changes means fewer disciplinary incidents as has been noted in schools that have already implemented block scheduling.

#### DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

For the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years, teacher leaders developed school improvement plans based upon formatting and content expectations provided by the District. In August of 2006, teachers were presented with data that reflected both student achievement results as well as student attitudes toward BHS. This data was used by the teachers in a structured exercise to identify

specific challenges that needed to be addressed. An assistant principal was charged with writing a School Improvement Plan based upon what the teachers had suggested as strategies to address the challenges. During the course of that academic year, teachers had opportunities to review the initial plan and subsequent iterations, but the review process was elective and not structured. Very little feedback was provided by BHS faculty and staff members, and the assistant principal continued to rewrite the Plan based upon formatting and content suggestions put forward by District, but only one aspect of the Plan—inclusion—has been implemented.

It is essential that the BHS faculty and staff come to understand that school improvement is not an exercise in compliance but rather a results-directed process requiring structured analysis of student achievement and opinion data and the development of strategies that all understand have been identified because there is an organizational expectation that the strategies will be implemented. Restructuring strategies related to school improvement follow:

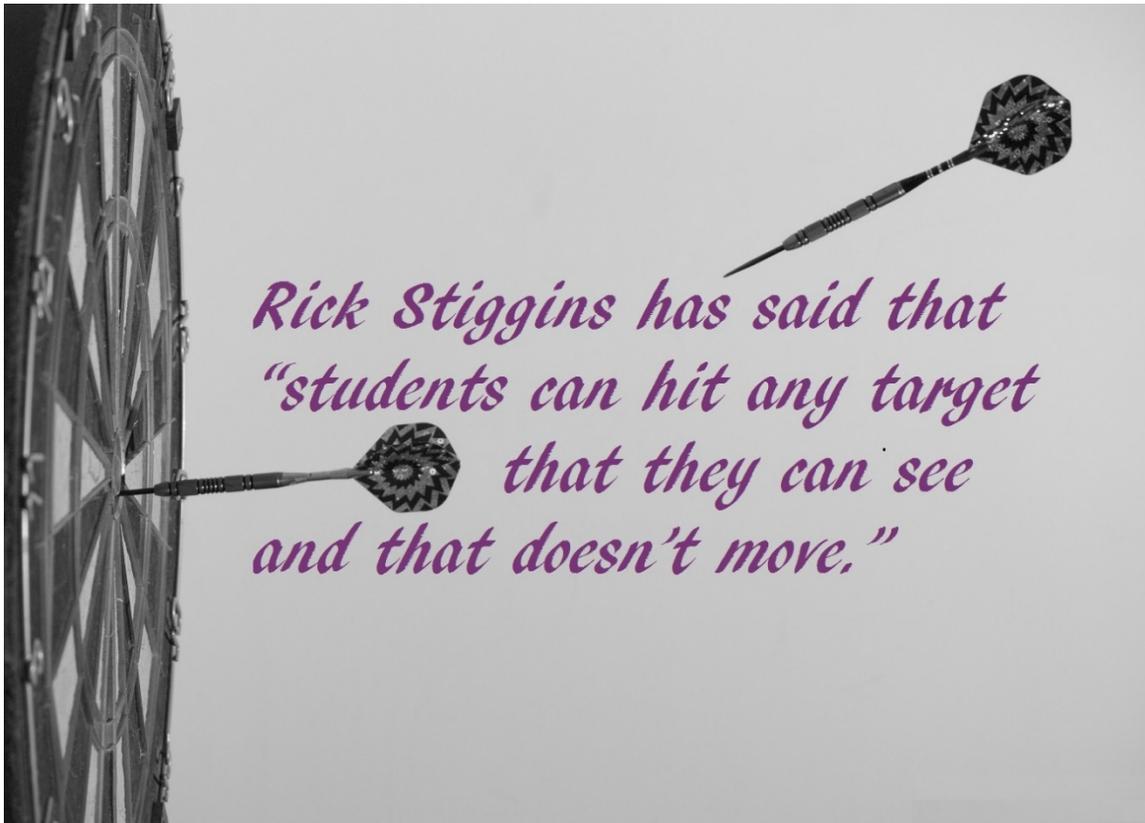
- a. **Develop a School Improvement Plan based upon faculty, staff, parent, and student analysis of NWEA/MAP data, DSTP data, and District student opinion data, which identifies areas in need of strengthening as well as areas of strength.** This process should serve as the cornerstone of school improvement. To the degree made possible by the availability of data, a structured analysis of data should take place during a School Improvement Conference that occurs within one week of the end of each school year and involves BHS administrators, teachers, parents and students. This analysis will provide the basis for the establishment of improvement

teams based upon the clustering of identified challenges. Subsequent work by school improvement teams will develop potential improvement strategies that will undergo full faculty, staff, parent, and student review. The essential content of school improvement plans will be created by the BHS Improvement Team (formerly known as the Leadership Team), which will include leaders of improvement teams, parent representatives, student representatives, and administrators—the number of parent and student representatives will be determined during the first School Improvement Conference to be held in June 2008. Draft school improvement plans will be written by the school principal and reviewed by representatives of the key school constituencies. This process will assure a strong focus on improvement challenges and will encourage faculty, staff, parent, and student ownership of school improvement plans.

- b. Change the origin of team leaders' authority from the principal to improvement teams that are formed to address data-based improvement challenges.** Because a significant portion of teachers became disenfranchised with the BHS leadership structure during the 2006-07 year and leading into the 2007-08 school year, the first and essential restructuring task was that of forming or reforming teacher teams. This is a process that will occur at the end of this (and every) academic year based upon data-based improvement challenges that are directly or indirectly related to student achievement. The number of teams will depend upon the number of areas of challenge identified with the goal of having at least 7 and no more than 10 teams each year. Each teacher will be required to participate with one team,

but meetings will be scheduled so that teachers who wish to do so may volunteer to participate on an additional team. It should be noted that in preparation for restructuring two existing teams were dissolved and five new teams were created for the remainder of the 2007-08 school year.

- c. Empower students to become more involved in the school improvement process.** Beginning in September 2007, the BHS Student Council was totally reorganized with the goal of full implementation of a bicameral student government for the 2008-09 school year. The Student Council will be expected to be the principal voice of the entire Student Body, all significant segments of which will be represented, and as such, the Student Council will be expected to identify school issues, respond to faculty and administrative concerns, and to bring forward recommendations for resolution of issues. Beginning in October 2007, the Student Council Advisor was added as a permanent member of the Leadership Team to serve as a liaison between the Leadership Team and the Student Body. It is expected that student leaders will actively participate in the school improvement process.
- d. Create a system that maximizes parental input in the school improvement process.** Parents from all communities need to be represented in the school improvement process. In addition to continued communication via established practices, a Parent Council will be established that will be involved in the analysis of data, in the identification and clarification of improvement challenges, in the development of those improvement strategies that involve the direct participation of parents, and in the periodic monitoring of school improvement plans.



## *The Measure of a School*

*The following was the "script" I prepared to guide me through the introduction of a full inservice day. This inservice day was intended as part of the preparation for the actual act of restructuring and occurred during the spring of the year preceding the actual date for the beginning of restructuring. As indicated previously, I developed the scripts in order to fully clarify my thoughts and instructions and never used a prepared script verbatim, but what was shared with the faculty on that inservice day was closely aligned with what follows...*

Some weeks ago I brought a concern to your attention that I believe to be at the root of our failure to inspire and teach black kids and special needs kids. We have been discussing this in department meetings and informally, and today, when we

have all day to devote to improving what we're doing, we'll be extending those discussions.

Graduation rate, college admissions, SAT scores, AP enrollment and test results seem to indicate what we're doing works really well for more than two-thirds of our students, so when it comes to school improvement in a time of limited resources—and when aren't they limited in Public Education?—I think we should focus our attention on those students for whom whatever it is we're doing does not seem to be as effective; specifically, many of our CP<sup>45</sup> students.

Grades and referrals to the office reflect the likely fact there are many students in our CP classes who do not feel accountable for their behavior, class work, homework, tests, or amount of effort put forward, and there has been occasional conversation among some of us, apparently, regarding the fact that Brandywine would be better if only we didn't have to deal with “those kids.” What I do not know is how many of us have that view. I know we all don't feel that way, but school improvement is going to be inversely proportional to the number of us that do...The more that do, the tougher the task...Just so you know, **my personal view is that the quality of a school is not measured by how well our most successful students perform but by how well all of our students perform.**

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<sup>45</sup> CP is the acronym for College Preparation, which was the term devised for what was, without doubt, equivalent to a classic General Curriculum that was common in high schools prior to “A Nation at Risk.” The only thing that resembled college preparation in BHS CP courses was the predilection for teachers to water down (i.e. dumb down) actual college preparatory curricula; unfortunately, the result was some of the least relevant and most boring instruction I have ever personally witnessed. It could be argued that this delusional classification (CP) and the instruction that resulted is the best prima facie evidence of general teacher expectations (or lack thereof) for disadvantaged children of color at BHS.

There are certainly things we might do to get parents to step up in terms of accountability for their kids, but I do not think we can rely on those things as a primary strategy for improvement. I think it is going to be up to us to figure out what we need to do to increase our kids' sense of accountability. There are a couple of areas that might address this...

- a) One would be for the Freshman Academy to continue to refine the approaches that help students understand appropriate behaviors.
- b) Another might be some form of advisor/advisee program for students identified as being at risk.
- c) Another is related to curriculum, assessment, and instruction—and this is something that we can begin to discuss in our content area teams beginning today and continuing through the course of the spring and during the retreat this summer.

Specifically, the kids we are talking about are not going to respond as freshmen to traditional teaching approaches that *are* highly effective for independent learners; however, those kids *do* need to be independent learners by the time they're seniors so they can be successful in college and at work, so...

**CHALLENGE ONE IS TO DETERMINE THE TIMING AND STRATEGIES NEEDED TO WEAN AT RISK KIDS FROM EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES THAT WORK WITH THEM AS FRESHMAN, SO THEY CAN SUCCESSFULLY TRANSITION INTO THE MORE TRADITIONAL APPROACHES USED WITH JUNIORS AND SENIORS.**

Somewhere, there is likely to be a model for this type of transition, but I have yet to locate it, and I believe, given the time to reflect and create, we can meet this challenge.

**CHALLENGE TWO** is related to the learning targets that should be the basis for lesson planning and assessment of these kids. I do not know about the other areas, but the documents that seem to guide at least some science teachers are pacing guides that simply list topics: photosynthesis, cellular respiration, mitosis, meiosis, etc. I haven't seen documents listing the learning targets for these topics, and in the absence of targets—and sometimes in the presence of them—most of us, given topics, will design lessons to teach students what *we individually* think the students should know about the topic, and with independent learners, presenting copious amounts of information works, because in the process, students are likely to learn what they need to know for future courses, standardized tests, etc. For the students I am talking about, that approach is intimidating and requires a skill set and commitment to independent learning that, to date, those students have not demonstrated, and no amount of wishing or protesting on our part will change that.

What apparently does work is to present challenging and comprehensive tasks that require the acquisition and use of knowledge and skills that are aligned with state or other standards. These tasks become the final assessment for a unit, semester, and/or a year—not a traditional paper and pencil summative exam. The learning target is the description of the task, which teachers break down in terms of the knowledge and skills that students need to know in order to master the culminating task, and then work together to identify the instructional

strategies and the pacing of lessons needed to teach the knowledge and skills. The culminating task (or tasks) becomes the constant answer to the constant question we hear from our kids: “Why do we have to do this?” These tasks—and not a chapter test—become the focus of what happens in the class.

Rick Stiggins has said that “students can hit any target they can see and that doesn’t move.” Apparently, students who have not had much success in school are more likely to engage fewer but significantly more challenging targets than they are to engage the more typical high school barrage of many, more discrete targets. In many cases, it has been my experience at Brandywine that students may not be aware of clearly defined learning targets of any kind. Focusing on significant and clearly defined learning targets requires not only a different instructional approach but also different approaches to assessment and grading, which would definitely be topics for another conversation or twenty. Let me summarize CHALLENGE TWO using the following questions:

- 1) What significant, challenging tasks, aligned with standards, might be incorporated into CP programs, which, when described, are the primary learning targets for a course?**
- 2) Working backwards from these targets, what knowledge and skills do kids need in order to complete the tasks that assess the targets and in what sequence would they be learned—sometimes called curriculum mapping or pacing?**
- 3) What instructional approaches would best teach and practice the knowledge and skills for at risk students?**

Today, in your content teams, I would very much like you to discuss the two challenges I have described; specifically, take time this afternoon to reflect upon and share opinions and feelings about the two identified challenges and then take a few private moments to reflect further upon what was discussed. I would really appreciate your sharing your individual opinions and feelings about what I have shared with you. We have a school improvement meeting on Wednesday afternoon, and I would very much like your views by the end of the day Tuesday (I will share them anonymously) because your responses will convey the possible degree of commitment that might be called upon to deal with these challenges and will, perhaps, provide other suggestions regarding priorities and projects that would address the challenges of improvement.

*Some folks are scared that the changes we are making are going to hurt their kids.*



## ***The Talk***

*The following script was prepared for an evening meeting I called for the reasons delineated below. Several hundred parents, students, and faculty attended the meeting, which began with the following introduction. My introduction was followed by an hour-and-a-half of parental hand-wringing, and my responding to a wide-variety of questions and attacks, which reflected the deep-dissatisfaction on the part of advantaged parents who were struggling to come to grips with the fact that the school they were coming to know was not the school to which they thought they were sending their children. It should be noted that, even though 37% of BHS students were African American, the only persons of color in the audience were BHS faculty and staff members.*

*In the “Caveat to the Brandywine High School Restructuring Plan,” I wrote...*

In response to uninformed speculation about restructuring, a mobilization of advantaged parents is taking the form of threats to choice their children away from Brandywine High School.

*The questions and comments coming from the audience reflected a collective concern about the proportion of “desirable” students at BHS. Yes, “desirable” was the word first used, and I had to be aggressive in affirming that I believed every student who walked through the front door was “desirable.” Apart from the first and only use of the word, parents used choicing their students out of BHS as a threat because of the perception that we were going to be focusing most of our energies on kids other than their own. What was said that evening, over and over again, was predicted in the “Caveat.” It should be noted that the parents of over one hundred white students fulfilled their threats the following summer and more have followed. The scenario cited by Fullan in Turnaround Leadership came home to roost at BHS.*

Thanks for coming this evening.

Hopefully, you’ve picked up an agenda that will give you an overview of our topics this evening.

I’m going to try to conclude the meeting by 8:30 and between now and then, It’s my hope I’ll be able to talk a bit about what came out of the School Success Conference on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June, one item of which, school spirit, is the second topic on our agenda, and it’s my hope that all of you will consider volunteering some time and energy for our kids—more on that later.

Before we get into that, I want to address the concerns some of you have about my commitment to the school and to what you see as an absence of a positive attitude on my part.

All of this, I have to tell you, was a total shock to me when I returned from vacation. As I tried to figure out why this was happening, I was getting phone calls and visits from faculty members who had been overhearing conversations at the swim club or had seen some pretty derogatory stuff on the Internet and came in to, I guess, warn me that something was going on.

I could see in their faces and hear in their voices a sense of alarm and surprise, and as I began to learn more and more, I felt I needed to let the staff know that I knew what was going on, but more importantly, to ask that the staff stay focused on what we had begun last year and about what we were all excited about: looking toward the start of school.

I sent several e-mails to staff about beginning of the year matters last Monday, and one of them characterized what seemed to be happening in the community as negativity.

A former Brandywine teacher forwarded my e-mail to some parents, and I regret that they perceived what I wrote as a blanket indictment of anyone who had raised concerns. Obviously, change cannot ever occur without folks raising concerns—doing so is one of the most positive things a concerned person can do.

I am really sorry about the perception I created because that was not my intent.

All of this began with the dress code issue, but the reaction on the part of some parents to the dress code and my e-mail are really just symptoms, I think, of a greater concern those parents and a few staff members seem to have, which is that I am not gung ho positive about Brandywine High School.

Unfortunately, nothing could be farther from the truth. I do raise issues. I have identified challenges because we cannot get better until we identify what we have to change.

I could not be prouder of this faculty and what they accomplished this past year. Did you know that we exceeded State targets for growth this spring for the first time ever? You may have picked up a page out front that documents this achievement.

Our average writing score was in the top five of all high schools in the state.

And I cannot help mentioning that we are at 691 out of 18,400 high schools and 623 slots higher than Concord on the US News and World Report list of outstanding high schools. We moved up 200 slots from the previous year—why is there talk in the community that Brandywine is on a decline?

***What folks do not realize is that last year was the year Brandywine started to climb.***

For 50 years Brandywine has prepared academically-inclined students for the finest schools, and the percentage of those kids who go on to 4-year schools remains very, very high.

This spring, 3500 students graduated from the University of Delaware. Six of them had 4.0's and two of those six were graduates of this high school.

Some folks are scared that the changes we are making are going to hurt their kids. If we believed there was a possibility of that happening, we would not make the changes. If anything, we are going to challenge academically-inclined kids more than they have ever been challenged—that is one of our goals.

Another goal is getting teachers ready for block scheduling, which isn't rocket science, but it does take work, and teachers do need to be ready. Our instructional coach is back from Harvard where he joined some of the most influential educators in America in looking at school change—I'm pleased to know that many of the things we're doing are the things those educators are recommending.

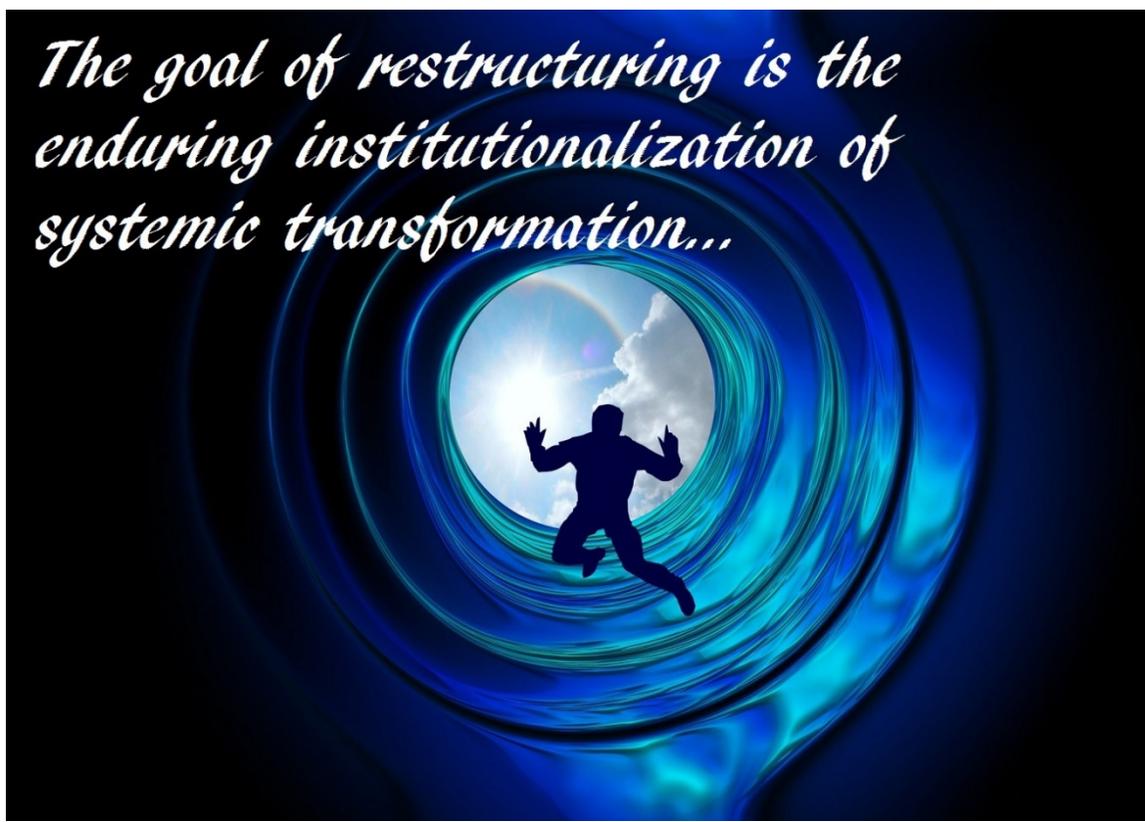
A national consultant on instruction in the block will be coming to Brandywine the week of August 12 to work with as many teachers as we can get in here. This will not be a theory session—we are way past that. This will be a nuts-and-bolts lesson prep for the block, a session that will be incredibly valuable.

Some of your kids are worried about what kind of school they are coming back to, and frankly, I am maybe more concerned about their feeling this way than anything else. Based upon what they have been hearing from some parents and a few teachers, they are scared. They're also depressed at the fact that they started out the year last year thinking they were students at the best high school in Delaware, but—and these are the words of one of them—“then I find out

we're restructuring, so that means we *can't* be the best high school in Delaware."

And that is what we need to change. We need to do what we need to do so that our kids will be attending the best high school in Delaware. We have to do more than say it; we have got to prove it. We have already begun to do that—the data says so—and this incredible faculty is going to keep pushing and pulling our kids toward excellence.

This is not the Principal's show. Brandywine is going to find its way back to the top of the ladder on the backs of committed students, parents, faculty and staff.



## *Denouement*

I felt fired up on the August evening of *The Talk*, but by October, I felt overwhelmed by the resistance of parents, and by the insurgence of a small knot of ten faculty members who, via emails, were often guided by a disgruntled, former faculty member who had moved out of state. Primarily because of their actions, I found myself in a relentless attempt to discover and undo organizational sabotage. Further, the District's failure to provide the staffing the School Board had approved meant that an essential part of the restructuring plan was not available. That part of the plan was intended to address social and emotional needs of students and the instructional needs of teachers.

Even more exhausting than countering the resistance of recalcitrant educators was managing and selling the implementation of block scheduling (there is more on this in the “Principal’s Reflection Narrative” that follows). The Superintendent had insisted, over my objections, that the State would accept block scheduling as the key change in governance structure. My objections, which proved prophetic, were:

- There was nothing in the available research that indicated block scheduling, in and of itself, was likely to address the underlying systemic and attitudinal causes of the insufficient achievement of our disadvantaged and special needs students.
- So much leadership energy would be required to support such an unwelcome change, that it would sap the energy needed to bring about the most important changes outlined in the restructuring plan.
- The advantage of increased instructional time per class period would not be efficaciously utilized by teachers, because it was unlikely there would be the resources (time and staffing) needed to sufficiently train and support teachers to implement instruction in “the block” with fidelity.

Once my boss inevitably prevailed on block scheduling, I moved forward. Unfortunately, block scheduling was a politically correct and tangible something that could be attacked by angry, advantaged parents and recalcitrant teachers in order to obstruct implementation of the restructuring plan. The core reason behind the obstruction was the perception that the attention of BHS school leadership was being shifted from the 50-year focus on advantaged children toward that group of students the opposition viewed as being the cause of BHS’s embarrassing restructuring: poor black kids. Block scheduling

provided an opportunity for folks to undermine the entire restructuring plan without being painted as racists.

The goal of restructuring is the enduring institutionalization of systemic transformation, the creation of a different status quo that is dependent upon an established culture and not upon charismatic leadership.

When change in a school is abrupt and coerced in the face of significant political opposition, as was the case at BHS, change is dependent upon the will of the school leader. In time (at least five years is a likely minimum amount of time if all goes well), if the principal's will, skill, and charisma are substantial enough, if sufficient resources are available, and (this is essential) if the principal can replace recalcitrant faculty with teachers whose attitudes are aligned with the changes being implemented, institutionalized transformation may occur.

At Brandywine High School, the changes the Delaware DOE required were abrupt and coerced in the face of significant political opposition; therefore, the key variable in restructuring BHS was me. I was the designated change agent, but I was not alone. There were twenty or so faculty, two administrators, and at least two guidance counselors who were openly supportive. The number of those supporting change, combined with the number of those in the opposition, meant that the majority of the faculty and staff remained neutral but compliant.

Three months after *The Talk* on that August meeting, I began to realize I did not have the physical and emotional stamina the job required. I had created The Plan, which I still believe was an admirable plan, but by winter break, I knew I was not the person who could implement it. In January, I determined I

would retire from Delaware but did not announce that decision until March. I was gone in spirit well before my June 30 retirement date. Within two weeks of my retirement from Delaware, I was working for a Pennsylvania intermediate unit on behalf of the PA Department of Education, a position that, ironically, led to my being responsible for overseeing the development and review of over 800 school improvement plans across the Commonwealth.

Dr. Peter Demyan is an educator who, after a long career that included stints as a faculty member at Johns Hopkins and as a superintendent in school districts on the West Coast, decided to quietly end his career by teaching physics at BHS. I observed that he was an extraordinary teacher who rejected the opportunity to teach “AP” students and welcomed the challenge of teaching students who would not traditionally find their way into a physics classroom. He remains the preeminent educator I personally encountered during my career, and many was the time that his words inspired and informed me as I tried to fulfill my responsibilities. His was a wonderful sense of humor, and after my decision to retire, I was chatting with him about my frustrations at having been unable to bring about permanent change. He left me with this poignant and relevant observation:

*Changes brought about by a change agent usually last about as long as his car's exhaust fumes as he drives away to his next job.*



## *Principal's Reflection Narrative*

*After retiring and leaving Brandywine High School, I felt the need to reflect upon and record what had transpired in my attempts to implement the restructuring plan I had created. What follows was sent to the acting superintendent (my supervisor had departed after three years for greener pastures at a wealthy, suburban Pennsylvania district) with the hope that perhaps there were observations that might prove helpful. It is my understanding that the positive image of Brandywine High School that I characterized in "The Talk" has not endured.*

*Rereading the following narrative after the passage of more than six years, I'm sure my motivation to prepare and submit what follows was to "man up" and acknowledge my personal challenges. Today, The Brandywine Experience section of this memoir represents a cautionary tale for any poorly-armed educational leader about to be thrown to the lions in a coliseum of change.*

## PRINCIPAL'S REFLECTION NARRATIVE

The essential goals of Brandywine High School's School Improvement and Restructuring Plans have not been achieved, and *the responsibility for this failure rests squarely on my inability to productively address the challenges standing in the way of fulfilling those goals.*

The challenges were and remain:

- The long-standing existence of two schools within Brandywine High School that are in competition for resources; one school is currently the beneficiary of resource allotment (e.g. average class size of 20 versus an average class size of 24+ for the other school), parental influence in school decisions, and high expectations
- Systemic and long-standing low expectations for students in non-honors courses
- A critical mass of non-honors students who have internalized years of low expectations
- Absence of collective accountability on the part of faculty and staff for the academic achievement of all students; the operative paradigm is one of individual accountability which challenges the fostering of collegiality and collaboration

- Faculty inertia that resists accepting responsibility for the performance of non-honors students but willingly accepts responsibility for the successes of honors students
- Significant deficiency in the application of research-supported instructional strategies in all content areas, which may indicate a significant deficiency in the collective instructional capacity of the faculty
- Significant absence of standards-based instruction in a high majority of classrooms; a lack of evidence that there is a pervasive understanding on the part of teachers of the importance of the alignment of what is written, taught, and tested
- Long-standing belief on the part of a critical mass of teachers who believe that teaching at Brandywine High School is prima facie evidence of their high competence, and given this belief, there is a concomitant resistance on their part to change instructional practices
- Absence of meaningful district curriculum documents that interpret State Standards, which could be used by teachers to guide course development and lesson planning
- Absence of curriculum mapping at the school and district level that would provide vertical and horizontal alignment of BSD courses and alignment of courses with State Standards
- Empowerment of a highly influential but small number of parents of honors students whose communicated agenda does not include the academic

achievement of all students; alignment of these parents with a small number of oppositional faculty members has created a political force that has drained organizational energy away from the School Improvement Plan

- Lack of definitive criteria from the State regarding what constitutes restructuring, which has resulted over the past two years in continually shifting conceptual and compliance expectations

DSTP data continues to reveal significant achievement gaps between African American and white students and between those students who might be characterized as advantaged versus those who are disadvantaged. The origins of these gaps can be traced back to two significant events that impacted Brandywine High School: the 1978 New Castle County desegregation decree and the Brandywine School District's decision to close Claymont High School. During the succeeding years, these decisions sent students to Brandywine High School that were not warmly received by a community that once referred to Brandywine as "The Academy," a place of academic excellence where 90% or more of graduates annually went on to college. That reality began to change in the early Nineties, but the district and the school administration chose to maintain the image of The Academy by focusing on and celebrating the achievement of students who traditionally performed well academically. The majority of students who had not proved successful academically prior to their arrival at Brandywine were placed into tracks that had expectations far less than the expectations placed upon college-bound students. Over time, the number of lower tracks was reduced, but scheduling practices succeeded in institutionalizing the existence of two schools within Brandywine High School. One school might be characterized

as the Honors (and AP) School, which is comprised of approximately one-third of the student body. The other school can be characterized as the Non Honors School, and each school has clearly different sets of expectations:

Honors School expectations: all students will do well on SAT and AP examinations, have class rankings that will foster acceptance by the colleges of their choice, and will be sufficiently prepared to be successful when they attend college.

Non-Honors School expectations: as many students as possible will graduate and enough students will meet proficiency on DSTP exams to allow Brandywine High School to meet AYP.

During the year of planning for restructuring (2007-08), seven public, evening meetings were held to solicit parent input into the planning process. The attendance at those meetings was almost exclusively composed of the parents of Honors School students. Their input was wholly related to assuring that whatever changes were to occur would not negatively impact their children. An often heard statement was, “we should be spending our time finding ways to get the students to come here that we want to come here, and on finding ways to keep from losing the students that we don’t want to lose.” These words convey the view that administrative and other energies should be focused on increasing the enrollment of the Honors School. The parents making this claim were not willing to accept the view that a focus on growing the Honors School meant a diminution of the energy and resources needed to address the significant, documented learning deficiencies of the Non-Honors School students. The

Honors School parents were not the only members of the BHS family who thought we needed to be concerned about the reputation and status of The Academy. There has been an aligned view on the part of at least some faculty—in some cases openly expressed—that if it weren't for the students of the Non Honors School (specifically, African American students), “we wouldn't be in this mess (i.e. restructuring).”

It is possible that for several years prior to my arrival at Brandywine, increasing the status and public reputation of the Honors School (i.e. maintaining the public impression of Brandywine High School as “The Academy”), was a non-documented but pre-eminent goal of both the politically powerful Honors School parents and the school administration. This has decidedly challenged one characteristic of what we know about schools that improve—in such schools, there is a collective accountability for the success of all students. The generation of a collective accountability for the success of all students remains, perhaps, the principal challenge for Brandywine High School.

The following is derived from a caveat prologue to the original draft of the BHS Restructuring Plan submitted to the Brandywine School District on January 14, 2008. What follows was not included in the documentation submitted to the Delaware DOE, nor has it been publicly disseminated. It is my belief that it remains substantially accurate (*see pages 161 through 164 for the complete caveat prologue, what follows is the last paragraph*):

*Because it is the degree of internal commitment of Brandywine educators and the greater community to educating targeted students that will determine whether or not Brandywine*

*High School will be successful in leaving no child behind, a significant amount of time and energy must be employed by BHS administrators and by teacher leadership in face-to-face relationships that model focus and commitment. The goal of these relationships is to create a “high degree of alignment among individual teachers about what they can do and about their responsibility for improvement of student learning” and to achieve “shared expectations among teachers, administrators, and students about what constitutes good work and a set of processes for observing whether these expectations are being met.” If we cannot attain this goal, implementing significant changes in governance structures focused on targeted students will not bring about the sustained, substantial, positive improvement that is our goal.*

The Brandywine School District Board of Education selected the fifth option for restructuring under NCLB: change governance structures. The interpretation of “changes in governance structure” in the literature indicates this choice has to involve changes significant enough to dramatically improve student achievement. At the time (and at present), there was (is) little in the literature that supports this choice as a viable way to improve student achievement in the dramatic way required by NCLB. In addition, there was (is?) no documented guidance from the Delaware DOE regarding what changes in governance structure might look like. In the absence of evidence of effective changes in governance structures and in the absence of State criteria, the default interpretation by the Superintendent focused on how time was used, and to a lesser degree on changes in staffing responsibilities. Neither of these was closely (or at all) aligned with the challenges delineated at the beginning of this reflection or described in the caveat immediately above; nonetheless, it was decided that

Brandywine High School would address the insufficient performance of African American and disadvantaged students by implementing a 4X4 block schedule. It was presumed that doing so would provide more time for instruction during a class period, which could have a positive impact on the achievement of “targeted” students. It was also presumed that the longer periods of time would require teachers to change their instruction. In Schmoker’s *Results: the Key to Continuous School Improvement* (1996), he describes a typical faculty’s response to innovations:

*A school’s culture was one where, despite the school’s intention to implement reforms or new curriculum, the conservative tendency almost always won out. The culture of isolation and privacy generally insured that innovations were not really implemented. Despite a school’s official adoption of new programs, the reality behind the classroom door was not innovative. Evidence indicated that only the most partial, superficial implementation was occurring as teachers found ways to twist the innovation right back into what they had always done.*

Schmoker’s words aptly describe what has occurred at Brandywine regarding implementation of the block—all teachers have implemented this innovation, but observations reveal that little has changed in the majority of classrooms regarding instruction.

There were some collaborative faculty experiences during the summer of 2008 related to instruction and curriculum development that may have been encouraged by teachers’ concern about working with students for ninety uninterrupted minutes. An April professional development experience built

upon those summer experiences and may have been somewhat successful in reinforcing the benefits of collaboration. While it is hoped that these initial experiences will ultimately lead to increased collaboration, such behavior is not yet part of the culture of Brandywine High School, where individual accountability remains the norm. The block schedule may also have contributed to the significant decrease in serious disciplinary incidents and in the number of days students have been suspended during the 2008-09 school year—reduction in disciplinary incidents has been documented in the literature about block scheduling. Given that collaboration and collective accountability are associated with increases in student achievement, and given that the decrease in suspensions has a disproportionate, positive effect on targeted students, it could be argued that implementation of a 4X4 block schedule has had a positive influence on the school; however, there is no evidence that there have been dramatic changes in student achievement as required by NCLB. In fact, the opposite is the case.

One disappointing aspect related to implementation of the restructuring plan is the attempt to change the orientation and focus of the student support function. The changes were intended to identify those students most in need or at-risk, and then to provide targeted interventions that would lead to increased student achievement.

First, counselors were allowed to alter the plan's innovation that one counselor would be assigned all at-risk students; rather, four counselors were required to become an “expert” regarding those resources needed to support at-risk students (the fifth counselor was charged with SAT and AP oversight). I was in error in allowing this change in the restructuring plan to occur, and it is my understanding

that my successor will be implementing the original plan of having an at-risk counselor for the 2009-10 school year.

Second, there was supposed to be a weekly meeting of a student support team (SST) comprised of all counselors, the deans of students, educational diagnostician, school psychologist, a representative from the wellness center, and the school nurse. The SST was to be facilitated by the assistant principal that supervised the counseling function. It was intended that each week this group would identify the three to five students who were deemed to be the most at-risk at that point in the school year, and then focus their collective attention on identifying interventions that would help the students. This was the point at which the “expert” counselors would be able to bring their expertise to bear. For reasons that remain unclear, only a very few meetings were held even after specific interventions on my part to structure the SST in February. I still believe the SST should have an essential role: if it is determined that the SST will be resurrected, it is my recommendation that responsibility for the facilitation of the SST should be delegated to the at-risk counselor.

Third, a mentoring program for targeted students was to be established. Originally, the program was to fall under the purview of the at-risk counselor, but when that role was not established, the program was assigned to two counselors. The initial process of matching mentors with mentees was flawed and reduced the number of matches to fourteen, far below the hoped for number, which diminished the program’s potential effect. A second problem was that support and monitoring were insufficient, which might be due at least partially to there not being a single individual responsible for implementation of

the program. It is my understanding that the district will be introducing and supporting a mentoring program for the 2009-10 school year. If this is the case, there should not be sufficient cause for Brandywine High School to create its own mentoring program.

Another failed aspect of the restructuring plan is related to parent involvement. In early October, the Brandywine High School Leadership Team decided to delegate increasing parent involvement to the PTSA. Other than the usual mailings and other communications, nothing innovative was attempted by the PTSA or me to increase involvement of traditionally underrepresented parents from Wilmington and Claymont. As a result, parent involvement from Wilmington and Claymont related to school improvement was disproportionately low. At the end of the 2007-08 school year, a school improvement conference was held that brought together the entire faculty, thirty parents, and nearly that many students. It was hoped that such a conference would be an annual event, but when I determined that I would not return to the principalship for the 2009-10 school year, I did not schedule a second conference. It is my hope that my successor will consider the success of the initial meeting and reflect upon the potential benefits of resurrecting this innovation—provided that proportionate input from Wilmington and Claymont parents can be ensured.

Unless and until Brandywine High School has a critical mass of teachers who understand the urgency of the challenges facing the school and believe in the capacity of all children to achieve mastery of standards, Brandywine will not meet the specific numeric goals outlined in an improvement plan nor will the

overarching goal of leading all of students to mastery be attained. Because of my inability to lead the faculty to accept the essential quality of collective accountability for the attainment of identified goals, the interventions identified in the SIP have not been implemented broadly or effectively or even at all.

Changing bell schedules or any other innovation will not bring about dramatic changes in student achievement unless and until a sufficient number of faculty and staff members come to understand and believe that students will respond positively to high expectations and to effective instructional strategies focused on assessed standards. More than altering staff responsibilities and moving to block scheduling—which were prescribed in the restructuring plan—changing the collective mindset of the Brandywine High School faculty and staff, regarding the impact of their expectations and instructional efficacy on student achievement, remains the key to creating one school wherein dramatic changes in the achievement of all students will occur.



## *Summary Thoughts on Practices Related to Student Achievement*

*I live in the catchment area of the Kennett (Pennsylvania) Consolidated School District, a district that has been meeting the challenge of educating a significant disadvantaged population, of which many have English as their second language (about 40% of the student population). Despite the challenges that such students bring, the district has managed to meet not only the needs of these students, but the needs of all students, including a large number of affluent students. My wife and I love living in the Kennett Square area for many reasons, not the least of which is how the Latino population is accepted by and has enriched the community. The school district has had much to do with enhancing the quality of life in our community.*

*Two members of the Kennett Education Foundation have taken upon themselves the project of interviewing members of the district family in order to document evidence of why and how the district is being successful in meeting the educational needs of all of its students, with the goal of identifying what might continue to be done to ensure that the current quality of life and education continues. I suggested that they compare what they have documented with those things that are known to be correlated with significant student achievement. What follows is an edited version of the information I sent to them for the purposes of their project; the following also serves as a summary capstone for what I have learned about practices that are needed to ensure all students will have the opportunity to achieve at the highest levels...*

***A) Increasing funding, per se, is not correlated with significant (or any) increases in student achievement. ([Cato Institute Report](#)<sup>46</sup>)***

There is no question but that there needs to be “sufficient” funding to operate a school district. If there are holes in ceilings, seventy students in every classroom, and no instructional resources, students will not achieve at high levels.

Examine a district’s budget over the past ten years and compare the percentage increase of instructional resources and training over that time to the percentage increase in educator salaries and benefits. I understand the importance of being competitive when recruiting educators, which does lead to higher compensation. I also understand there is no real correlation between educator compensation and student achievement. High student achievement is often found in districts with high educator compensation,

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<sup>46</sup> <http://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa746.pdf>

but research is very clear that performance on standardized tests (which are the tools used to measure and compare achievement) are far more correlated with factors such as the educational level of mothers and the economic condition of neighborhoods than with factors related to what goes on in classrooms, i.e. advantaged kids tend to do really well on standardized tests regardless of the quality of teaching. Advantaged kids live in affluent districts. Affluent districts pay their teachers well. Advantaged kids score high on standardized tests. As a result, teacher pay has a positive correlation with student achievement; however, it is a purely statistical phenomenon. Higher teacher compensation does not cause higher student achievement.

***B) Problem: the usual measures of student achievement are highly suspect due to the nature of standardized testing.***

(See pages 74 through 85 in this memoir regarding the inappropriate use of standardized testing, especially with a student population that has a high proportion of disadvantaged students.)

It is important from a public relations standpoint to identify measures of student achievement that are aligned with a district's curricular objectives (which should be aligned with state standards if required by law) and that are communicated in a way that can be readily understood by all members of the district community (e.g. parents, students, teachers, taxpayers). *Are there examples of such measures within the district?* If yes, these are likely to be examples of practices that contribute to increased student achievement.

*C) The Knowing-Doing Gap* (See pages 10 through 15 in this memoir)

After you have familiarized yourself with the concept of the Knowing-Doing Gap, can you identify district practices that are contributing to reducing the Gap? If yes, those practices should be recognized and validated because they will be indirectly responsible for increasing student achievement.

To me, the Knowing-Doing Gap is perhaps the most frustrating thing in Education. The gap is greater in Education than in any other profession (not according to my non-scientific sample of one, but according to various sources). This means that even though a very large proportion of teachers know what research says contributes to increased student achievement, they do not do it. Frustrating.

There are three areas of the Knowing-Doing Gap that are the most dysfunctional when it comes to student achievement: impact of teacher expectations (see D immediately below), lack of knowledge about human motivation (see E below), and failure to implement research-based instructional practices.

Teacher expectations and a thorough understanding of motivation may be more significant than practicing effective instructional practices; however, a teacher who has high expectations for all students and understands how to motivate them is unlikely to see significant student achievement if clueless about the technical aspects of teaching!

Research on effective practices has been ongoing for decades. For over 15 years, American educators have been regularly exposed to “[Marzano’s Nine](#)”<sup>47</sup>—what he refers to as “[high yield strategies](#)”<sup>48</sup>. You may wish to familiarize yourself with the “nine” and look for district practices that reflect these research-based strategies.

Madeline Hunter is another famous researcher of an earlier generation whose work has been somewhat displaced by Marzano’s work, but her [Model of Mastery Learning](#)<sup>49</sup> remains, for many of us, our I Ching of instruction. You may wish to compare district practices you have documented with Hunter’s model. District practices that are aligned with Marzano’s Nine and Hunter’s Model of Mastery Learning should be recognized and validated as leading to increased student achievement.

Are any of the following specific practices that are known to impact student achievement being implemented in the district?

*Is there close alignment among what is written, taught, and tested? In other words...*

- (1) Are curriculum objectives stated in student-friendly terms and
- (2) Do teachers base instructional design on the objectives? In most American secondary classrooms, teachers design lessons to

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<sup>47</sup> <<http://www.palmbeachschools.org/qa/documents/Handout5-MarzanoHighYieldStrategies.pdf>>

<sup>48</sup>

<[http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/cali/setting\\_the\\_record\\_straight\\_on\\_high\\_yield\\_strategies.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/cali/setting_the_record_straight_on_high_yield_strategies.pdf)>

<sup>49</sup> <<http://www.onetohio.org/library/Documents/Dr%20Madeline%20Hunter%20Article1.pdf>>

communicate what it is they know about a topic and then search a list of objectives to find those that seem aligned with the lesson; this is like an archer shooting an arrow at a barn and then painting a bullseye around it; if lesson design is done correctly, a teacher should design the lesson to hit a predetermined bullseye.

Specifically, every teacher needs to be able to answer this question about every lesson: *In a causative context, how are the instructional strategies you have selected going to lead your students to mastery of the identified objectives?*

- (3) Are the assessments used to measure mastery aligned with the objectives? For example, if an objective requires that a student explain something, mastery cannot be measured by a multiple-choice test; it must be measured either by a written, oral, and/or diagrammatic response.

*Is there a common practice of requiring students to engage in non-fiction writing?* For example, are students frequently required to complete essay tests, one-source reports, and/or write clarifications of responses to multiple choice questions?

***D) Teacher Expectations*** (See pages 48 through 57 in this memoir)

There is a direct and apparently causal relationship between teacher expectations and student achievement. This is something that has been known and studied directly in schools for over fifty years, but *it is a major victim of the Knowing-Doing Gap*. The pages indicated above will provide a

good overview. I hypothesize that the achievement of district students, especially those who are disadvantaged and achieve above the level that would be predicted based upon national data, is a probable result of high expectations of teachers.

The level of teacher expectations is a very difficult thing to measure, but as the Morning Edition story on page 56 explains ([Teachers' Expectations Can Influence How Students Perform](#)), it is even more difficult to change teacher expectations. You may want to look for evidence of practices that reflect high expectations. Such practices are not often dramatically overt and are more interpersonal in nature than (e.g.) an innovative, research-based lesson plan. Once identified, practices reflective of high teacher expectations should be acknowledged and validated.

The only professional development activity of which I am aware that has been shown to have a causative effect on increasing student achievement is [Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement](#)<sup>50</sup>. You may want to check it out and see if similar practices are taking place in the KCSD.

### *E) Educator Understanding of Human Motivation: The Three C's*

My non-scientific sample of one over the course of 42+ years, supplemented by my direct exposure to over 1500 PA school, district and IU leaders over a period of 4 years has shown me **there is an incredible lack of understanding regarding even the basics of human motivation.** This is NOT actually a vestige of the Knowing-Doing Gap because, believe

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<sup>50</sup> <<http://www.lacoe.edu/Home/CommunityServices/ParentCommunityServices/TESA.aspx>>

it or not, learning deeply about motivation—which should be one of the cornerstones of an educator’s foundational understanding—is not a mandatory component of training programs in schools of education. In other words, the Knowing-Doing Gap in this case is not the fault of teachers; it is the fault of those who teach teachers to teach. Plain and simple, teachers do not know why students do what they do!

Pages 16 through 53 provide a view of the components of Self-determination Theory (SDT: what the research has learned in over 50 years about motivation). During the time I was blogging, I communicated with Edward Deci—one of the researchers who began the studies that unearthed the roots of motivation—and he told me of his astonishment that there has been little interest from American educators over the years in learning about SDT, especially since it is something that is apparently well known by educators throughout much of the rest of the world.

If you read about and come to understand the Three C’s (Control, Competence, and Connection), you might look for district practices that include (consciously or unconsciously!) one or more of these foundations of motivation, which are related to (the very important matter of) teacher expectations, which is a causative factor in increased student achievement. Again, recognizing and validating such practices would be an important thing to do.

*F) Does the district provide professional social and emotional support for students most in need of it?*

I do not have a link to research that supports the importance of such support, but my non-scientific sample of one tells me that it is very difficult for a student learn if s/he is or has been: abused, seriously neglected, hungry, homeless, a witness of violent crime, etc. Any practices that the district provides to ensure social and emotional support to students should be recognized and validated.

*G) Have you identified district practices that indicate educators understand the impact of social dominance on minority students, including the effects of stereotyping?*

See page 153ff in this memoir for an explanation of the effects of stereotyping.

[Understanding Cultural Diversity and Learning](#) by John U. Ogbu is perhaps one of the most significant and powerful documents I have encountered that deals with “the problem of those minority groups who have not traditionally done well in public school.”

[Social Dominance and the Achievement Gap](#) is a direct transcription from a book (pp. 37, 119-132) entitled “We Can’t Teach What We Don’t Know” by Gary Howard. I prepared the document and used it to provoke discussion while Principal at Brandywine High School, a place where the collective teacher expectations for minority students were, in my considered opinion, very low.

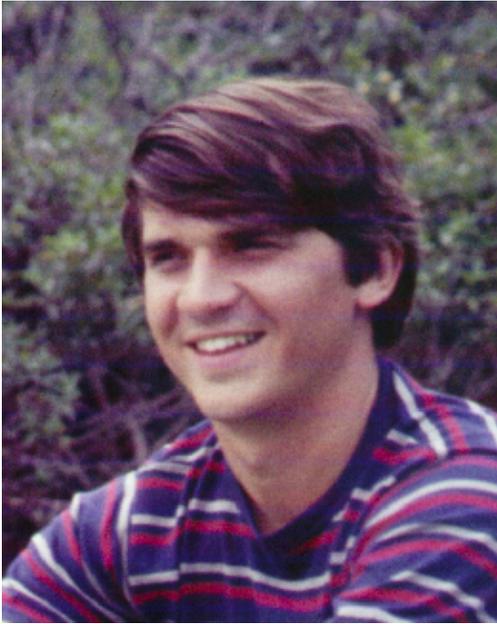
Stereotyping (especially as related to standardized testing, which unfortunately remains a major measure of student achievement) and social dominance have a very significant impact upon minority student achievement. District practices that address these phenomena should be recognized and validated.



## *Afterword*

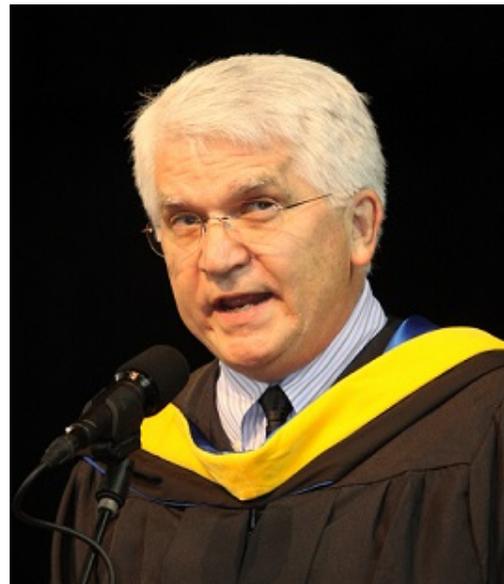
Four decades in geological time is not even a blink, a flash, or a flicker. It is inconsequential and insignificant given the 4.5-billion-year existence of Earth. True, there are instants in geological time when a flash has been enormously consequential: the collision of the bolide that created the Chicxulub crater and brought the extinction of 75% of the then Earth's species comes to mind. That said, I stand by the idea that four decades in Earth's existence is insignificant.

The same time in terms of an individual's human life is, of course, significant to that person, but as we age, some of us scratch our heads and are amazed, looking back, at just how insignificant and inconsequential our lives—and more specifically—our careers have been. Like many in my generation (according to my nonscientific sample of one), I entered education with the full intention of making a difference. Initially, I assumed I was interested in making a difference with individual students, although I cannot remember ever knowing exactly what kind of difference I intended to make. I think the notion was a subterfuge



for my personal need to feel respected, or even adored, by the imagined students who would cross my path. I know I believed that, in some way, a child's interaction with me in a classroom would enrich that child's life; unfortunately, four decades ago, I did not know what that "way" might have been, nor do I comprehend it now.

When I left the classroom for the world of administration, I had the full intention of making a difference in the greater world of educational policy, curriculum, and assessment. As a curriculum-assessment specialist, I learned to utilize "personal power" to increase teachers' alignment among what Fenwick English called the "written, taught, and tested." As a high school principal, I intended to—and did—use my institutional authority to facilitate changes that brought about *fleeting*, statistically-measured improvements in student achievement and behavior. In the last years of my career as an educator, I was able to influence how failing schools (according to NCLB) went about the business of developing school improvement plans across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.



I was a change agent.

And as predicted by my colleague, Pete Demyan, the changes—like those I brought about at Brandywine High School—lasted about as long as my car’s exhaust fumes as I drove away to whatever was my next job.

Not staying long enough in any position to ensure that changes become institutionalized seems to be a prevalent characteristic of educational leaders over the past few decades. Egos drive us to whatever we perceive to be the next level of challenge and/or recognition. Change carried forward on the back of a charismatic, ego-driven, time-constricted leader is doomed. Somewhere along the line for too many of us, *making a difference* morphs into *making a career*, and when that happens, an educator’s unspoken priority becomes his or her personal achievement, not the educational well-being of children. I resemble that remark.

Beginning as a young man and continuing until I was at an age when I should have known better, I thought my life would be significant if my actions as an educator impacted how students lived their lives. If my impact on one student radiated outward, then others would be indirectly influenced by me, I thought, and mine would be a significant life. I now understand that any influence I might have had became increasingly diluted in the stew of influences that grows more and more complex during a person’s life. The more ingredients that enter a stew, the more difficult it becomes to taste one specific ingredient, especially if that stew is simmering on a stove for a human lifetime.

It would be, therefore, delusional for me to think that my actions as an educator, during my brief moment in time, would have a direct, causative impact upon the ultimate outcome of a student's life. Such a delusion feeds the human psychological need to believe that one's life has value and meaning beyond that of any other living thing. We humans spend one hell of a lot of time worrying about that. If you are bored and want a chuckle, look up "meaning of life" on Wikipedia and note the magnitude of the entry and of the variety of answers humans have proposed over the past few thousand years.

A good friend once suggested that if so many people over the millennia have spent so much blood, sweat and tears trying to figure out the meaning of life, the endeavor must be important. I'm not so sure. I think it's more of a testament to how pathetic we are as a species for us to think that there *is* actually some meaning to the flash of geological time *Homo sapiens* will spend in this "vale of tears." I've personally spent way too much time wondering about what the hell has been the point.

My four decades as an educator provided me with mental stimulation, memories, friendships, a decent income, and a welcome retirement nest egg, but for all those years, I have been tilting at windmills. Having arrived at a point where I do not care about "the point" is a good place to be. Tilting at windmills was exhausting, and what the hell was the point in my doing so? In the end, we will be *Dust in the Wind*, a song title aligned with this



Biblical and accurate scientific reference from King James' Genesis: *...for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*

Thanks to the journey of reflection and documentation that this memoir represents, I think I am finally reconciled to, and contented with, the inconsequentiality of my life, to my being but a jot of dust in a universe so vast as to be beyond human comprehension. As an intelligent being, I had to do something over the years or go stir-crazy. For reasons usually serendipitous—sometimes extraordinarily serendipitous—I fulfilled many and varied positions in education, in each of which I tilted at windmills for no apparent reason. As a result, I accomplished nothing of lasting significance, save for one thing: *I have survived for nearly seven decades in this crazy world and can still find a reason to smile at something every day.* For me, that is “the point,” and it is going to have to be good enough.