

## Public School Reform 4

For more information on the model programs discussed, see Links.

Illustrations of public school-based programs that have been scientifically evaluated as successful include the **Comer School Development Plan**; **holistic middle schools** based on the principles in the Carnegie Corporation's *Turning Points* report; **full service community schools**, like Intermediate School 218 in New York City; and innovative vocational skills training, as in Project Prepare run by Youth Guidance at the Roberto Clemente Academy in Chicago. See the **Citations** at the end of this section. For more information, see the **Carnegie Corporation of New York**, the **Children's Aid Society of New York**, the **Children's Defense Fund**, the **Yale University Child Study Center**, and the book *Safe Passage*, by the Eisenhower Foundation Trustee Joy Dryfoos.

### The Comer School Development Plan

Active and informed family participation has long been recognized as a key in successfully educating children. In inner-city communities, parental involvement is a challenge because of the negative experience so many parents have had in school.

But there are inner-city models of success, like the School Development Plan, created by James P. Comer, Maurice Falk Professor of Child Psychiatry at the Yale Child Study Center. The Comer Plan for inner-city elementary schools serving welfare-dependent populations has 3 components. A management team, led by the principal and including teachers, parents, counselors and other school staff, is empowered to set overall policy for the school. Parental involvement in the school is increased dramatically, with parents being recruited to organize school events and to serve as classroom assistants. Focused intervention is provided for children who have emotional, behavioral or academic problems.

Students in two New Haven, Connecticut, elementary schools where the full program was first demonstrated between 1975 and 1980 showed improvement in attendance and academic achievement. One school ranked fourteenth in attendance among New Haven Public Schools in 1975-1976. After the program was begun, the school ranked eighth or better in all but 2 of the subsequent 9 years. Graduates of one of the demonstrations were compared with their counterparts from another elementary school serving children of the same socioeconomic status. The Comer graduates had considerably higher language skills, math skills and work study skills than did the comparison youth.

As a result of the demonstrated success, the School Development Plan has been replicated widely in inner-city schools throughout the nation, also with demonstrable success. As the number of SDP schools has increased and evaluations have been completed, it is becoming clear that while this model works, it works best where it is most faithfully replicated. Where the model is modified, or only partially implemented, often due to internal and external opposition, the results are not as substantial.

Professor Comer observes, "We haven't had a serious behavior problem in the schools where we have been involved in over a decade." He believes that the strength of his plan is its concentration on institutional change for the entire school. This also is one of the few programs evaluated as successful in inner-city locations which has significantly involved parents (in spite of the difficulties low-income adults can have in volunteering).

## **Holistic Middle Schools**

In the words of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, small schools "nurture positive teacher-student relationships; provide more instructional flexibility to respond to kids' specific learning styles; and provide a safer, more secure educational climate." A good model is in New York City. A number of secondary schools, called New Vision Schools, have created small, supportive learning environments that carefully engage all students. Since 1992, the 21 New Visions Schools have shown higher attendance rates and lower dropout rates than other public schools in the city. Students in New Visions Schools are performing at above-average levels of academic achievement.

In its report, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*, the Carnegie Corporation called for reform of middle schools, for 10 to 15 year olds, that included the ideas of Comer Schools and New Vision Schools. The report centered reform on these principles:

- Large middle-grade schools should be divided into small communities for learning that foster relationships between adults and students.
- All students should meet with success in acquiring a core of common knowledge and skills.
- Teachers and principals should be allowed to make the key decisions necessary to transform middlegrade schools.
- Teachers should be specifically prepared to teach young adolescents.
- Schools should promote good health; the education and health of young adolescents are inextricably linked.
- Families should be engaged with school staff in enhancing their children's education, and schools should be connected with their communities.

The Carnegie Corporation funded 15 states and their local school districts to implement these principles. The national evaluation was directed by Robert Felner at the University of Rhode Island. Comparisons were made between the level of implementation of these principles by middle schools and the outcomes as measured by indices of student achievement and adjustment. *Significantly for us, the evaluation broke out this relationship for the case of at-risk students.* There were enhancements in achievement and adjustment, beginning at the point where schools began to seriously and substantially implement the principles. The evaluation concludes:

*It should not be surprising that it takes fairly comprehensive and intensive levels of implementation for the suggested changes to produce major gains in all spheres of functioning of high-risk students. Often these students live in community environments that may be high in stress and low in opportunity and resources. However, our findings to date strongly support the view that high-quality schooling, well implemented, can make profound contributions to the achievement, mental health, and socio/behavioral functioning of students who are often left behind and for whom there is often a sense that school cannot make a difference in their lives. These data also argue for resources to be used effectively in schools with high concentrations of at-risk students, and, in some instances, for resources to be increased significantly in order to create the necessary conditions for all children to be successful.*

## **Full Service Community Schools**

Especially in inner-city locations with troubled schools, children and youth need additional enrichment from community-based institutions. Joy Dryfoos has used the term full-service community schools to define a range of models that presently are emerging. "What these programs have in common is the provision of services by community agencies in school buildings -- with a view toward the creation of new institutional arrangements." The key elements of full-service community schools include, according to Dryfoos:

- Restructured academic programs.
- Heavy emphasis on parent involvement and services for parents.
- Availability of health centers and family resource rooms.
- After-school activities.
- Cultural and community activities.
- Extended hours -- open evenings, weekends, and summers.
- Respect and high expectations for students.

One such school implementing these principles is the Academy for Peace and Justice operated by El Puente, a community-based organization in Brooklyn, New York. As co-director Luis Garden-Acosta explained:

*Unless we were able to create a safe bridge (el puente) for growth and empowerment, our children would never be safe. But from the very beginning we knew we would have to take on the education system. If we didn't deal directly with the educational system, nothing would change.*

The Academy, as an integral part of the total El Puente organization, is open 12 months a year from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. The Academy is seen by its founder to be an academically and developmentally focused school as opposed to a second chance or alternative school. As one observer noted, schools like El Puente "aren't aiming simply to be mainstreamed into the city's factory style of education. They want to displace it. Engaging the classroom as community and the community as classroom, teams of students create community development projects promoting peace and social justice.

El Puente Academy works to:

- Create a place for young people where they feel safe, respected, and cared for so they can learn.
- Build a young person's positive sense of self through the curriculum.
- Integrate book learning with community projects, with family, and with community.
- Give back to the community -- nurturing a sense of responsibility to others.

The staff of El Puente is multicultural, and there is no hierarchy among directors, volunteers, facilitators (teachers), and part-time staff. Every effort is made to connect

schooling to real-life experiences. El Puente students pursue Environmental Community Service projects that develop math and science skills by actually measuring the toxic perils that surround them. One humanities class has made a documentary video on the dangers of a proposed incinerator for the nearby Navy Yard, an English class focuses on the hip-hop movement, and biology students work on immunization drives.

The Academy provides breakfast and lunch to its students. Half of the students stay for extended day programs such as tutoring, leadership, and the arts. Other students from the community also come to El Puente after school. El Puente is in the process of expanding its wellness center to establish a family health clinic. It also has partnerships with the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Parents are encouraged to be involved with the Academy through a Parent Action Center which runs leadership workshops, computer technology and other adult-education classes, and support groups.

In its first year, the passing rate was 100 percent for El Puente students compared to Eastern High School where only 25 percent of the students graduated. After the school's first 18 months, the students outscored their counterparts in other schools on basic measures of reading and mathematics.

El Puente has many characteristics of full-service community schools, but it is a private school. The Foundation's policy priority is on reform of the public school's system. See National Policy Based on What Works. An example of a public service community school is the Salome Arena Middle Academy, Immediate School 218 in the Washington Heights section of New York City.

The Salome Arena Middle Academy (IS 218) is one of four schools that is being operated jointly by the Children's Aid Society and the Community School District 6 in New York City. It is located in a new building in Washington Heights, designed to be a community school, with air-conditioning for summer programs, outside lights on the playground and an unusually attractive setting indicative of a different kind of school. It offers students a choice of 4 self-contained "academies": Business, Community Service, Expressive Arts, and Mathematics, Science, and Technology. The school opens at 7:00 a.m. and stays open after school for educational enrichment, mentoring, sports, computer lab, music, arts, trips, and entrepreneurial workshops. In the evening, teenagers are welcome to use the sports and arts facilities and take classes along with adults who come for English, computer work, parenting skills, and other workshops. A Family Resource Center provides social services to parents -- including immigration, employment, and housing consultations. A group of 25 mothers has been recruited to work in the Center as family advocates. They receive a small stipend for their services. In addition, a primary health, vision, and dental clinic is on site, as well as a student-run store that sells student products. These facilities, arrayed around the attractive lobby of the school, are open to the whole community. School-supported and Children's Aid Society-supported social workers and mental health counselors work together to serve students and families. The school stays open weekends and summers, offering the Dominican community many opportunities for cultural enrichment and family participation.

In **Safe Passage**, (see **Publications**) Joy G. Dryfoos reports, "During a recent visit to the school, I observed a scene that confirmed my conviction that community schools offer

great potential for the future of our children and their families. In the library were "triads," hard at work over Spanish lessons. The teaching team consisted of a student and a parent, and the scholar was a policeman. IS 218 had taken on the task of instructing the local precinct in the language of the neighborhood, and the police officers, mostly white and non-Hispanic, were reciprocating by inviting these families to visit the police station and stay in touch." This innovative intervention, combining important educational lessons with parental involvement and social supports, came about through the collaborative efforts of a school system, a community agency, and the local police precinct. Children Aid Society coordinator facilitated the invitation to the precinct and arranged for the participation of the school in designing the instructional components. This collaboration between a community organization and police officers serving as mentors was not unlike the success documented later in this chapter, with youth safe havens that share the same space with police ministrations.

Evaluations show that the students in this school have increased their achievement scores compared to other district schools. Attendance is up. Delinquency in the neighborhood is on the decline.

### **Innovative Vocational Skills Training**

Project Prepare in Chicago is a comprehensive vocational skills training program for at-risk teenagers in inner city Chicago public high schools. Implemented by Youth Guidance, a citywide nonprofit community organization, the initiative offers intensive job-skills training linked to job placement and counseling. One key component of Project Prepare is an arrangement with local businesses that helps train students in exchange for offering them jobs upon completion of the program.

Two hundred and seventy-two students in 3 schools participated in the first year of the program. Another 227 students served as a comparison group. (They did not receive services from the project but continued in standard vocational education courses.) Upon entry into the venture, both project youth and their comparison groups possessed similar low grade point averages, low job-readiness skills, and low class-attendance rates. The program's planned services were implemented fully in one high school, the Roberto Clemente Community Academy, and in lesser degrees at the 2 other schools. As might be expected, full implementation yielded stronger improvements in students' attendance, job readiness, and retention rates.

At Clemente, the Hyatt Hotels Corporation built a state-of-the-art kitchen to train students in culinary arts, donated a chef from Hyatt to train them, and instituted a 3-year curriculum and internship program. Students liked the food vocational education program because of the high-tech equipment, serious commitment from Hyatt, and the dynamic teachers and counselors. The annual operating cost of the project, including the corporation's donation, amounts to less than \$2,000 per youth.

An Eisenhower Foundation evaluation of the first year of the program showed that Clemente students who received Project Prepare's comprehensive services improved their job-readiness skills and attendance rates and stayed in high school longer than comparison students. These differences were statistically significant. Dropout rates at Clemente for Project Prepare students were 13 percent lower than for comparison students. During academic year 2004-2005, city wide drop-out rates approached 15

percent, while Project Prepare students had a drop-out rate of about 2 percent. As a result of this success, Youth Guidance has replicated Project Prepare in other locations.

Any program such as this, which reduces drop out rates, also is significant because of the powerful link between school failure and criminal behavior that has been found in many studies. Project Prepare also holds promise because most other attempts to blend high school and job training have been unsuccessful in the U.S.

By contrast, Germany probably has the most advanced model in the world for vocational training and apprenticeship. In Germany, approximately two-thirds of the country's students participate in a formal apprenticeship program. It offers training in 375 occupations. A social compact promises a job when they are finished. German students not planning to attend college usually choose their occupation as young as age 14. The dual system of work and study forms the core of career training in Germany. However, this formula seems to be somewhat inappropriate for American values. Here, the education system has long considered early tracking of young people to be a form of class oppression that consigns them to working class lives at an early age. General education is seen as a requirement of American democratic society. The approach of Project Prepare appears to better combine democratic principles with job training and opportunity.

### **Investing in Public Schools**

The principles and models that do work -- like meaningful family participation, smaller schools and full service community schools -- are ready for more replication, and require increased investments in our urban public school systems.

Presently, the largest federal educational initiative for educating disadvantaged public school children and youth is Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Funded at about \$7B per year, Title I provides for 25 minutes of separate tutoring per day for disadvantaged children. Evaluations have shown that Title I has improved participants' reading and math scores by 15-20 percent, compared with similar needy youth. However, critics find that not enough funding reaches the nation's poorest schools. Funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, an independent commission has released a report, *Making Schools Work for Children in Poverty*.

In 1994, Title I was amended to allow involvement of parents and community agencies in school wide programs. We believe that Title I should be further amended to finance implementation of the models in the present section, other recommendations in the Clark/MacArthur Commission and recommendations by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's recent evaluation-based report, *Success in School*.

But a further reformed Title I is not enough. We need a national policy of greater equity in urban school financing, as set forth in *Saving Urban Schools* by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Carnegie calls for more money for inner-city schools and a commitment to educate all children, even those from the most difficult backgrounds. As Jonathan Kozol has concluded:

*[T]he children in poor rural schools in Mississippi and Ohio will continue to get education funded at less than \$4,000 yearly and children in the South Bronx will get less than \$7,000, while children*

*in the richest suburbs will continue to receive up to \$18,000 yearly. But they'll all be told they must be held to the same standards and they'll all be judged, of course, by their performance on the same exams.*

*Slogans, standards and exams do not teach reading. Only well-paid and proficient teachers do, and only if they work under conditions that do not degrade their spirits and demean their students....*

*Money, as the rich and powerful repeatedly remind us, may not be "the only way" to upgrade education, but it seems to be the way that they have chosen for their own kids, and if it is good for them... it is not clear why it is not of equal worth to children of poor people....*

We are against public funding of private schools, as in some voucher schemes. Such funding works toward making the rich richer and the poor poorer, so it violates our selection criterion on equality. (See: **How Do We Decide What Works And Doesn't?**)

While there is evidence that students attending private schools on vouchers do benefit, similar studies, such as a randomized field trial in Tennessee, demonstrate that significant gains occur by simply reducing class size. Of course, public money for education cannot support both vouchers and reduced class sizes.

Voucher advocates argue for "choice." But there are plenty of proven innovations for public school systems to experiment with the real issue which is accountability. Public schools are accountable to the taxpayer; private voucher schemes have much less accountability. For example, as Barbara Miner has described:

*In the tradition of Ronald Reagan's tales about welfare recipients driving Cadillacs, conservatives have successfully used the strategy of policy-by-anecdote. Yet one story they ignore is that of an African-American student named Tenasha Taylor. In a speech on black separatism to her English class at University School of Milwaukee, Taylor criticized the school as racist. She was suspended and asked not to return the following fall. She sued on grounds of free speech. She lost. In his opinion, Federal Judge Terrence Evans wrote, "it is an elementary principle of constitutional law that the protections afforded by the Bill of Rights do not apply to private actors such as the University School. Generally, restrictions on constitutional rights that would be protected at a public high school...need not be honored at a private high school."*

*Private schools, like private roads and private country clubs, don't have to answer to the public. That's why they're called private. But what if the private schools get public dollars? Do they have to follow the same rules as public schools? The answer is particularly crucial in Milwaukee because even if 100 percent of a private school's students are funded by vouchers -- that is, the school doesn't have a single student who privately pays tuition -- the school may still call itself "private" and operate accordingly.*

**4/ Citations:** This section is based on:

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