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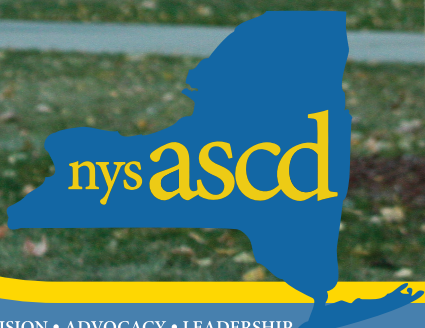**HELP** - Click ? in the toolbar.

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FALL 2014 Volume 39 No. 2

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Poverty, Performance, and Practice

NYSASCD is thrilled to have Janet Angeles as this year's guest editor. Janet Angelis specializes in bringing together the worlds of research and practice. Originally a middle school teacher, she has spent most of her career actively working to bring research results to schools, classrooms, and districts in forms and formats that are useful to them. Her presentations and publications bridge the academic, policy, practitioner, and parent worlds. Since 1996, she has served as associate director of the Albany Institute for Research in Education in the University at Albany School of Education, and since 2004, as director of the Know Your Schools~for NY Kids project. In that capacity she has been participating in the project's best practices research, analyzing data, and sharing results.

NYSASCD 2014-15 Influence/advocacy work has been addressing the issue that is critical in New York State, poverty and its effect on students' ability to learn. Research has dramatically shown that children living in chronic poverty can have their ability to learn affected and limit their access to educational success. Our goal with this issue of IMPACT is to continue to bring this issue, poverty, to the attention of all educators.

Valerie Kelsey Ed.D.
Executive Director - NYSASCD

"Poverty must not be a bar to learning and learning must offer an escape from poverty."

- Lyndon B. Johnson

Introduction

Janet Angelis

Janet Angelis *specializes in bringing together research and practice. Originally a middle school teacher, she has spent most of her career bringing research results to classrooms and districts in formats that are useful to them. Her presentations and publications bridge the academic, policy, practitioner, and parent worlds. Since 1996, she has served as associate director of the Albany Institute for Research in Education in the University at Albany School of Education, and since 2004, as director of the Know Your Schools~for NY Kids project. With Kristen Wilcox, she is the author of* **Best Practices from High-Performing Middle Schools** *(2009) and* **Best Practices from High-Performing High Schools** *(2011), both from Teachers College Press.*

I grew up in poverty – rural poverty. My father was a dairy farmer trying to eke out a living to support a wife and six children on a small farm owned by his parents in central Connecticut's stony soils. But even rural areas of central Connecticut are not geographically isolated, and it was not generational poverty, and for that I am thankful.

When I became an educator, I thought back on my own school experience, reflecting on why I had been so successful, given the odds. I knew enough to know that, as hard as I had worked, I had not "pulled myself up by my bootstraps." Many others had also played a role. My five siblings and I had benefitted from a wealth of social resources, including:

- My parents were literate and read and enjoyed books; they owned a few books themselves and provided books for us.

- Both parents' siblings were more economically secure and were involved in and enriched our lives.

- We had not only two sets of grandparents to visit but great aunts and uncles as well as a great grandmother, many of whom lived within walking distance (a mile or so).

For example, one great aunt, a seamstress, taught us to make our own clothes; she also ensured that we gained social skills and knowledge. Despite having neither car nor license to drive, she occasionally included one of my sisters or me when going out to dinner at a nice restaurant with a friend (who did drive). By bus and train she also gave us each at least

one trip with her to Hartford, New Haven, and even New York City. The result was that we presented as middle class when we went to school and were treated as such, with all the attendant expectations about behavior, intelligence, and performance.

Despite my own sympathies and experience with poverty, I was not prepared to teach students who came to my classes challenged by some of the effects of poverty, and I struggled to better understand deep poverty and its effects on childrens' school experience and learning. Both while teaching and in the years spent in the R&D world since then, poverty, education, and life outcomes have been an abiding concern. Thus I readily accepted the request to edit this issue of *Impact.* In it, Mary Ellen Freeley relates how as a young teacher she, too, had to learn those lessons, and she recaps for us much of the recent research on ways poverty impacts our classrooms, while calling for a whole-child approach. Julienne Cuccio-Slichto's article paints a picture of students' lives and teachers' challenges in an urban school of dense poverty; then she reminds us that impoverished children are in our suburban classrooms as well and describes their particular challenges.

For the past ten years I have been fortunate to be able to pursue my interest in this topic, in part, through the studies of the Know Your Schools~for NY Kids (NYKids)

project. Our research focuses on schools with high concentrations of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch yet consistently better-than-predicted levels of student performance. Coauthors Kristen Wilcox and Linda Baker and I describe the characteristics those schools have in common and that we have not found in schools that get more typical results.

But schools alone are unable to fully address the issues presented by poverty, especially when poverty is accompanied by the social isolation and social exclusion from which I was spared in my own youth. Hal Lawson posits that addressing this "terrible trilogy" requires not just more than educators but a different kind of school that better serves students, their families, and their teachers. He calls for new school designs that tightly link schools and communities, especially their health and social services, to provide cradle-to-career support for youth living in poverty.

Finally, Michelle Bianchi shares her analysis of two national models of school-community partnerships that seek to do just that. She looks through the lens of civic capacity – the joint efforts of various segments of a community to solve a problem – because, after all, the problem of preparing for successful adulthood the nearly 50% of New York State youth who are growing up in poverty will require the commitment and

effort of all.

In editing this issue of *Impact* I have sought to include the voices of those who have recently worked directly with students living in poverty; those who convey what we can learn from effective schools and teachers working within the current system, in which educators bear the brunt of doing more to address the effects of poverty; and those who are looking beyond schools to better ways to garner and deploy society's resources to ensure that poverty is not destiny. May you find food for thought and sparks of inspiration within these pages.

Recent Research Continues to Address Poverty's Impacts on Our Classrooms

Mary Ellen Freeley

***Dr. Mary Ellen Freeley** is Associate Professor in the School of Education's Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University. Following a teaching career and prior to joining the faculty at St. John's, Dr. Freeley served in numerous administrative positions in Nassau County ranging from elementary principal to assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and personnel to superintendent of schools. In addition to serving as President of both the New York State and national ASCD, Dr. Freeley also chairs the Board for Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Academy and the Board of Trustees at The Mary Louis Academy and is a trustee of St. Joseph's College.*

Jerome, sit still.

Jerome, pick your head up.

Jerome, pay attention.

Jerome, get up off the floor.

Jerome, try harder.

Jerome, why can't you listen?

Jerome, look at the words.

Jerome, what's wrong with you?

I was a first year teacher in Bedford Stuyvesant. The year was 1967 and Jerome was one of my students. Unbeknownst to me at the time, Jerome was a child living in poverty.

Since my school was involved in "looping," I taught Jerome for two years – in first and second grades. As a result, I really got to know him and his family, which gave me a pretty good lens into the lives of my other students. All of them were living in city projects, most of them below the poverty level.

I quickly learned that children who come to school hungry have trouble paying attention. Children who share a bed with a few siblings are often tired and fall asleep in class. Children who have not had books of their own often don't know left to right progression – a basic reading skill. Children who have poor diets are often disruptive. Children who live in unstable homes often come to school without proper clothing. Children

who have not heard stories read aloud or engaged in family conversations come to school without adequate verbal skills. Over the years, all of these initial insights have been corroborated through my continued professional study, experience, and research.

Fast Forward Five Decades

I was amazed to read in the May 2013 issue of *Educational Leadership (EL)* that in the prior few years educators around the world had said that poverty was a top concern affecting their students (Scherer). That issue included articles by many researchers who had been investigating the connections between poverty and performance over the prior decade.

For example, Richard Rothstein reminded us that in 2008 he had found that:

- With less access to routine and preventive health care, disadvantaged students have greater absenteeism.

- With less literate parents, they are read to less frequently when young and are exposed to less complex language at home.

- With less adequate housing, they rarely have quiet places to study and may move more frequently, changing schools and teachers.

- With fewer opportunities for enriching after school and summer activities, their

background knowledge and organizational skills are often less developed.

- With fewer family resources, their college ambitions are constrained (p. 51).

These reminders echo David Berliner's 2009 warning to the European Commission that the only sure path to educational equity is eliminating poverty itself.

In his *EL* article reporting a study he had conducted in 2011, Sean Reardon stated that income inequality had risen dramatically in the prior 30-40 years. His work demonstrated that family income is the determining and predictive factor in students' educational achievement. The income achievement gap – defined as the income difference between a child from a family at the 90th percentile of the family income distribution and a child from a family at the 10th percentile – is now nearly twice as large as the black-white achievement gap. Reardon also learned that high income families spend seven times as much on their children's development as low income families do – up from a ratio of four times as much in 1972.

Reardon's findings are corroborated by Susan Neuman, who has found that economic inequality is real and growing. Her *EL* article recapped her recently completed 10-year study that had compared children from two Philadelphia-area neighborhoods – one of

poverty and one of privilege – to determine how these two ecologies contribute to disparities in reading and the development of information capital. She concluded that the gap between the information haves and information have-nots could lead to even greater social and economic inequality.

It was Eric Jensen's article, though, that really hit home in terms of my recollections of working with Jerome and his classmates so many years before. In it, Jensen contended that students from low income households are more likely to struggle with engagement in school for seven reasons: health and nutrition, vocabulary, effort, hope, cognition, relationships and distress.

In the area of health and nutrition, for example, he claimed that poor people are less likely to exercise, get proper diagnoses, receive appropriate and prompt medical attention, or be prescribed appropriate medications or interventions. Additionally, children who grow up in poor families are exposed to food with lower nutritional value. When students experience poor nutrition and health practices it is harder for them to listen, concentrate and learn. When kids get the food they need, they feel better, perform better in school, and have fewer behavior problems.

He also contended that poor children typically have a smaller vocabulary, which raises the risk for academic failure. They are less likely to know the words a teacher uses in class or that appear in reading materials. They often tune out or do not participate for fear of looking stupid. Similarly, poor children commonly show cognitive problems, including short attention spans, high levels of distractibility, difficulty monitoring the quality of their work, and difficulty generating new solutions to problems. These problems make school even harder for them.

Jensen went on to state that children living in poverty commonly get twice as many reprimands as positive comments, particularly if their care givers themselves are stressed. Classroom misbehaviors are likely because these children simply do not have at-home stability or the necessary repertoire of social-emotional responses for school. Furthermore, children living in poverty experience chronic stress, which can affect brain development, academic success, and social competence. Poverty also impairs behaviors, reduces attention control, boosts impulsivity, and impairs working.

Policy Considerations

Consider the following: When the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1970) revised its definition of poverty in 1969, 12% of the total U.S. population lived below the poverty line. Forty-two years later, that number had exploded to 44 percent of the nation's children under the age of 18 living in poverty

in 2011 (Slade, 2013). In a recent white paper, Richard Coley and Bruce Baker (2013) looked at a variety of indicators related to education and poverty and concluded that "while education has been envisioned as the great equalizer – able to mitigate the effects of poverty on children by equipping them with the knowledge and skills they need to lead successful and productive lives – this promise has been more myth than reality (p. 3)." They went on to point out that "the manifestations of child poverty influence both the educational opportunities available to children and the educational outcomes they will likely achieve" (p.4).

Coley and Baker corroborated many of the points made in the articles in *Educational Leadership,* including others where they found significant gaps based on family income levels. Examples include differences in reading achievement among 4th and 8th graders on the NAEP assessment and in SAT scores and stratification in who attends and graduates from college. They also documented several important areas that affect the development of young children *before* they enter kindergarten and described how the experiences of poor and non-poor children differ in terms of:

- Family structures and behaviors (e.g., reading to children);

- Exposure to toxins such as tobacco smoke and lead, which can lead to a

> **"While education has been envisioned as the great equalizer – able to mitigate the effects of poverty on children by equipping them with the knowledge and skills they need to lead successful and productive lives – this promise has been more myth than reality."**
>
> *- Coley & Baker*

wide range of health and developmental problems for children;

- Stable employment;

- Health insurance and health care; and

- Quality childcare that provides preparation for formal schooling.

Perhaps more important, they called attention to policy decisions that have increased segregation and isolation in our schools. Drawing on data from the Civil Rights Project of 2012, they reported that Black and Latino students are segregated by both race/ethnicity and poverty. They also examined the role of government in addressing poverty and threw down the gauntlet by stating that the emphasis has shifted away from providing more equitable and adequate funding for schools and targeted

services for disadvantaged students and toward policies directed at:

- Developing and implementing Common Core State Standards;

- Improving teacher quality through quantitative evaluation metrics;

- Wide-spread use of test based accountability systems; and

- Providing choice among traditional school districts, charter schools, and private school vouchers.

Coley and Baker concluded that there is little evidence that these reform strategies can substantially reduce the influence of poverty on educational opportunity, especially when they fail to address concurrently children's readiness for school and the availability of equitable and adequate funding for high poverty schools and districts.

Where Are We Today?

I have been pleased to see that ASCD has continued to focus on poverty. For example, in July 2013, *Education Update* (Varlas, Ed.) looked at how the economic downturn that began in 2007 in the US has dramatically changed the educational landscape. Some districts that were previously vibrant are now dealing with unemployment, underemployment and more transient families. One implication of this "new poverty" for schools is the need to provide health-related services to students and their families.

In the feature article of that newsletter, Sean Slade reminded us that "the first tenet of a whole child approach to education is ensuring that students are healthy. We know that if students aren't healthy they can't learn" (p. 1) and they have difficulty completing work and are often late to school or frequently absent. In an effort to address the increasing number of children in poverty, ASCD is working with experts from the fields of health and education to embed school health firmly within a whole-child approach to education so that the health of the student is taken seriously by those involved in the school improvement process.

I am very proud to say that the whole child initiative began during my tenure as national President of ASCD, and I am gratified to see that it has not only continued but expanded to address the needs of our children living in poverty. It is our responsibility to speak out for each child, to advocate for all of their needs, and to ensure that those children living in poverty become the focus of the national agenda to improve educational opportunities for all.

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Two Districts: A Retrospective of One Teacher's Lessons Learned

Julienne Cuccio-Slichko

Julienne Cuccio-Slichko is a doctoral fellow in the Division of Special Education at the University at Albany. Mrs. Cuccio-Slichko plans to complete her Ph.D. program in May of 2015. She has earned a C.A.S. in School Building Leadership from The College of St. Rose and a Master's Degree in Elementary and Special Education from Mount St. Mary College. With over 10 years of experience in teaching and three years of administration and supervision experience, Mrs. Cuccio-Slichko's research interests include leadership and technology instruction within the field of special education.

As an educator, I am not indifferent to poverty, but ten years ago I was ignorant. Through working in two different schools — an elementary charter school in an urban district and a high school in a suburban district — it became apparent to me that poverty does not discriminate. Throughout my years of teaching, I took on various leadership roles that involved me in the voluminous challenges of educating children. Retrospectively, I have come to realize that many behavioral, academic, and family issues stem from a lack of resources. What may be disguised as one student's behavioral problem or academic issue is a much larger obstruction to American education – poverty.

Coping with High Poverty Levels in an Urban Elementary Charter School

My first public school teaching job was as a special education teacher at a grades K-6 charter school in upstate New York. Professional development began in August, where I learned about the curriculum, the school's behavior management plan, the schedules, job titles, and expectations. The school was housed in a newer building, materials were still in plastic wrap, technology included Palm Pilots, and the teaching staff seemed young and passionate. There was buzz about new teacher training in Florida, conferences, and new policies. I couldn't wait to start "decorating" my classroom. I can recall deliberating about bulletin board colors – should I use primary or pastel? I would soon learn that it didn't matter.

As a special education teacher, I was assigned the role of a consultant teacher, where I had to "push in" to classrooms and provide support to specific students or to the teacher by making curriculum modifications for students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs). I was also given a class of my own where I taught Wilson Reading, a multisensory intensive reading intervention program, for 60 minutes each day. I recall looking at the materials – "A, apple, /ă/" – and thinking, "I am not qualified to teach reading to first graders since I am not certified in literacy." When I looked over the students' IEPs, I learned that my students were fifth graders, not first graders. I was perplexed as to why fifth-grade students still needed to learn letter sounds. These were not students who were intellectually disabled; they did not have traumatic brain injuries; they were included in regular education classes, but they could not read monosyllabic words. It is true that students who come from low socioeconomic status (SES) may score lower on literacy assessments than children from higher SES (Lee, Griggs, & Donahue, 2007), start kindergarten with weaker language skills (Spira, Braken, & Fischel, 2005) and ultimately may have delayed reading abilities (Crowe, Conner & Petscher, 2009). However, five years seemed excessive for delayed reading abilities.

The first day of school was not what I expected, nor was my entire year for that matter: Children crying in the halls, chairs thrown across classrooms, and discussions in the teacher's lounge about Child Protective Service visits became all too common. Some of the teachers quit, but many of us hung on, determined to make a difference. I recall holding a Palm Pilot in my hand thinking, "All this technology and the child in front of me probably did not eat anything for dinner last night."

The students in my reading class did not notice my bulletin boards, nor did they eagerly read the objective I was required to write on the board: "Students will be able to recognize and read long vowel sounds /ā/ and /ō/." Most days my lessons were disrupted by fights. I was advised to assign lunch detention with me to any student that disrupted class. Sound advice, since I knew I had to build a rapport with these students before they would be willing to do anything I asked. During lunch detention, I asked them questions about their lives, got to know them, shared food with them, and built a rapport. Damion[1], a frequent patron of my lunch detention turned luncheon, talked about losing all of his personal possessions in a drug raid. His dad, convicted of selling drugs, had previously afforded the best of everything for his family. Tearfully, Damion described the hardship of living without money, without a car, without furniture, and without his dad. His mom worked a minimum-wage job to try to feed Damion and his brothers. Jacob, another

[1]This and all other student names are pseudonyms.

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one of my fifth graders, had six brothers and sisters. He never mentioned having a father. His mother worked in a nursing home, and the kids lived with grandmother in a two-bedroom apartment. However, Jacob did not tell me any of this; the other teachers did. Zack talked about his feelings about being the only white kid in his class and how he was worried about his mom. Once I earned his trust, he divulged his family secret – his mother was giving him sleeping pills, she disappeared during the night, and he had to get himself to school. There were many stories like these -- children alone taking care of their infant siblings, children sleeping on floors, without food, and without heat. According to the New York State Community Action Association's 2013 Poverty Report, New York's poverty rate has increased over 15% in three years, with over 900,000 children living in poverty throughout the state.

Crime was something I was only familiar with on the news. I had never witnessed anything worse than a car accident. Instead of what I thought of as "usual" school talk of weekend adventures (i.e. seeing a movie), many students spoke about witnessing a crime, or worse, a loved-one's murder. These incident reports became part of our morning routine. As teachers we would walk into the building, and staff would apprise us of what had taken place the night before that might affect the students. Most memorable was the stabbing of Jacob's mother. His father had stabbed her numerous times in the face, and she remained in critical condition for quite some time. I cried that morning for Kiley, Jacob's sister; she was already so withdrawn and fragile. Jacob, I knew, would put on a tough face and pretend that it didn't bother him. Kiley, on the other hand, stopped speaking for a while, and she always wore the same white uniform shirt without washing it for weeks at a time. I brought her new shirts, but she continued to wear the same one.

The school was in danger of losing its charter. Unstable leadership was problematic according to the State's Charter School Institute. Not only was teacher turnover high, administrators seemed to disappear as well; four principals in one year impacted morale. We served over 600 students, over 90% of whom qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. Despite the plethora of problems impacting this community, our school employed only one social worker. Much of the counseling, parental support, and community outreach was left up to the teachers, teachers that were already working ten-hour days and overwhelmed by unattainable academic goals. Many of the children in our classrooms had lost family members, possessions, and months of education due to transience and crisis. I had learned that many of the students, including those without IEPs, were reading at a first-grade level.
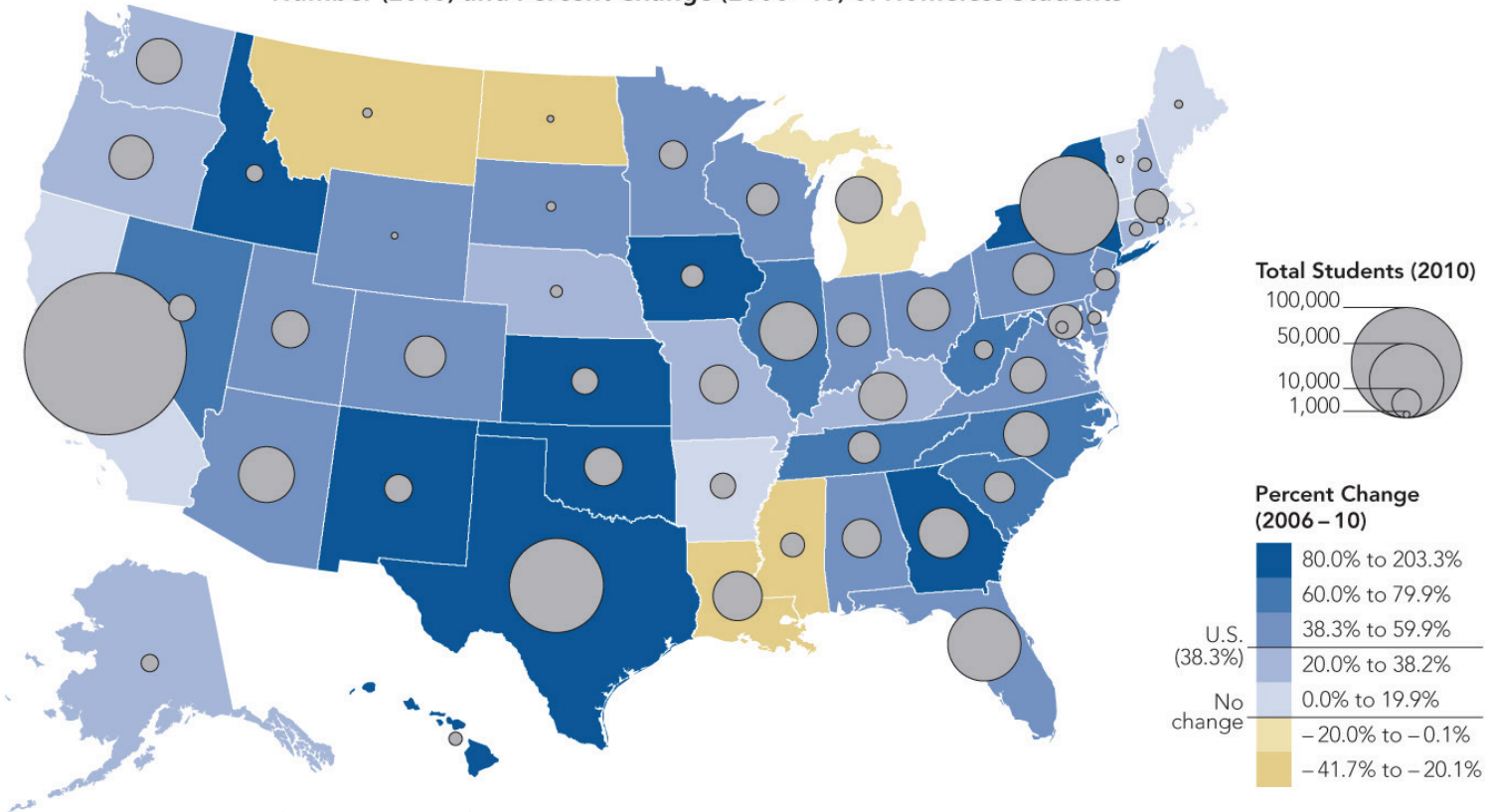
After a year I moved into an administrative role. Meeting agendas focused less on students and more on numbers -- the number of students identified as in need of academic intervention, in need of special education referral, in need of a certain test score or a specific percentage on a certain test. Our test scores were trending in the right direction but not significantly enough to keep our charter, and we were in danger of closing, regardless of any gains we had made with students or their families. Despite our efforts in academic interventions, including Saturday school, they were not enough to close the gap. The staff continued the important work we were doing regardless of the unstable environment. We were proud of our numbers -- the number of Thanksgiving dinners we delivered, the number of winter coats we donated, the number of children removed from unsafe conditions, and the number of words Jacob mastered in his two years in my reading class. Many would say it was all for naught since the school closed anyway, but I would like to think differently. Despite the declining morale, high turnover, and prevalence of crime in a poverty-stricken community, as a staff we supported many families through crisis. We provided a service beyond education and although that remained our primary focus, it was imperative that we support children holistically in order to make gains academically.

Dealing with Pockets of Poverty in a Suburban High School

To pursue an administrative career, I sought out an administrative internship with a more stable school in a suburban district. During my second year teaching there, I applied for a Teacher Leader position at the high school level. High school was uncharted territory, but I was up for the challenge. To my surprise I faced similar adversities; I was teaching ninth graders how to read monosyllabic words and administratively had to address socioeconomic issues once again. Meeting agendas focused on test scores and the achievement gap. Students were referred to as "cohorts," and it was my charge to make sure the district attained annual yearly progress for graduation rate for the students-with-disabilities cohort.

I had lofty ideas about meeting with the special education teachers and brainstorming strategies to meet district and department objectives. At my department meeting the teachers recounted stories of students that didn't show up or were suspended, addicted to drugs, whose parents didn't care, and so on. Instead of brainstorming strategies, they asked, "How are we to make kids pass when they are not here? We cannot control what happens outside of school." I didn't have the answers. I had only worked in elementary school, where compulsory education was in our favor.

Number (2010) and Percent Change (2006–10) of Homeless Students

Total Students (2010)
100,000
50,000
10,000
1,000

Percent Change (2006–10)
80.0% to 203.3%
60.0% to 79.9%
38.3% to 59.9%
U.S. (38.3%)
20.0% to 38.2%
No change
0.0% to 19.9%
–20.0% to –0.1%
–41.7% to –20.1%

Graphic from Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness - Click **HERE** to read more.

Before long, I was introduced to the "homeless coordinator" for the district. I was perplexed by this role and thought maybe the school was helping the community by offering classes to homeless people. I learned quickly about unaccompanied youth – a term I had not heard before that year. Not unlike the charter school, this district, too, was afflicted by poverty, but it just was not as apparent as it had been in the urban district. However, the district had resources, the staff, and contacts with county agencies to assist the district and its students. I had anticipated collaborating with staff, just not parole officers and homeless shelter staff.

Working in a high school meant being educated on social issues by the students.

My education began with learning about pharm parties, not the cow-tipping type. One administrative meeting ended abruptly due to one students' suicide attempt the night before. During that year, I mentored several students, one a fifteen-year-old who continuously ran away from home, disappeared from shelters, and talked about her desire to get pregnant. The last time I saw her she attacked the vice principal on the side walk and was taken away by an ambulance.

Unlike the charter school, this district offered professional development on poverty. I joined a book discussion — *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (Ehrenreich, 2001). Although the book helped me to better understand the adult perspective,

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Although these two schools differed by grade levels served and geographic location, the faculty at both schools measured annual yearly progress one student at a time.

it did not include the child's. Employing the sound advice I had received from my mentor at the charter school, I aimed to build relationships with the students. I used my planning time as office hours for students to discuss their issues or concerns. One colleague described my office door as a cold cut counter at the grocery store and thought it would be appropriate to install a number dispenser. Students divulged their worries about incarcerated parents, drug addictions, and sexuality. As a team, we tried to address each issue with the resources at our disposal.

I recall one student who was getting into fights and having a difficult time with teachers, due to hygiene issues. Teachers told me they had to put Vicks up their noses to be able to sit in the same room. The social worker learned that he was living with his grandmother, who did not have hot water, and it had been months since his last shower. The other contributing issue was his very old sneakers that took him through a cow pasture to get to grandma's house. The social worker bought him new sneakers, and a plan was devised so that he could shower in the boy's locker room before school.

This Band-Aid easily solved one specific problem, but the real solution lies with building relationships and teaching kids self-advocacy. Many students will not tell you that they do not have a shower, a bed, or money for food, or that they are living in a car (more common than you would think). Even in districts where poverty is not prevalent on the streets, it may be prevalent in children's lives. Some kids may not know what they need or where to look for help. I have worked with many amazing educators for whom teaching curriculum was only a small part of their day and social workers who stayed at school till dark working tirelessly to assist children and their families. They are steadfastly chipping away at the social issues that impede our true purpose.

How to Measure Progress

Unfortunately, we often hear about one of our students who has been incarcerated, or worse. That is why I was so delighted to see Kiley's name on an enrollment list at a proprietary school for medical assistants. It had been nine years since that fragile, mute sixth grader was dealing with the attempted murder of her mother. Now she spoke

proudly of her accomplishments and her dreams of working in health care.

I might not remember the exams or the percentage of students that passed their Global Regents, but I do remember students' faces and their stories. I remember the teachers and social workers that bought sneakers to prevent fights, volunteered their time to Saturday school, stayed late to provide crisis counseling for family members, or collected donations for winter coats or Thanksgiving turkeys. Although these two schools differed by grade levels served and geographic location, the faculty at both schools measured annual yearly progress one student at a time.

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Poverty and Performance in New York State:
What Can We Learn from Best Practice Research?

Janet I. Angelis, Kristen C. Wilcox, Linda Baker

Janet Angelis *specializes in bringing together research and practice. Originally a middle school teacher, she has spent most of her career bringing research results to classrooms and districts in formats that are useful to them. Her presentations and publications bridge the academic, policy, practitioner, and parent worlds. Since 1996, she has served as associate director of the Albany Institute for Research in Education in the University at Albany School of Education, and since 2004, as director of the Know Your Schools~for NY Kids project. With Kristen Wilcox, she is the author of* **Best Practices from High-Performing Middle Schools** *(2009) and* **Best Practices from High-Performing High Schools** *(2011), both from Teachers College Press.*

For the past decade, we have been studying what are sometimes called "beating- the-odds" schools – schools where performance is consistently higher than would be predicted by student demographics, including, especially, poverty levels. With colleagues in the University at Albany's Know Your Schools~for NY Kids project (NYKids) we learn what is unique about the practices in those beating-the-odds schools by comparing them to schools serving similar populations of students, yet with more typical performance outcomes. Since 2005 we have conducted six such studies spanning elementary through high school, with some looking at specific instructional contexts (e.g. science classrooms) and others at particular groups of students (ethnic and linguistic minority and special needs). We have found that the higher-performing schools in each study share some common characteristics that distinguish them from schools with typical performance. Across all the studies, we found that in the higher performers, educators collaboratively use data to drive decisions about curriculum and instruction with the goal of ensuring that every student can and will learn; in addition, they take the stance that "poverty is no excuse" for poor student performance.

These similarities across successful schools have held for the higher-performing schools in each study, whether they are located in urban, rural, or suburban areas, no matter their size, nor whether their students are recent immigrants or native born. In whatever setting, educators in the higher-performing schools have created a climate in which they are able to support

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each student to succeed. Despite the challenges associated with high levels of poverty, teachers and administrators optimize the potential positive effects of their unique school settings and ecologies on individual student performance rather than allowing those challenges to drag student performance down to the expected norm (Angelis & Wilcox, 2011).

To select schools to study, we use statistical tests (specifically, regression analyses) to parse socioeconomic factors from student achievement, selecting schools whose students consistently perform well on standardized measures of achievement despite their poverty levels. We are not suggesting that society's inequalities are not replicated in the public schools. They are (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ravitch, 2010). Nor are we claiming that the schools in our studies regularly perform better than schools that serve more economically privileged students. They do not. In New York as elsewhere, the highest-performing schools are likely to be in wealthier (and generally whiter) districts. However, there are anomalies, and our studies have been designed to learn more about schools whose students consistently perform better than expected, given their concentrations of poverty (Angelis & Wilcox, 2011; Wilcox & Angelis, 2009, 2011; Wilcox, Baker, & Angelis, with Conklin, 2013).

Of course specific practices vary from school to school, depending on each unique setting and student population, but we have found that three practices are common across the higher performers. In these schools, educators

- Expect that all students, including students living in poverty, can and will achieve beyond predicted levels;

- Share responsibility for student success; and

- Make decisions based on a variety of evidence and strategically use resources to align to their plans.

Linda Baker had been involved in all six research studies conducted by NYKids and coauthored the most recent report, *The ABCs of Graduating At-Risk Students on Time.* She also has contributed to the National Study of Writing Instruction. A teacher, professional developer, and active community volunteer, she earned her Ph.D. from the Department of Educational Theory and Practice at the University at Albany.

For each of our studies, we identified two sets of schools that were similar in student demographics, poverty levels, and per pupil expenditures but consistently differed in achievement levels. For the first five of our studies, our measure of achievement was performance levels over three years on particular New York State Assessments. Our most recent study examined schools with typical or higher-than-predicted four-year graduation rates for their at-risk students, including those eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (F/RL). From each potential sample we also sought to include schools representative of the state's geographic diversity. In this article we draw our examples from 12 schools across the six studies whose student poverty levels range from 50-100% (based on F/RL) in a variety of settings in New York State. The state average poverty level from 2004-14, the decade during which the studies took place, has steadily climbed from 44 to 49%. The cross-case analyses for the six studies and the case reports for all 55 higher-performing schools are freely available at our project's website: **www.albany.edu/nykids.**

School, City or Town	Grades served (Number of Students)	Free/Reduced-Price Lunch Rate	Year*
Ulysses Byas Elementary School, Roosevelt	K-6 (420)	100%	2004
School 19, Dr. Charles Lunsford, Rochester	K-6 (309)	98%	2010
Columbus Elementary School, New Rochelle	K-5 (816)	78%	2010
Saunders Trades & Technical High School, Yonkers	9-12 (1395)	76%	2006
Westbury Middle School, Westbury	6-8 (849)	74%	2006
Jefferson Middle School Science, Jamestown	5-8 (390)	69%	2008
Centennial Avenue Elementary School, Roosevelt	K-5 (440)	66%	2010
Downsville Central High School, Downsville	9-12 (85)	63%	2012
John F. Kennedy Middle School, Utica	6-8 (1025)	60%	2006
Otselic Valley Jr-Sr. High School, So. Otselic	7-12 (188)	53%	2012
Port Chester Middle School, Port Chester	5-8 (790)	52%	2006
South Kortright Central Schools, South Kortright	9-12 (126)	52%	2006

* The year indicated for each school correlates with the year the school was identified as part of the sample.

Educators in the odds-beating schools stress that poverty is never a reason to expect less of a student, and it is never an excuse for low performance levels by a group of students. Much of the key to the success of these schools might be traced to the high expectations teachers and administrators have for all students. Those expectations inform everything that educators do to help students achieve, including working to build students' confidence and raise their aspirations as well as communicating with the larger community to develop or maintain a culture of anticipated academic achievement for all. For example, anyone walking into Saunders Trades & Technical High School in Yonkers in the spring (as we did in 2008) would see a wall covered with college acceptance letters and a record of scholarship monies students have been awarded.

Saunders Trades & Technical High School, thermometer showing the amount of scholarships the class of 2008 received. Photo by E. Salasoo

> **"You look at our school — we don't have magic chocolate milk here. The kids in the city are plenty smart. The kids have to be invested in the schools, and the teachers have to be invested in the schools."**
>
> *- teacher and instructional coach, School 19*

Rather than adjust standards for individuals or groups, educators in higher-performing schools adjust and enhance their support systems to enable every student to succeed. For example, Downsville's Wednesday faculty meetings include identification of struggling students and strategies for scaffolding, so that by Thursday additional supports are in place to assist each student identified.

In high-poverty and isolated rural areas like South Kortright or the Otselic Valley, part of providing the vision of success is finding ways to expose their students to opportunities in the wider world, whether it be through real or "virtual" field trips, visits to nearby college campuses, or opportunities to take a college course on line as part of their high school course work. In the more urban setting of New Rochelle, weekly meetings with Latina Moms include programs such as visits to

Manhattan museums so that parents can help open children's eyes to the world beyond home and classroom.

Engaging instruction and intervention go hand-in-hand with high expectations. No student is allowed to "fall through the cracks" for either academic or social/emotional reasons. Staff members in urban Saunders and rural Downsville, for example, go into the community to bring absent students to school. Special education and AIS services are tightly connected with a student's classroom work, and Downsville provides an

> **"All students, regardless of their SES resources, deserve the opportunity to achieve at a high level."**
>
> *- district administrator, Jefferson Middle School*

afterschool library program where students can get academic support, along with bus transportation home. For its after-school tutoring program, Utica's Kennedy Middle School ensures that students who need it attend by using school security to escort students from their last period classes to a location where the teacher requiring their presence meets them.

Also at Kennedy, a special bus picks up the 14-16 students assigned to an alternative program. The pick-up is at their homes so that parents can see them board. The alternative program runs until 5:30, at which time they are bused directly home. The program focuses on developing the behavior and skills that will enable these students to be successful academically – anger management, interpersonal and social skills. In addition to academic course work that supports keeping up with their core subjects, they receive social services. Westbury Middle School also offers an alternative program designed to address underlying causes of poor behavior, attendance, and academic performance. That program provides support from a special education teacher, a content area teacher, and a social worker to students who are not successful in a normal school setting. Self-contained, it serves 15 students, and the goal is for the students to succeed academically. However, working on social-emotional issues as well as attendance often has to come first.

Being part of an inclusive culture of rigorous academic standards is important for young children, too. Emphasis on student ownership of high expectations and personal standards permeates the cultures at Centennial Avenue and Ulysses Byas Elementary Schools. Centennial Avenue students set goals and learn about performance indicators so that they have a

strong sense of what they plan to achieve and the steps they need to take for success. Ulysses Byas students learn self-management skills and put their focus on learning in a "fight-free, drug-free, disrespect-free" environment. The teachers reinforce self-control and discipline through a "court" system in which students review the facts of other student's "cases" and determine appropriate consequences.

Staff Collaborative Effort

> **"Collaboration is supported and sustained by the modeling of our principal and by the belief of all faculty and staff that collaboration is critical for the success of our students."**
>
> *- faculty member, Centennial Avenue Elementary School*

> **"Our strength is having to pull together as a community."**
>
> *- teacher, Otselic Valley High School*

fine-tune instructional strategies; establish benchmark, progressive, and culminating assessments; analyze student performance; and develop scaffolding for individual students as well as groups. Teachers in these schools also interview prospective new faculty members, evaluate and/or write curriculum, and have a voice in school- and district-wide decision making. Collaboration, which takes place both in purposeful, scheduled meetings and in informal situations, always centers on identifying and meeting students' needs, both academic and social.

In odds-beating schools, educators work together to ensure student success. District and school leaders support collaboration through professional development, scheduling time for purposeful faculty discussion, and modeling an attitude of respect for teachers. Faculty members feel a sense of professional agency as they work together in small groups to plan interdisciplinary units; help colleagues

Teachers at Jefferson Middle School, for example, were part of a task force determining how to improve middle-level education in Jamestown. They helped to re-schedule the student day and built two-teacher teams for fifth and sixth grades. English teachers "loop" to the next grade level so that students are able to feel a close connection with a faculty member for an extended time and experience little loss of instructional continuity. Grade-level departments develop goals and action plans

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collaboratively. Port Chester Middle School, with 68% of students Hispanic or Latino at the time of our study, focuses on literacy and English Language Arts. The English teacher on each grade-level team provides resources for the team and leads monthly discussions on classroom instructional strategies and content. Teachers work together to develop reading comprehension skills related to both fiction and non-fiction, including test questions. Teachers credit that collaboration with helping Port Chester to achieve ELA assessment results 10 to 15 points higher than the state average.

At Columbus Elementary, another school with a high percentage (82%) of Hispanic or Latino students, some recently arrived from Central America, learning English has been a top priority, but that initiative is incorporated into an inter-disciplinary curriculum. Grade K-2 students participate in an inter-disciplinary and inter-active Literacy Fair. Teachers of grades 3-5 collaborate to prepare students for the annual Expo, celebrating students' STEM skills. Grade 4 students work with a community architectural group to design the exhibition structure, using the winning design from a contest of fourth-grade student teams. Grade 3 demonstrations focus on science research, while Grade 5 exhibits incorporate math, science, and technology. Every student, regardless of English language fluency, serves as a guide or docent for parents

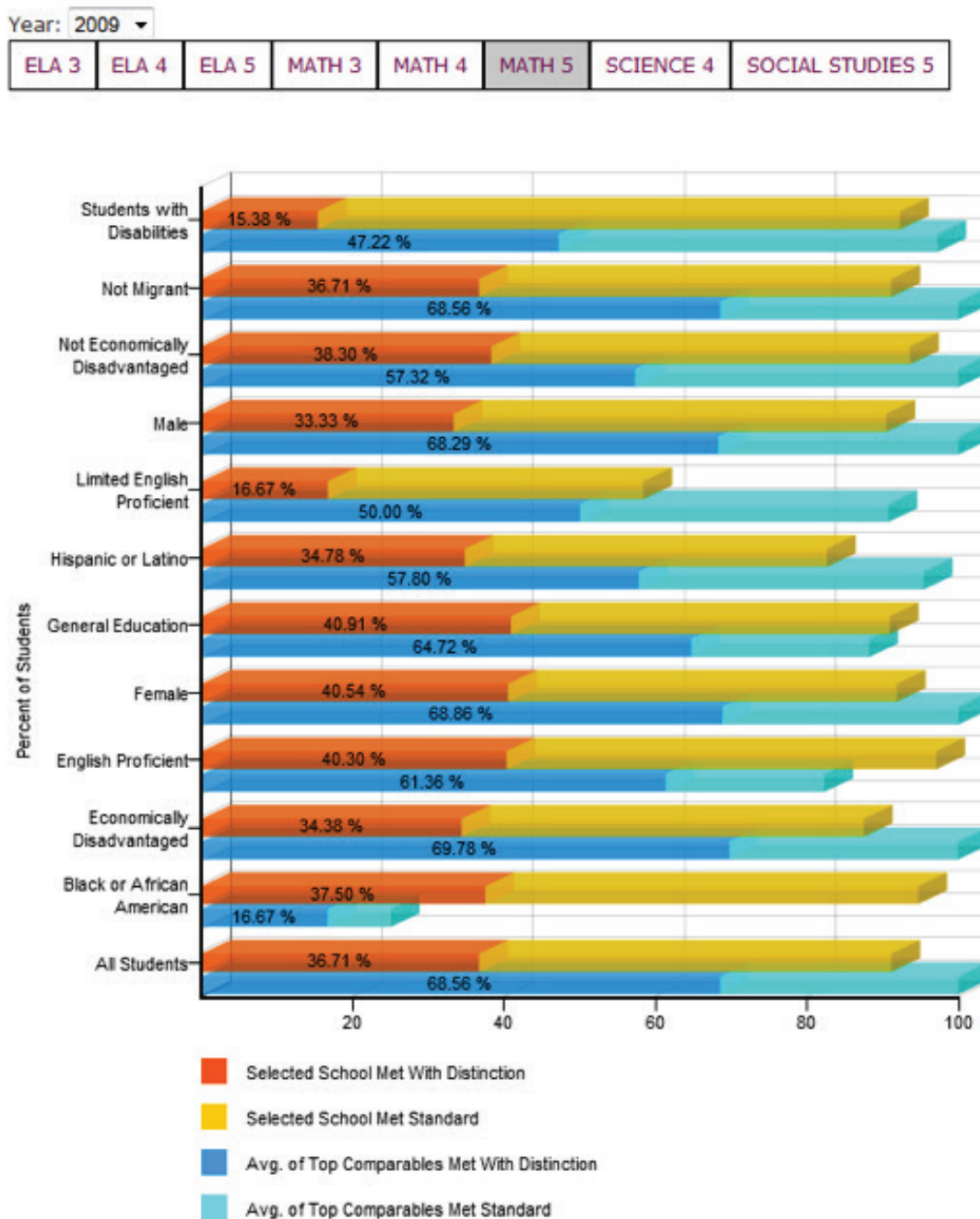and community members attending the event.

Another aspect of collaboration involves building relationships with the community, although establishing close community connections may be more difficult in poorer neighborhoods (McGee, 2004). Educators in School 19 describe themselves as a "family" and extend that feeling to their students and their families. A former principal explained that "within our school, we saw each child as everybody's child and assumed responsibility for helping that child." Like a family, they have "courageous discussions" about individual children's performance. These discussions occur in weekly grade-level meetings, weekly leadership meetings, "on the fly," and in quarterly formal meetings between each teacher and the principal.

In Downsville, teachers and administrators make it a point to attend athletic events so that they can meet and mingle with parents and community members, getting to know them and building trust. Families now often turn to the school for assistance in finding social services that are scarce in their rural county. Building a sense of collaborative community is seen as a challenge but one well worth pursuing at Saunders Trades & Technical High School, where 1400 students from all parts of the state's fourth largest city arrive by public bus each day. Particular focus is given to welcoming freshmen and other new students who might otherwise feel lost or isolated. Administrators

and faculty members reach out to parents and host events such as street fairs to help establish the school community. The school has developed a practice of assigning each assistant principal and guidance counselor to the same cohort of students throughout their four years at Saunders.

Data below are from the NYS assessment data base for 2009 as displayed at www. KnowYourSchoolsNY.org. The "selected school" is Centennial Avenue; the "top comparables" bars represent the average performance for the ten schools in NYS with equal or greater poverty levels and critical needs than Centennial Ave.

Centennial Avenue Performance in Grade 5 Mathematics

Year: 2009

| ELA 3 | ELA 4 | ELA 5 | MATH 3 | MATH 4 | MATH 5 | SCIENCE 4 | SOCIAL STUDIES 5 |

Percent of Students

Group	Selected School	Avg. of Top Comparables
Students with Disabilities	15.38 %	47.22 %
Not Migrant	36.71 %	68.56 %
Not Economically Disadvantaged	38.30 %	57.32 %
Male	33.33 %	68.29 %
Limited English Proficient	16.67 %	50.00 %
Hispanic or Latino	34.78 %	57.80 %
General Education	40.91 %	64.72 %
Female	40.54 %	68.86 %
English Proficient	40.30 %	61.36 %
Economically Disadvantaged	34.38 %	69.78 %
Black or African American	37.50 %	16.67 %
All Students	36.71 %	68.56 %

🟥 Selected School Met With Distinction

🟨 Selected School Met Standard

🟦 Avg. of Top Comparables Met With Distinction

🟦 Avg. of Top Comparables Met Standard

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> **"An amazing thing happened [as] teachers saw the value of evidence-informed instruction."**
>
> *- principal, Downsville Central High School*

teachers also have and use a variety of on-line student performance data systems. With district benchmarks, on-line assessments, and other commercially available tools, they are able to adjust their instruction on an ongoing and continuous basis.

In Downsville, the School-Based Inquiry Team analyzes individual and group test performance, looking for patterns. Among the patterns that emerge through careful analysis may be clusters of missed questions

Using Data to Inform Decision Making

Faculty members in odds-beating schools see performance data as essential to identifying student needs. A combination of informal and formal, short-term and long-term, teacher-generated and state-produced assessments provide a wealth of data for educators to draw upon to improve curriculum and instruction. While the details of data collected and methods of analysis vary, all of the more successful schools in our studies share a common philosophy of valuing data as well as practices of collecting data regularly and using careful study of those data to build strategies for improvement.

In School 19, for example, they emphasize "real time" data. When three-times-per-year benchmark assessments left too long a lag at the beginning of the year, ELA and math specialists designed assessments to be given during the second week of school. In addition to using real-time benchmark data, School 19

> **"We look at the data. We're always looking at past performance and trying to improve upon it."**
>
> *- district administrator, Jefferson Middle School*

that show gaps in a student's understanding of a particular concept; those patterns guide the tailored scaffolding teachers will provide to individual students to fill in the gaps. On the other hand, a pattern of multiple students missing a particular question or type of question may indicate a problem with the wording of the question(s) or may show that students lack skill or understanding on a particular topic; identifying the latter situation

helps teachers decide on the next instructional steps, which may be to reteach, cycle back, or provide AIS, Downsville teachers said.

An attitude of leading positive change gives purpose to progress monitoring and data analysis in the more successful schools. In Otselic Valley, data analysis revealed that students who score below 80 on the Algebra Regents Exam generally do not perform well enough in geometry to then be eligible for more advanced mathematics, so the district adopted a policy requiring an 80 on the Algebra Regents as a pre-requisite to taking geometry. The positive change did not stop there, however. The school also provides a second-year algebra class that targets individual students' skill needs and ensures that students have the foundation for moving on. Once the score of 80 is achieved, students can advance to geometry. A change in state graduation requirements prompted South Kortright to study student performance over the prior ten years to see how well students might have met the new state requirements. Analysis showed that performance on fifth and sixth grade reading and writing assessment correlated strongly with performance on Regents exams and led school officials to see those earlier tests as a strong predictor of success in high school. Building on that idea, the school implemented an improvement plan focused on strengthening ELA programs in the elementary grades as an effective way to foster high school success.

Some of the data analysis and related improvement initiatives in these "odds-beating" schools have been centered on breaking free from state designations as a school needing improvement, restructuring, or even closing. Although regarded as higher performers at the time of our study, many of these schools had been struggling in the past and had initiated close data monitoring as a strategy for turnaround. Such monitoring and planning became a hallmark of Jefferson Middle School's grade-level discussions, where subject area representatives helped set goals in keeping with district improvement plans and then worked with colleagues to develop and analyze benchmarking assessments to determine student instructional needs.

Communicating about data and their analyses with the school community has been a part of the process in several of the more effective schools. At South Kortright, for example, the results of student and teacher surveys are shared at faculty meetings and serve as the impetus for sub-committees focusing on particular issues where improvement is needed. At Centennial Avenue, school officials stress the importance of sharing performance data with the local board of education at the close of each marking period.

Conclusion

High expectations for all, strong collaborative engagement, and deep analysis of data that in turn informs improvement plans combine to foster school cultures in which even the most financially impoverished students can thrive. Those schools that are beating the odds have no fewer challenges than those that are less successful. What the higher-performing schools do differently from their counterparts is to very deliberately create settings in which aspirations and work ethos are not limited by poverty levels. They outperform other schools not by chance but because they purposefully work together, aligning and sharing informational resources while accepting no external barriers to achievement.

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Designing Innovative 21st-Century Schools for High-Poverty Populations and Places

Hal A. Lawson

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As child poverty continues to increase in New York State and across the nation, educators, their colleagues from other professions, public policy experts, political leaders, and concerned citizens are arriving at the same conclusion: Inherited, 20th-century systems of schooling will not enable educators to meet the needs of children who arrive at the schoolhouse door with multiple, inter-connected needs attributable to poverty and its two frequent companions. The two companions are social exclusion (perceived discrimination and marginalization) and social isolation.

Together poverty, social exclusion, and social isolation constitute a terrible trilogy (Lawson, 2009). Their effects, individually and collectively, are intensified when they are concentrated in particular places such as isolated rural community settings, "jobless" urban neighborhood communities, and a growing number of inner ring suburbs. Oftentimes these effects are etched in the faces of children, and they are evident in the school-related demeanor of their parents and caregivers.

Granting the strengths and resilience of children and their parents/caregivers, Wilson's (2011) descriptors are apt: "Concentrated disadvantage" describes the social and economic circumstances confronting the people who live in these places. "Concentration effects" refers to the outcomes of disadvantage, and they include poverty-related barriers to school attendance, engagement, and academic learning. Find one barrier, and sooner or later you'll find the others.

Addressing one entails addressing one or more of the others.

When children, families and entire communities are challenged by concentrated social and economic disadvantage, so are their school systems. In fact, this place-based, terrible trilogy provides the social ecology for two dropout trajectories.

The better known one involves approximately four million students every year. Many such students have chronic attendance problems (Balfantz & Byrnes, 2012), while others repeatedly change schools because their families move. Leaders from the Children's Defense Fund (2008) have a name for this persistent dropout problem. They call it "The Cradle to Prison Pipeline."

The other dropout trajectory involves teachers and principals. Teachers in particular are leaving high-poverty schools in record numbers because many are overwhelmed by the challenges, and they do not receive the assistance, social supports, and resources they need to succeed (TNTP, 2012). Nearly all teachers who leave report that their work is not rewarding, partly because they feel isolated and partly because they lack the competence needed to instruct students from high-poverty communities. Predictably, teachers and principals search for schools serving more privileged student populations, especially ones offering better working conditions, higher job satisfaction, and positive relationships with their students and colleagues.

Together, these two dropout trajectories form a pattern with a predictable, undesirable effect. Student strangers are interacting with adult strangers, and both students and adults find it challenging to develop emotional attachments to each other as well as a sense of connection to the school. When these conditions prevail, students' academic engagement is constrained (Lawson & Lawson, 2013), layers of challenges are added to the development of positive school climates, and school improvement planning becomes more complicated because so many priorities need to be addressed.

In brief, the systems of schooling we inherited from the 20th century do not serve the needs of adults or children today. Until such time as both populations' needs are met, no school located in a place with concentrated poverty will succeed over the long haul.

What needs to be done differently and better in order to meet the needs of students growing up in poverty, along with their families and educators? This far-reaching, complicated question frames the ensuing analysis with its narrow focus, which is on school redesign needs and priorities. The top priority is for multi-faceted improvement models designed to better serve educators, family systems, and community health and social services professionals, enabling all to achieve their respective goals.

Significantly, this work is not merely an implementation challenge. It is a design challenge. In brief, modest, incremental reforms, which amount to "tinkering toward utopia" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) will not suffice. Game-changing designs must include innovative strategies that tap family and community resources, enhancing teachers' work and supporting children's learning, healthy development, and academic achievement. This grand challenge coincides with the current mandate to design cradle-to-career education systems that enable all students to graduate from high school "college

and career ready" and without academic remediation needs (Lawson, 2013).

The late Peter Drucker's (1998) design-oriented question sets the stage for this transformative agenda for 21st-century school redesign: If we hadn't inherited it, would we do it this way? A sketch of key inheritances follows.

A SKETCH OF 20TH-CENTURY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT INHERITANCES

Two related aspects of the school system we have inherited indicate urgent needs and opportunities for redesign. The first is the fast-vanishing context that prevailed through much of the latter half of the 20th century, especially salient student, family, and community conditions. The second is the dominant model of school improvement, which derives from and depends on these conditions.

The Overall Context and Prevailing Conditions for the 20th-Century School

For the most part, the 20th-century school continued to serve the original purposes of its 19th-century predecessor. In addition to basic

literacy and numeracy, two of these purposes were to prepare workers for the factory assembly line or to work the family farm. In fact, the school calendar had been structured in response to agricultural needs, enabling students to assist their parents and neighbors during the peak growing season. For two centuries now, children's needs for consistent, engaged academic learning time from June to September has taken a back seat to 19th- and 20th-century family farming priorities. We have inherited this dominant school schedule even though most family farms are gone.

The old stereotype for schooling is illuminating. Drill, skill, no thrill and "kill" instruction was the dominant pedagogy in schools that served as sorting machines (Callahan, 1962). This pedagogy was perfectly matched to the requisite work discipline needed for piece-meal mass production and also for manual labor on local farms. The select few students who demonstrated academic aptitude were deemed college ready,

but most students aimed for high school graduation, which was the symbolic goal line for much of the 20th century.

Especially in America's cities and suburbs, it was safe to assume that good jobs awaited high school graduates because many 20th-century families enjoyed inter-generational patterns of full employment. Two-parent families with at least one employed parent, typically a father, were positioned to support their children's healthy development, school readiness, and academic engagement—thanks to the efforts of a stay-at-home mom. If parents, especially mothers, performed their child-rearing duties effectively, children would come to school ready and able to learn, and educators and schools would succeed.

In that model, parents had designated roles and responsibilities, and so did educators and their schools. Parents had their special time with children, and so did educators. The two groups connected and supported each other when parents were involved in their children's education.

Educators and parents also connected when children had special needs warranting the involvement of student support professionals and community-based health and social service providers. Mirroring the jobs of educators and parents/caregivers, these service professionals had their respective

times with children. All were key players in a role-and-responsibility system that amounted to a turn-taking arrangement. One-at-a-time, linear thinking and problem solving reigned the day as each party took their turn with children. If this pattern seems familiar, it is because it remains in effect in today's schools.

The Dominant Model of School Improvement

As demands on schools in the late 20th century increased, a particular model of school improvement emerged. And it is this model that has structured educators' turn with children. This model can be described as walled in, building centered, controlled by educators and their site-based teams, and focused on the school day and year (Lawson, 2010). Granting the importance of districtwide performance and the emergence of cradle-to-career system building, in this inherited and still-dominant model, one school is the unit of analysis.

Both reporting and accountability systems for principals and other educators in stand-alone schools are structured accordingly—with a focus on just one school. This organizational arrangement more or less ignores the fact that elementary school performance depends in part on preschools; middle schools depend on elementary schools; and high schools depend on all of them. Shared accountability systems are not part of this model.

Three other features of this dominant model are noteworthy because all are redesign priorities. The first can be described in rough-cut, catch-all terms. The model depends on parents/caregivers, especially mothers, doing their jobs at home so that children come to school, on time, ready and able to learn, i.e., without barriers to engagement and learning. On closer inspection, this model depends on strong, stable, and vibrant families with employed parents who are surrounded by vibrant, supportive neighborhood communities. But what happens when family systems are fragile, when only one-fourth of all families fit the two-parent, biological family system model, when neighborhood communities are destabilized because residents are on the move, and when the majority of new births belong to single mothers?

The second feature of this model is its stance on children's time, especially time for academic learning. On average, children spend approximately 10-13% of their waking hours in school, and it is not unusual to have less than half of this time devoted to academically engaged learning time. Granting that teachers sometimes successfully compete for students' out-of-school time with homework assignments, the fact remains that when school improvement is building centered and walled in, family and community resources for beneficial use of time are walled out.

Meanwhile, educators are held accountable for time-dependent learning activities over which they have little influence or control (Berliner, 2009). What is wrong with this picture?

The third feature is well known to every experienced educator. Building-level teams typically prioritize no more than five major goals for a given year, and savvy leaders strive to prioritize three or less. For decades, principals and teams have developed extensive "to-do lists" consisting of priorities they have derived from their own fact-finding and data systems. Teams usually have anticipated that it will take at least five years to fully implement their entire plan.

In today's world, this planning has become more challenging because principals and teams increasingly must place their own plans on hold as they focus on state-mandated priorities (e.g., Common Core Learning Standards). Meanwhile students from high-poverty families and communities come to school with multiple barriers to learning, healthy development and overall school success. In other words, they come to school with the aforementioned, co-occurring and interlocking "concentration effects."

The main take-away from this dominant pattern is profound. By the time educators have implemented every team-designated improvement priority as well as new state mandates, it is too late for an entire generation of students.

By the time educators have implemented every team-designated improvement priority as well as new state mandates, it is too late for an entire generation of students. In other words, students in high-poverty schools need every component—out-of-school-time learning, school-linked health and social services, family support with parental employment assistance, positive youth development practices that unite schools and youth-serving community agencies such as the YMCA and Boys & Girls Clubs—so that they are able to learn, achieve, and succeed. Unfortunately, the inherited school improvement model is narrowly linear, too slow, uncoordinated, and insufficiently comprehensive. Adherence to this model virtually guarantees suboptimal results for students, educators, schools, and entire districts located in high-poverty places.

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NEW DESIGNS FOR SCHOOLS AND THEIR IMPROVEMENT

The challenges of addressing place-based, concentrated poverty, social exclusion, and social isolation are not unique to New York and the United States. Across the world educators, other professions, and policy makers are striving to understand the nature of the terrible trilogy, reframing some of the associated problems as timely opportunities for innovation, and then crafting solutions. Mirroring the benchmarking processes for nations with educational systems that rank high on international tests, considerable cross-national policy learning and model development are underway. This analysis concludes with two snapshots drawn from this work.

An Outside-In Approach

Significantly, some leaders have framed the challenge and the accompanying opportunities as something bigger than "a school problem." They have prioritized sustainable, equitable, and integrated social and economic development strategies for particular locales. Called "area-based initiatives" in England (e.g., Raffo, 2014), these innovations frequently involve crossing organizational, professional, community, town-city, and what amounts to county boundaries and redrawing them. Where schools in disadvantaged areas are concerned,

the main idea is to strengthen and support them by working strategically and closely with expert local leaders.

Although not always explicit, one goal is to develop place-based, collective efficacy for children, i.e., neighborhoods and communities where kids are under the watchful eyes of neighbors and friends who are vested in safeguarding and improving children's well-being (Sampson, 2012). To the extent that collective efficacy for children is achieved, schools benefit. When schools are a priority, this approach can be dubbed "outside-in."

Redesigned Schools: An Inside-Out Approach

The second approach, whether developed alone or in tandem with an outside-in strategy, is to redesign schools so that they are able to respond to, and prevent, the co-occurring and interlocking needs (concentration effects) of high-poverty student populations. One aim is especially noteworthy. As schools make progress, the aim is for good results to spill over into their surrounding locales. Here, schools serve as local hubs and "anchor institutions" for vulnerable children and families on the move (Alameda-Lawson, Lawson, & Lawson, 2013).

With poverty's social ecology as the framework, this school-based approach is

"inside-out." Like the outside-in approach, organizational and professional boundaries are crossed and reconfigured as walled-in, building-centered models are progressively replaced.

Two main watchwords help to characterize these innovative models for 21st-century schools. One is partnership, and it refers to new working relationships among organizations such as schools/districts, community agencies, the private sector, and neighborhood organizations, including faith-based institutions. The other watchword is collaboration—referring to new working relationships among educators, other professionals, parents/families, and student leaders. There are two units of analysis here: Organizations (needing partnerships) and

people (needing to collaborate). It is possible to have one without the other. But both are needed.

Two main assumptions are noteworthy. First, these organizations, especially schools serving high-poverty populations and their professionals, fundamentally depend on each other. In other words, results for one depend in part on results achieved by the others. The main idea here is critically important: Collaboration builds and strengthens interdependent relationships (Lawson, 2004).

The second assumption is that by joining forces they are able to mount a multi-component improvement agenda so that they are positioned to address together co-occurring and inter-locking

"concentration effects." In contrast to one-at-a-time turn-taking in 20th-century schools, people simultaneously implement multiple improvement strategies across several fronts. Arguably, this capacity for coordinated, synergistic, and mutually beneficial collective action is the only way to address the complex challenges presented by poverty, social exclusion, and social isolation.

Figure 1 provides a logic model for this kind of expanded school improvement planning. A logic model earns its name insofar as it identifies the causal relations among several components and indicates how these components lead to desired outcomes

— short-term, intermediate, and long-term. Such a model is, in other words, a conceptual-operational map.

Clearly, Figure 1 contrasts dramatically with the inherited 20th-century school improvement model. Although conventional school improvement planning's focus on academic engagement in classrooms in support of powerful teaching and learning is not showcased directly in the model, inspection of the short-term and intermediate outcomes indicates that this priority remains. In fact, this innovative model is designed to strengthen and support aspects of conventional school improvement planning,

Figure 1. A Logic Model for Expanded School Improvement Planning
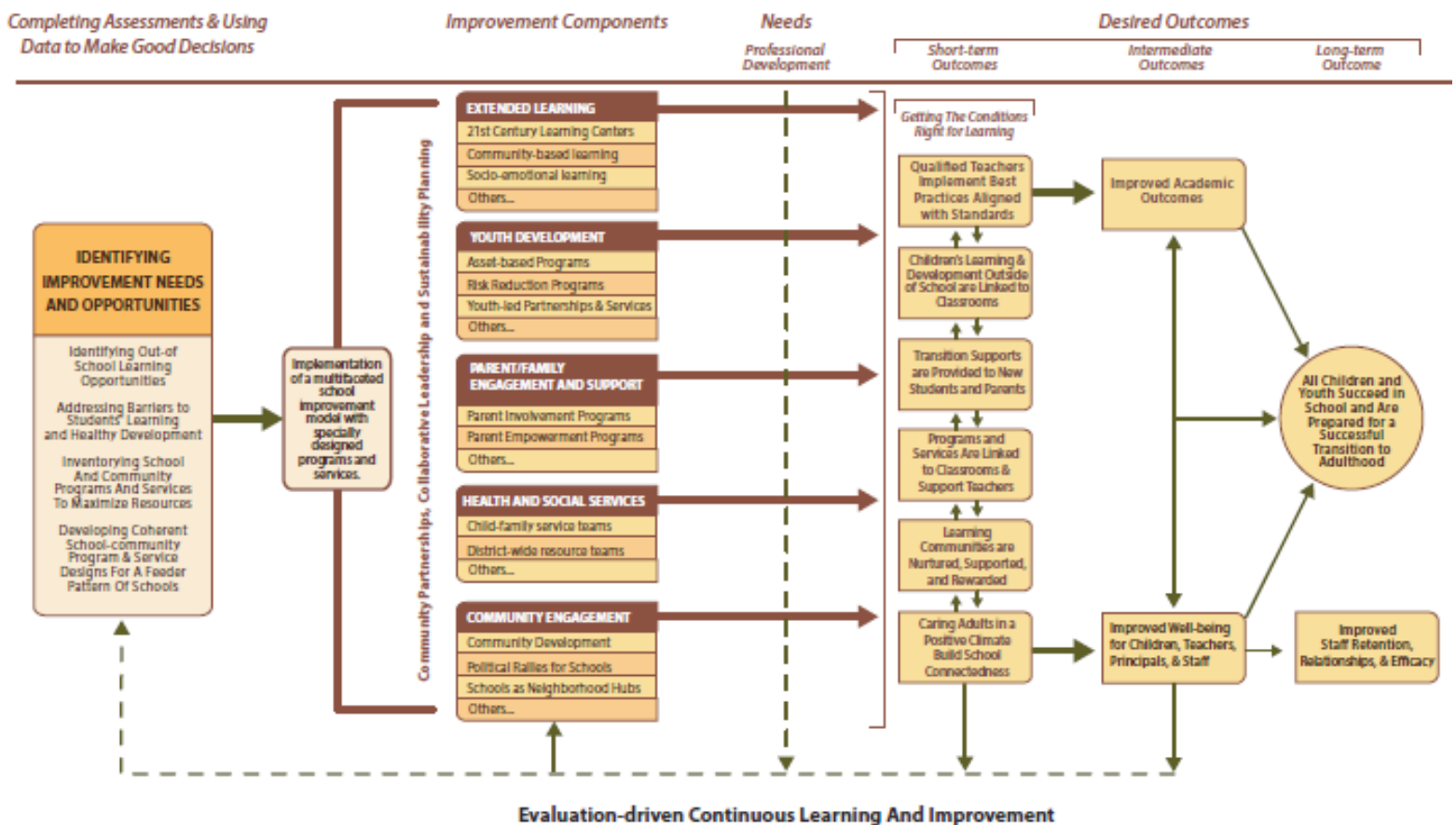
focusing especially on classroom learning while also emphasizing teachers' needs. This latter point merits emphasis. Outcomes for educators are inseparable from outcomes for children (Day & Gu, 2014). Consequently, innovative designs for 21st-century schools must emphasize both!

In several nations of the world, Figure 1 would be quickly interpreted as a model for a community school or a multi-service school. Granting this perspective, Figure 1 is named accurately and appropriately. It provides a place-sensitive map for expanded school improvement planning, and this is why it emphasizes school- and district-specific planning guided by local needs assessments and solid data. In brief, while nearly all schools serving high-poverty student populations may be expected to prioritize some aspects of this model, especially out-of-school-time learning and expansive strategies for health and social services for needy students and their families, choices remain. Toward this end, a logic model is useful insofar as it frames available, important choices, identifies desirable outcomes, and guides decision making.

A CONCLUDING THOUGHT

America's promise to young people is that the circumstances surrounding their birth should not determine their life chances and adult circumstances. Demography should not and cannot be destiny. Unfortunately, this promise is in jeopardy as poverty, social exclusion, and social isolation remain and increase in too many places.

Realizing this promise is a moral imperative and a profound social responsibility for educators and policy makers. Clearly, the time has arrived to take stock of the needs of high-poverty families, communities, community agencies, and schools, using these needs assessments to design new institutions that achieve desired outcomes.

In these special, high-poverty places, desired outcomes for families, schools, agencies, children, and educators go hand-in-hand. No organization and no single profession can achieve desired outcomes while working alone, and this is why organizational partnerships and new kinds of collaboration among specialized professionals are needed. Such is the rationale and hope for new designs for 21st-century schools and ultimately, the emergent cradle-to-career systems they will constitute. Only in this way can 21st-century institutional designs be configured so that children born into the poverty have equitable access to opportunity pathways out of it.

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Building Civic Capacity to Support School Improvement

Michelle Bianchi

Michelle Bianchi *is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies at the University at Albany, State University of New York. Her research focuses on engaging and retaining students in K-12 and higher education. Michelle has also been volunteering for seven years with a local organization, Club Zoe, Inc., a public charity that provides a safe space for after-school hours. She has taught martial arts to the youth and holds semi-annual food drives to help provide dinner to the children. She aims to have a future career that blends research and practice, as both of these things are very important to her.*

Today's education policies put us in competition – for example, in a "Race to the Top" with other countries. However, the dominant belief of many school improvement models is that this goal is unrealistic for certain students in particular areas — especially if school practices remain the same. Students who face poverty, social isolation, and social exclusion may not even finish high school due to lack of resources and role models — or even a lack of understanding about what an education can do for them. Until the pressing needs of these students are addressed, it will be nearly impossible to get all students college and career ready, and this is particularly true in schools serving high percentages of students challenged by poverty.

In 2009-10 the United States Average Freshmen Graduation Rate — the percentage of students who graduate high school within four years of starting 9th grade — was 78.2% (Stillwell & Sable, 2013). This means that nearly one quarter of freshmen (some half million a year) become disengaged or drop out. Despite all the efforts of federal policies intended to improve results (e.g., the *No Child Left Behind Act* and Race to the Top competition), retention is still clearly an issue in schools across the country.

Since a significant portion of students drop out of school due to financial hardship and disengagement, schools have become more focused on strategies to better serve those students. Yet there are still significant gaps in achievement between students living in poverty and the rest of the student

population (Morgan, 2012). This gap has been attributed by some to "a system that is not providing the educational opportunities that low-income students are entitled to" (Morgan, 2012, p. 292). In response, some families, communities, businesses, non-profit organizations, and higher education institutions have stepped in to help create a new cradle-to-career education system that focuses on better supporting students, especially those in struggling communities. These systems bring together various resources and stakeholders to support youth from birth through their career attainment – specifically focusing on areas of difficult transition for youth and young adults. Two of these national models are Ready by 21 and StriveTogether, which I describe in more detail below. Although they differ somewhat in how they work, both Ready by 21 and StriveTogether work to build civic capacity to support youth threatened by high poverty, social isolation, and social exclusion, helping them to engage with and remain in school.

Civic capacity can be defined as "the involvement of various sectors of the community in a problem-solving effort" based on four building blocks: civic mobilization, issue definition, civic capacity, and systemic reform effort (Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001, pp. 25-27). I have been looking at these two national models through the lens of civic capacity because

Civic capacity goes beyond the relatively passive concept of educational stakeholders – groups with a stake in public education. It includes the active participation of educators and non-educators in pursuit of a change agenda for the public schools (Shipps, 2003, p. 844).

In other words, civic capacity means more than just aligning the goals of various stakeholder groups — it requires loyalty, persistence, and concrete, sustainable actions. Building civic capacity, therefore, appears essential for both Ready by 21 and StriveTogether to meet their goals. It is my hope that educators seeking new models for improving outcomes for youth living in poverty might consider this approach to drawing on the expertise of their communities and consider whether either national program or one similar provides a potential model for their particular school and community.

Two Cradle-to-Career Models

Ready by 21, developed by the Forum for Youth Investment, describes itself as "a set of innovative strategies . . . that helps communities improve the odds that all children and youth will be ready for college, work and life" and to increase the capacity of leaders to achieve collective impact for youth "by providing standards, proven tools and solutions, and ways to measure and

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track your success" **(www.readyby21.org/what-ready-21)**. Established to bridge the gap between the goals of leaders and the outcomes of the efforts, it brings together national organizations from the education, government, nonprofit, business, research, and philanthropy sectors.

StriveTogether's approach is to help "communities build on opportunities existing in their communities and lessons learned nationally." Further, "StriveTogether's approach is to act not as consultants, but as partners with communities to expand or build cradle to career education partnerships" (www.StriveTogethertogether.org/approach). The model was developed in 2006

to address efforts that are "program rich and system poor."

In the following section I further describe each program by looking through the lens of developing civic capacity to improve education outcomes for youth living in poverty. My analysis is drawn from an examination of case studies of several local programs that have adopted either the Ready by 21 or StriveTogether model. I obtained these case studies on the national program's respective websites.

Ready by 21

Ready by 21 appears to foster civic capacity through building broad enough

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initiatives to include a variety of stakeholders. For example, in Austin (TX), Ready by 21's steering committee includes members with formal leadership roles as well as community volunteers, including parents; together they determine the goals and directions of school reform. This is important because, from a civic capacity lens, "Civic capacity and collective problem solving require not only committed entrepreneurs pushing favored solutions, but also serious open discussion within a public forum about the problems and potentials of educational change" (Stone et al., 2001, p. 141). Furthermore, the model is not too complex for community adoption, fostering genuine participation. Efforts to include participation of members from all sectors of the community build civic capacity as well as community social capital.

In another case from Texas (Georgetown), a 40-member collaboration of youth development organizations and individuals from business, government, education, health, and religious organizations came together to provide a shelter for homeless adolescents and teens. Support included food, showers, clothes, counseling, tutoring, health education, career exploration, and job readiness courses. Contributions came from all over the community, signifying not only development of civic capacity but the school-community connections and decentralization of accountability that are elements of systemic reform (Stone, et al., 2001).

I also found that Ready by 21 prides itself on its applicability to on-the-ground initiatives with enough power and authority to influence prominent community

Watch the video to hear Ayeola Fortune from United Way talk about building community engagement.

stakeholders. Without such on-the-ground support many efforts could potentially be at a standstill. For example, in Massachusetts, the Ready by 21 Action Planning Team submitted its final plan to Governor Deval Patrick in June 2009. By 2012, achievable, measurable goals were being developed statewide. In this case, the governor is the policy entrepreneur with the necessary power and authority to move initiatives ahead, yet the Action Planning Team also utilized the community conversations that are essential to achieve civic capacity and successful school reform.

StriveTogether

Looking at StriveTogether case studies, some different patterns begin to emerge. StriveTogether case studies are more data driven than Ready by 21 cases. Throughout all its cases, it was evident that StriveTogether believes that data should be the basis of decision making. Like Ready by 21, partnerships also play a big role in StriveTogether's efforts, but these partnerships grow out of existing efforts or issues of concern to the partners, rather than partners being brought together for a specific initiative. For example, in Portland (OR), All Hands Raised has partnered with StriveTogether to close achievement and graduation rate gaps. It is a cross-sector partnership that brings together leaders from the education, business, non-profit, philanthropic, and civic sectors. These leaders identified key indicators for

improvement and adopted a target for overall improvement along with specific targets for specific groups. The group engaged in "courageous conversations" in which leaders, staff, and community partners came together to discuss the causes of achievement gaps and identify concrete actions that both the schools and community partners needed to take to change outcomes. This resulted in policy changes (e.g., around professional development for educators) and a shared action plan between the six participating school districts and community leaders of color. Data analysis around achievement gaps also became standard practice, which led to the realization that the middle school-to-high school transition was a crucial time for addressing the achievement gap. This led to partnerships with culturally specific organizations that helped identify effective local practices that could better support the transition to high school and sustain the success of students. In the Portland case, it seems that problem definition and a common understanding across sectors led to efforts to improve the situation — definitely civic mobilization, and perhaps civic capacity.

Built as they are from existing conditions and issues, StriveTogether partnerships vary considerably from setting to setting. In San Antonio (TX), for example the effort focused on involving parents as a way to solve a chronic absentee problem. In contrast, in Cincinnati

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(OH), the main participants of Cincinnati's Public Schools College Access Alliance were leaders at local colleges and a StriveTogether coach. Although involvement from leaders is a necessary precondition to developing civic capacity for school improvement, it is unclear to me how much voice the non-college agencies had in the process and how much they participated, or felt welcomed to participate.

The question then becomes, to move from civic mobilization to civic capacity, must community members get involved? Stone and colleagues (2001) sought to answer this question. Based on interview data, they found that community influentials knew about a wider variety of problems, but community advocates tended to be problem specialists. It is also critical to note that the "connectivity between the problem understandings among

groups in the city and the mobilization of those groups is civic capacity" (Stone et al., p. 122). Thus if the elites, professionals, advocates, and community members are not in touch with a common understanding of the problem, there could be issues preventing the development of civic capacity. In other words, all stakeholders need to be at the table.

Conclusions and Recommendations

All in all, it appears that Ready by 21's broad-based approach fosters civic capacity and in some cases systemic reform. The model makes a noted effort to bring various stakeholders together and utilize community social capital to solve mutually defined problems where accountability is shared and sustainability is the key. Mobilizing various sectors of the community to bring together their

own resources to address their problems seems to be at the heart of this model. Decentralized problem solving appears to be taking place in the majority of the cases I reviewed.

StriveTogether seems to foster civic capacity in some cases, but civic mobilization and issue definition in others. The logic behind StriveTogether, however, seems to be that if civic mobilization takes place with the more powerful sectors of the community, a trickle-down effect will take place. Although this appeared to work in some cases, it did not seem effective in all. It is important not to draw conclusions too quickly because communities that reach out to Ready by 21 and communities that reach out to StriveTogether could be intrinsically different or at different stages in their efforts to build civic capacity. It could very well be that communities that reach out to Ready by 21 have already gotten past issue definition and civic mobilization. Meanwhile, those who reach out to StriveTogether may need help getting leaders on the same page, which is a precondition to building civic capacity.

Both StriveTogether and Ready by 21 are prominent national models of school reform that aim to prevent school disengagement and dropout in fragmented, struggling, and in many cases poverty-stricken communities. However, they emphasize different approaches and thus reach different levels of civic capacity. Perhaps StriveTogether and Ready by 21 are inherently different and should be utilized for different purposes. Not every school and/or community needs systemic reform, but school leaders and community members need to be aware of the different approaches so they can better align their model of choice to their specific needs.

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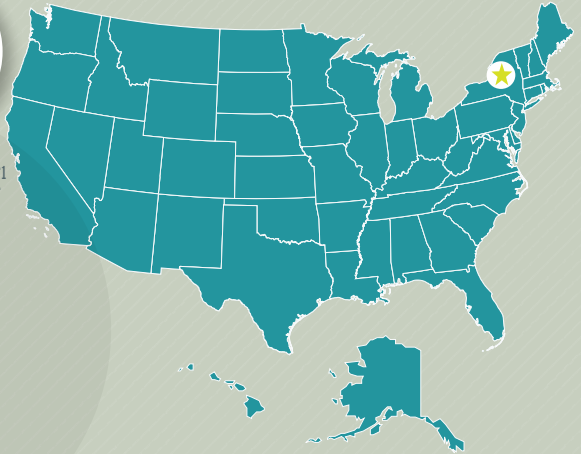
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1

23%
OF CHILDREN ARE IN POVERTY[1]

vs

23%
U.S. AVERAGE

CHILDREN IN POVERTY BY RACE[1]

Hispanic: 35%
U.S. Average: 34%

Black: 33%
U.S. Average: 40%

Asian: 25%
U.S. Average: 15%

Multi-racial: 24%
U.S. Average: 24%

White: 14%
U.S. Average: 14%

HEALTHY

15%
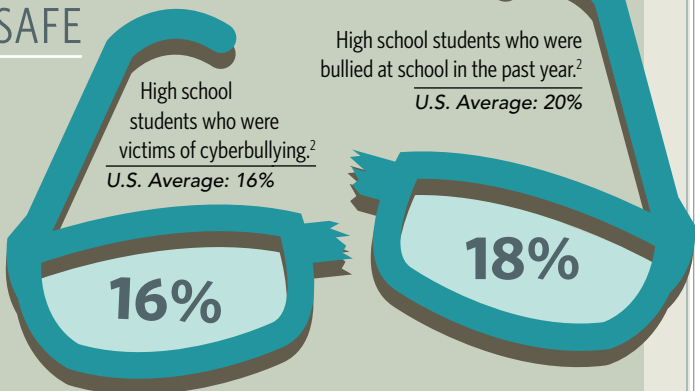of high school students are overweight.[2]
U.S. Average: 15%

11%
of high school students are obese.[2]
U.S. Average: 13%
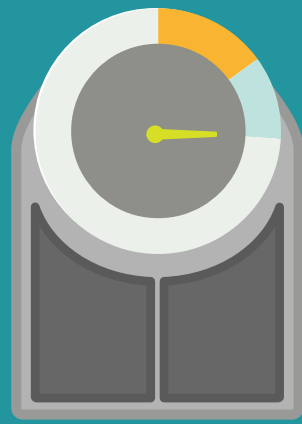
73%
of children had both medical and dental preventive care visits in the past year.[3]
U.S. Average: 68%

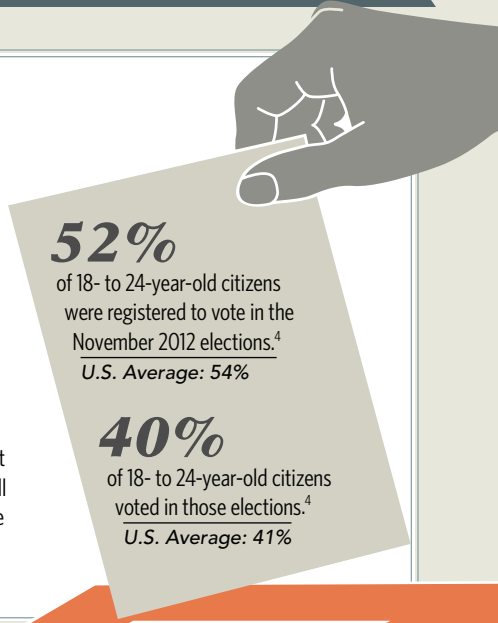SEE ALL 50 STATE SNAPSHOTS AT **WWW.ASCD.ORG/WHOLECHILDSNAPSHOTS**.

SAFE

High school students who were victims of cyberbullying.[2]
U.S. Average: 16%

High school students who were bullied at school in the past year.[2]
U.S. Average: 20%

16%

18%

58%
of children live in a neighborhood with sidewalks, a library, a recreation center, and a park.[3]
U.S. Average: 54%

ENGAGED

51%
of children always cared about doing well in school and did all required homework during the previous month.[3]
U.S. Average: 52%

52%
of 18- to 24-year-old citizens were registered to vote in the November 2012 elections.[4]
U.S. Average: 54%

40%
of 18- to 24-year-old citizens voted in those elections.[4]
U.S. Average: 41%

SUPPORTED

Percentage of children
BY HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD'S
EDUCATION ATTAINMENT LEVEL[1]

Graduate Degree
U.S. Average: 11%

Bachelor's Degree
U.S. Average: 18%

Associate's Degree
U.S. Average: 9%

High School Diploma/GED
U.S. Average: 47%

Not a high school graduate
U.S. Average: 15%

15% 14%
18%
42% 10%
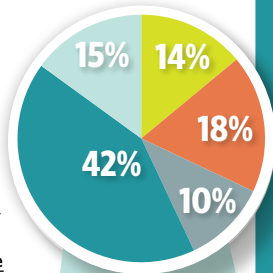
STUDENT-TO-COUNSELOR RATIO

392:1

NEW YORK
RANKS 21
among the 50 states.[5]

The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio no greater than 250 to 1.[5]

CHALLENGED

High school graduation rates for the class of 2010[7]

All: 73%
U.S. Average: 75%

White: 84%
U.S. Average: 80%

Asian: 82%
U.S. Average: 81%

Latino: 75%
U.S. Average: 68%

Black: 73%
U.S. Average: 62%

American Indian: 53%
U.S. Average: 51%

Percentage of public school students scoring proficient or higher on the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)[6]

	4TH GRADE READING	8TH GRADE MATH
NEW YORK	37%	32%
UNITED STATES	34%	34%

What You Can Do

HEALTHY

☐ Establish school health advisory councils with students, family, community, and business members.

☐ Connect free and low-cost physical and mental health services with the students and families who need them.

SAFE

☐ Regularly assess and report on school climate—including staff, family, and student perceptions—and use the data to establish positive learning environments.

☐ Support social-emotional learning and character development.

ENGAGED

☐ Offer students an array of extracurricular activities and extended-day learning opportunities, and provide students with academic credit for experiential learning, such as internships, service learning, and apprenticeships with local businesses.

☐ Measure and report student and family engagement activities and outcomes (e.g., volunteer rates, community-based learning participation, and parent involvement data).

SUPPORTED

☐ Support parent education and family literacy programs in addition to individualized, ongoing, and job-embedded professional development for educators.

☐ Develop individualized learning plans for all students that connect to their academic and career goals and interests.

CHALLENGED

☐ Provide relevant and challenging coursework through multiple pathways (e.g., Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, dual-enrollment programs) to all interested students.

☐ Use accountability systems with multiple metrics that take into account student performance and growth across all core academic subjects, efforts to increase student engagement, and access to varied learning opportunities; publicly report this information.

Visit www.wholechildeducation.org.

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1941-2014

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