

Education Matters

January-February 2010

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The New Debate

Is “separate but equal”
the best we can do?

By Mike Petrilli



Try this education test. Imagine a public school that’s knocking the roof off the state test. Its classes are led by energetic, passionate, thoughtful teachers who engage their students in rigorous study. The curriculum is rich and varied, with plenty of time for history and science, art and music, along with the 3 Rs. Its classrooms are orderly, its students respectful to one another and to adults. But it’s not dour; there’s a sense of joy, even wonder, at the school. It’s a lively, bright, warm place to be.

Now add this one wrinkle: all of its students are from high-poverty minority neighborhoods. It is as segregated as Southern schools before Brown. Here’s the test: Do you think this school is unabashedly worth celebrating? Replicating? Viewing as a national model?

There’s no right or wrong answer, but the thought experiment illuminates a divide within the education world. If you said “Yes, this is a wonderful achievement that we’ve created these sorts of schools,” then count yourself within the (now-mainstream) education-reform community. You look at the typical KIPP school or Amistad Academy or any of the other high flying high-poverty all-minority schools and say “See: it can be done.” You embrace the “no excuses” battle cry. Even schools

full of underprivileged kids can achieve tremendous results—and we should have more of them.

If, on the other hand, you find this picture regrettable, somewhat sad, maybe even unsettling, your inclinations are more aligned with the traditional civil rights view. Sure, you acknowledge that great black schools are better than terrible ones,

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yet you don’t count this as a success, not really. After all, academic learning is just one part of schools’ missions; helping to create the next generation of citizens is another. And in our diverse, multicultural world, kids need to learn how to work and play with all kinds

of people, not just those who look like them.

Moreover, poor minority kids in particular need to learn how to navigate the mores of middle class America. Yes, paternalistic schools like KIPP try to prepare their students for that but wouldn’t it be easier if they actually went to school with middle class kids in the first place? And with plenty of recent evidence (including from conservative scholars like Eric Hanushek and Caroline Hoxby) showing that peer effects really do matter—black students in particular do better when



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invited Administration officials to attend—and to explain why President Obama and Education Secretary Duncan have focused on fixing high-poverty schools (and creating great high-poverty charter schools)—rather than making these schools more integrated in the first place. (The civil rights groups want more attention and funds for initiatives like magnet schools and controlled choice programs.) Kahlenberg told me that participants agreed that it need not be either/or: we should try to create more high-quality high-poverty schools—while also taking forceful action to integrate schools.

Integrated Charter Schools

Here’s a related suggestion: What about creating a lot more racially and economically integrated charter schools? To some, that might sound like an oxymoron. When we think of great

more of their classmates are white—aren’t we tying one hand behind our back when we try to make separate but equal work?

This precise debate is one that the Left is currently engaged in. As Richard Kahlenberg of the Century Foundation reported recently, a group of civil rights groups recently hosted a conference and in-

charter schools, we tend to picture the KIPPs and Amistads and such, which tend to be all-minority and mostly poor. And public policy has created incentives for schools to focus on this demographic; many states only allow charters to serve disadvantaged youngsters or locate in failing districts. But philanthropy is guilty, too; several foundations have shunned integrated charter schools because they don’t serve enough poor kids or,

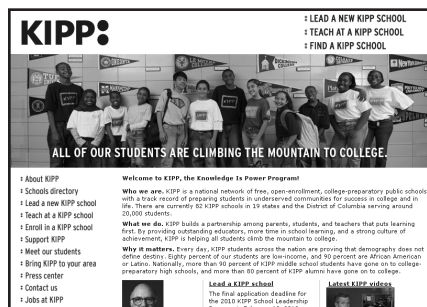


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taken as a whole, their pupil population isn’t needy enough.

Yet even in the face of these challenges, at least a handful of fantastic, integrated charter schools have gotten off the ground. Consider Capital City Charter School in Washington—the first

public school the Obamas visited as President and First Lady—which serves equal numbers of white, black, and Hispanic children and roughly equal proportions of poor and middle class kids—and which has gotten strong results over its ten-year history. There’s the famous High Tech High (HTH), founded with an explicit mission to serve a diverse group of students in



KIPP is a national network of free, open-enrollment, college-preparatory public schools with a track record of preparing students in underserved communities for success in college and in life. There are currently 82 KIPP schools in 19 states and the District of Columbia serving around 20,000 students.

For more information, visit www.KIPP.org.

the San Diego area. And there’s the Denver School of Science and Technology (DSST)—the best school in Denver, which is just about perfectly integrated along racial and class lines. Such schools should offer inspiration to the school reform, pro-charter crowd, as well as civil rights types—indeed, to just about everyone except neo-separatists who would prefer that, say, African-American youngsters learn from African-American teachers in Afro-centric schools.

Schools Like These Need Help

Both HTH and DSST must forego federal charter start-up funds because they refuse to use a standard lottery. (Federal law mandates that charter schools not use admissions requirements—if a school is oversubscribed, it must use a random lottery to decide who gets in.) It’s not that they want to keep low-income kids out; rather, they want to make sure that enough low-income children can get in. Because these schools are so popular, including among savvy, middle class parents, the applicant pool naturally skews toward better-educated, wealthier families. To counteract this, High Tech High, for example, employs a zip code-based lottery, enabling it to override San Diego’s stark residential segregation. (Each zip code gets so many slots.) And DSST holds two lotteries—one for low-income students, and one for everyone else—allowing it to be sure that at least 40 percent of its students are poor. A change in federal law would allow more charter schools to adopt these strategies—without giving up their start-up funds for replication efforts.

What KIPP and other high-poverty high-performing charter schools have achieved is remarkable and praiseworthy and, in the foreseeable future—because most urban areas have so few white and middle class families with school-age children—making high-poverty schools work has to be a big part of the education-reform agenda. But school segregation is just as harmful today as in 1950—and integrated charter schools could be one way toward a brighter future. ■



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Mike Petrilli is Vice President for National Programs and Policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, where he oversees the Foundation’s research projects and publications, including The Education Gadfly. He comes to the Foundation from the U.S. Department of Education, where he served as Associate Assistant Deputy Secretary in the Office of Innovation and Improvement.

Which Way Should You Go?

To track or not to track, that is the question

Brookings scholar Tom Loveless tackles the issue in his report *Tracking and Detracking: High Achievers in Massachusetts Middle Schools* examining changes that have occurred over time and their implications for high-achieving students. Here are excerpts adapted from his report.

What are the implications of tracking, or grouping students into separate classes based on their achievement? Many schools have moved away from this practice and reduced the number of subject-area courses offered in a given grade.

Massachusetts is one of the leading states in reforming tracking, and the changes that have occurred there over eighteen years (1991-2009). Loveless' report documents a dramatic transformation: middle schools have significantly altered the way in which they group students into classes for instruction, an issue of particular interest to those concerned with the educational fate of gifted and talented youngsters.

Tracking's Breadth

Tracking is the practice of grouping students into separate classes based on achievement. Tracking policy is typically made at the local level and therefore does not attract much national media attention. Yet it annually affects more than 14 million young people in the middle grades alone.

Furthermore, it is the type of policy that controls critical aspects of education—the classes students take, the curricula they are taught, the peers with whom they learn, and the teachers who instruct them. These elements of education largely define a child's experience in school—and all of them have changed significantly because of tracking reform.

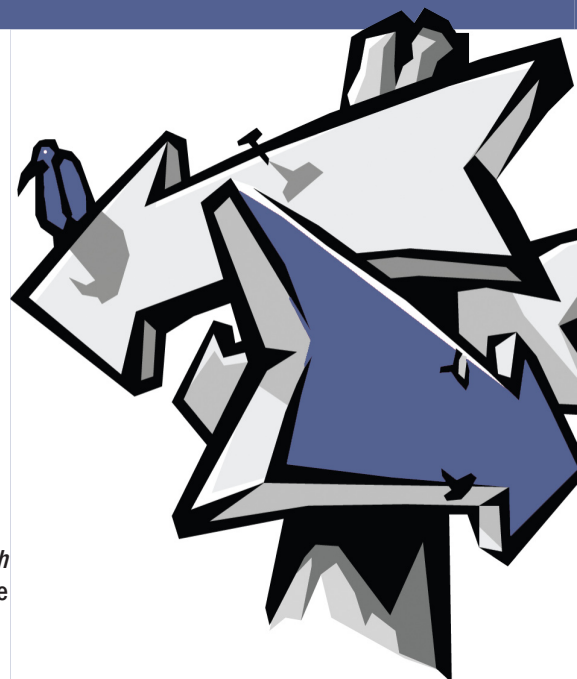
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traditional tracking systems were rigid and deterministic. Students and families had little input regarding classroom placements. Based predominantly on IQ scores, schools assigned youngsters to tracks—academic, general, or vocational—that cut across all subject areas, ignored students' individual strengths and weaknesses in particular subjects, made unjustifiable assumptions about children's destinations in life, and systematically discriminated against pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

That system eventually gave way to a more open form of tracking—one allowing, for example, a precocious reader to take advanced ELA classes while still enrolling in a less challenging math class.

Reliance on IQ tests fell by the wayside and track placement came to be based on past performance and achievement test results. Students who did well in a particular subject could take a more advanced class the following year. Parents could challenge course placements and insist that their children take the classes that they deemed best.

But this more flexible form of tracking also came under fire, most notably in Jeannie Oakes' 1985 book, *Keeping Track*. Even less rigid tracking, she insisted, made distinctions among students that often reflected their socioeconomic backgrounds. (To be sure, allowing parents a



say in track assignment favored school-savvy families.)

Social Inequities

Oakes and others charged that the changes that had been made to tracking were largely cosmetic and that its fundamental unfairness had not been ameliorated.

Citing the social reproductionist theories of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, among others, Oakes argued that tracking exists to maintain the existing distribution of power and privilege in society, one that is stratified to meet the demands of capitalism. Summarizing her study of twenty-five schools' tracking systems, Oakes claimed that "track levels in schools, reflective of social and economic groupings in society, were provided differential access to school knowledge in such a way that the children of more powerful societal groups had greater access to the kind of knowledge that may, in turn, permit them greater access to social and economic power." And she demanded that schools "relinquish their role as agents in reproducing inequities in the larger society."

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Association, the ACLU, the Children's Defense Fund, the Carnegie Corporation, the College Board, and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Tracking and Middle Schools

The middle school movement, as it was called, also gained traction during this time. It embraced a long list of reforms reflecting progressive educators' longstanding desire to alter the education of young adolescents.

These reforms included converting 7th-9th grade junior high schools into 5th-8th or 6th-8th-grade middle schools; balancing adolescents' social, emotional, and academic needs in the school curriculum; recruiting into middle schools teachers with elementary training who would presumably possess more child-centered philosophies than their subject-specialist counterparts in high schools; and promoting project-based learning and other student-led forms of pedagogy over traditional teacher-led instruction.

Given the overlap between progressivism and egalitarianism, it is no wonder that tracking reformers found fertile ground in middle schools.

Their cause was bolstered by several high-profile publications in the late 1980s and early 1990s that promoted middle school reform. These included the Carnegie Corporation's *Turning Points* (1989) and two state policy documents, *California's Caught in the Middle* (1987) and *Massachusetts' Magic in the Middle* (1993). About this same time, a battle over detracking erupted in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The Boston Globe ran an editorial cartoon illustrating the fear that high achieving children would receive instruction far below their capabilities. The cartoon showed Einstein at a chalkboard, sadly writing $1 + 1 = 2$ and $3 + 3 = 6$ on the board, with the caption: "Panel Recommends End of Tracking in the Cambridge Schools."

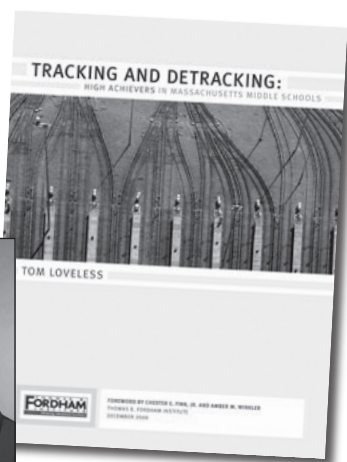
Opposition to detracking came from groups representing the parents of gifted and talented students. They argued that bright students should have advanced classes. The National Association for

Gifted Children (NAGC) passed a resolution in support of grouping for advanced students. But these arguments were swept aside by the charge that singling out high achievers in honors or accelerated classes is inherently elitist, and equity can only be attained when all students receive the same curriculum.

Many middle schools—but not all—steadily reduced the number of track levels offered in academic subjects. In most schools, today's middle school parents, like their predecessors fifty years ago, have few choices regarding the courses their children take. For most academic subjects, students are placed in a single,



Tom Loveless, a former sixth-grade teacher and Harvard public policy professor, is an expert on student achievement, education policy, and reform in K-12 schools. He also is a member of the National Math Advisory Panel.



heterogeneously grouped class offering the same curriculum and pace of instruction to all. The tracking that still occurs is generally confined to mathematics, but even options in math have been curtailed. Some middle schools have resisted the trend towards detracking, but they are in the minority, and in many cases, they must buck state and district recommendations to maintain their tracked systems.

Key Findings

Tracking and Detracking reports four key findings:

1. Tremendous change has occurred in tracking since the 1990s. Nearly twenty years ago, eighth-grade students attended tracked classes for most of the day. They now spend most of their day in detracked classes.

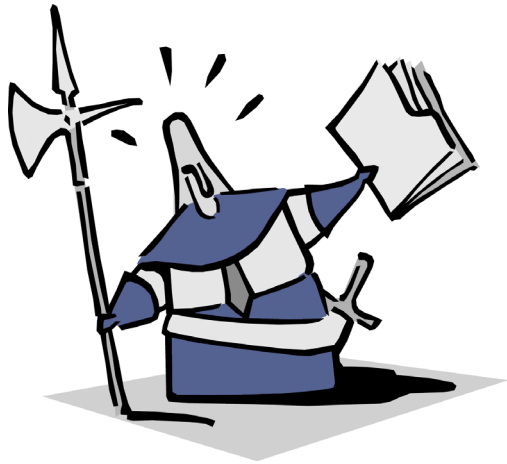
2. Several factors influence tracking policy. Schools serving predominantly poor populations are more likely to have stopped tracking. Those serving students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more apt to have retained tracking.

3. Mimicking high schools, middle schools serving grades 7 and 8 are more likely to embrace tracking compared with their grade 5-8 and 6-8 counterparts. Finally, schools in which parents wield greater influence tend to keep tracking in place, as do schools in communities where local school boards have discussed the topic.

4. Detracking is more prevalent in urban, high poverty schools. Urban schools with children of lower socioeconomic status (SES) are more likely to detrack than suburban schools with children of higher SES. Consequently, the risks associated with detracking are concentrated in urban schools serving large numbers of poor, low-achieving children.

5. Detracking carries risks for high-achieving students. The study compared the percentage of students achieving at the advanced level on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) in tracked and untracked schools. There was no difference in English language arts. However, with school-level SES held constant, each additional track level in eighth-grade math (up to three) is associated with a 3 percentage-point gain in students scoring at the advanced level. That means a school with 200 eighth graders that offers at least three levels of math is typically attended by twelve more students scoring at the advanced level than a detracked school of similar size and SES status. The study cannot link tracking policy causally to this outcome but, combined with previous research on the effects of detracking, it serves as a caution to schools and policymakers that detracking may adversely affect high-achieving students. ■

To read the complete report, visit www.edexcellence.net.



Seniority: Are there cracks in armor?

In Arizona this month, a new law takes effect preventing districts and charter schools from laying off teachers based on tenure or seniority. The legislation passed as part of larger state budget bill, responding to the state's severe economic downturn. Legislators realized that districts have to lay off a lot more teachers in a budget crisis than would be the case if higher salaried teachers could also be considered.

Meanwhile, in Rhode Island, the state's new Education Commissioner, Deborah Gist, last month directed superintendents to quit transferring teachers into new jobs on the basis of seniority. Instead, openings should be filled "based on a set of performance criteria and on student need." Gist is using the state's Basic Education plan, approved by the Rhode Island Board of Regents in June, to justify her actions. It requires that districts hire and train only the most highly effective staff and base teacher assignments on student need.

The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers isn't convinced that Gist is on solid legal ground and plans to put up a fight. Accusing the new policy of limiting the scope of collective bargaining (which is factually accurate as all state laws and regs do exactly that), the president of the state teachers' union Marcia Reback said that "there is nothing in state statute that gives [Gist] the right to dictate what will be in [the teachers'] contract." The opposing sides have agreed to take the conflict to a mediator. ■

Source—TQ Bulletin

Following My Dream

My journey from childhood to adulthood has been guided by my love for teaching

By Lauren W. Harrison, student teacher, and AAE/A+PEL Scholarship winner

Education has always been my passion. As a little girl, I played school with my sister and cousins. Being the teacher, I remember greeting my "students" as they walked into the classroom. I would pass out paper and pencils before beginning my lesson. Specifically, I remember teaching them the difference between declarative and interrogative sentences. Of course, "school" did not remain in session too long because my sister always had a bright idea to go swimming or play hide-and-seek. However, I stayed inside, made sample tests, and used my chalkboard to write down the classroom rules. I loved every second of it!



My love for school continued throughout my middle school and high school years. As I filled out college applications, I decided to major in education. However, several of my teachers, family members, and friends told me that I was too smart to be a teacher. "Lauren," they would say, "don't waste your intelligence on becoming a teacher. You can definitely be something more." I became so confused and frustrated with society's view of teachers. We need smart teachers, too, I thought. Why would I be "wasting" my intelligence? Why would someone suggest that smart individuals avoid teaching? After all, teachers teach our future.

Despite my frustration, I gave in and changed my major to my second choice, mass communication with an emphasis in public relations. After receiving a full academic scholarship to Louisiana State University's School

"As William Arthur Ward once said, The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. But, the great teacher inspires."

of Mass Communication in Baton Rouge, everyone said, "See Lauren, this is your calling." Even though I received that scholarship, I knew my heart was not in it. After a year at LSU, I put my foot down. I told my parents that I was going to follow my heart and return to my true passion, education. Because of this decision, I lost my LSU scholarship and had to move back home to save money. I applied to McNeese State University. As I sat through my first education course, I immediately knew that I was finally where God wanted me, and it was calming to know that I was "home."

As William Arthur Ward once said, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. But, the great teacher inspires." This being said, I plan to inspire and spark an interest and love for learning in my students. I want them to know that no matter their age, race, ethnicity, or background, dreams can, and do, come true. Finally, I will ensure that each student has the opportunity to reach his or her goals all while becoming effective decisionmakers and lifelong learners. ■

Workshops for Teachers

The Florida Humanities Council invites K-12 educators from across the U.S. to explore the impact of Eatonville, Florida on the life and work of Zora Neale Hurston, author of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Writer, folklorist, anthropologist, and arguably the most significant collector and interpreter of Southern African-American culture, Hurston spent her childhood in Eatonville, the oldest incorporated black municipality in America.



This week-long workshop will be led by distinguished historians, folklorists, and literature scholars. Participants will stay at Rollins College and will receive stipends to help cover travel and living expenses.

There will be two week-long workshops: June 13–19 or June 20–26, 2010. For more information, visit www.flahum.org/Zora or call (727) 873-2009. Application deadline is March 2, 2010.

Pitfalls of Moving Around Teacher Talent

Will great teachers still be great if they're moved to lower-performing schools? That intriguing question is the subject of a large \$10 million federal study to be conducted by Mathematica. Referred to as the Talent Transfer Initiative, the study is looking at results in seven school districts: Houston, Tucson, Winston-Forsyth County (NC), Guilford County (NC), Knox County (TN), Mobile County (AL), and Charlotte-Mecklenburg.



High-performing teachers in these districts are all being offered \$20,000 bonuses courtesy of federal grant dollars, paid out over two years, if they agree to teach in low-performing schools for those two years.

One of the lessons learned in Charlotte, which has two years' head start on the other six districts, is that this work requires a team approach and not just any school will do. Star teachers in Charlotte were reluctant to take a new assignment without the district also agreeing to assign a new star principal as well. In Houston, multiple high-performing teachers are all being placed in the same school so that they have a peer support network. In Tucson, the district selected the schools because they were considered to be on the upswing—not just because they were considered low performing.

Some of the districts are also finding that their talent may be spread too thin. Houston and Knox County have found themselves transferring teachers among schools that differ only a little in their demographics or achievement.

Source—TQ Bulletin

Fullbright Scholarship Available

The Academy for Educational Development (AED) is pleased to announce the application for the 2010-2011 cycle of the Distinguished Fulbright Awards in Teaching program. This particular Fulbright program is sponsored by The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) at the U.S. Department of States, and it is administered by AED in coordination with ECA in Washington, D.C.

The Distinguished Fulbright Awards in Teaching program seeks to attract highly qualified and experienced K-12 teachers from the United States and eight other participating countries (see list below). The main focus of the program is to provide an opportunity for teachers to conduct a variety of professional development activities during a three- to six-month period. Selected and approved teachers will:

1. Enroll in graduate level classes at a host university
2. Complete a "capstone" project which will be practical and relevant to trends in teaching and learning practices
3. Design and give lectures and/or workshops for host country teachers
4. Observe and assist with classes in host country local schools
5. Engage in other teaching-related activities

At the completion of the Fulbright grant, teachers from the United



States will be expected to share the knowledge and experience gained in other countries with their students and colleagues at their home schools and communities.

Participating countries for the 2010-2011 Distinguished Awards in Teaching program are Argentina, Finland, India, Israel, Mexico, Singapore, South Africa, and the United Kingdom (U.K.)

NOTE: Teachers from the community college and university levels in the United States can apply for the grant in Mexico and the United Kingdom.

Important Dates and Program Time-line:

- **February 15, 2010:** Application deadline: U.S. teachers must send documents to the AED office.
- **March 2010:** Technical review of applications.
- **April 2010:** Selection committee reviews applications and recommends candidates.
- **May 2010:** All U.S. teacher applicants will be notified of their status by AED.
- **August 2010:** Mandatory orientation program in Washington, D.C. for selected U.S. and international teachers.

Please note that U.S. teachers will have from September 2010 until July 2011 to complete their three- to six-month Fulbright grant.

Applications must be submitted electronically and in hard-copy to the AED office by **February 15, 2010**.

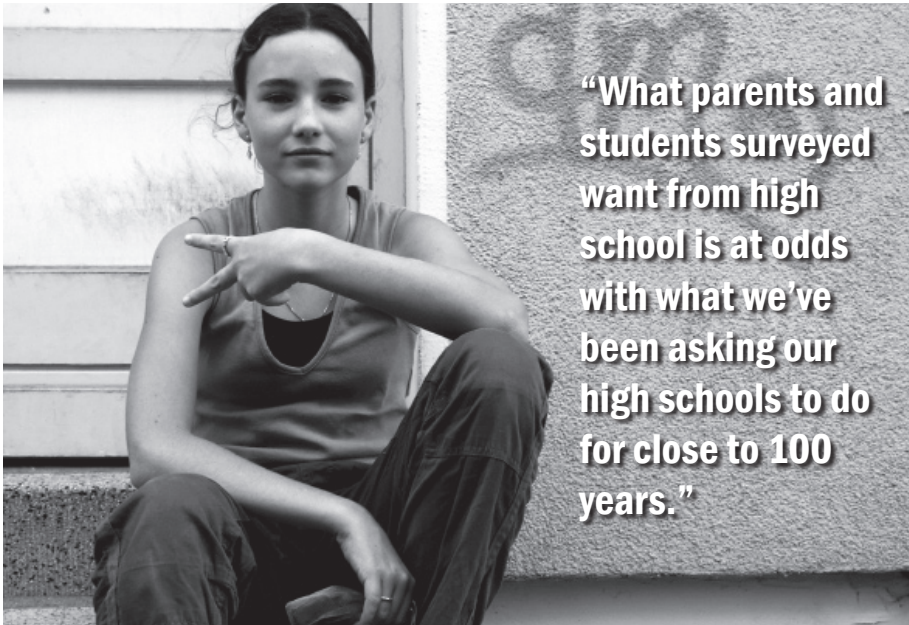
For program details, see www.fulbrightteacherexchange.org. For questions, email fulbrightdat@aed.org, or call (202) 464.3819.



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“What parents and students surveyed want from high school is at odds with what we’ve been asking our high schools to do for close to 100 years.”

Why Go to School?

Survey uncovers a disconnect about the role of high school

The competitiveness of the U.S. economy depends on increasing the college-educated work force. The Deloitte 2009 Education Survey shows a major disconnect between what students and parents want from high school and what educators believe is their charge.

When asked about the primary mission of high school, low-income parents and students rank preparing students for college the highest, with 42 percent of parents and 48 percent of high school students agreeing with the statement. Yet only 9 percent of educators think preparing students for college is their most im-

portant mission. Further, only 12 percent of teachers feel that they are most responsible for building a college-going culture. The Deloitte 2009 Education Survey was conducted among high school teachers and low-income parents and students.

Redefining the Mission

“What parents and students surveyed want from high school is at odds with what we’ve been asking our high schools to do for close to 100 years,” said Barry Salzberg, CEO, Deloitte LLP and newly appointed Chairman of College Summit. “Redefining the mission of high school is an important next step for building a twenty-first century work force.”

According to the findings of the survey, close to three quarters (70 percent) of students say they “definitely” will attend college; however, only about a quarter (27 percent) feel very prepared to handle college courses and less than a quarter (22 percent) rate the job their high school has done in preparing them to attend college as excellent. Moreover, half of the students responding to the survey say that

they are not “very confident” they have the necessary knowledge about how to best prepare for college, i.e., how to engage in volunteer and extracurricular activities, or understanding the performance requirements for college entry.

In order for students to experience high school as a launchpad for college and career success, educators will require training. While teachers personally feel it is important for students to attend college, only 59 percent are very confident that they have the knowledge about what students need to be prepared for college.

“Based on these stats, a significant portion of those students surveyed with aspirations to finish college are not likely to reach their goal because they are not adequately prepared for college,” continued Salzberg. “We need to create a strong college-going culture which ensures high school is viewed not as the end game but as preparation for post-secondary education and career success.” ■

For more information, please visit www.deloitte.com/us/educationsurvey.

Methodology

KRC Research was commissioned by Deloitte LLP to conduct a series of surveys among three target audiences. A total of 401 online interviews were conducted among U.S. high school teachers, counselors, and administrators; 400 telephone interviews were conducted among U.S. low income parents of high school students; and 601 telephone interviews were conducted among U.S. low income high school students.

The margin of error at the 95% confidence level for the two 400 samples is +/- 4.9%, while the student sample's margin of error is +/- 3.9%. The surveys were conducted between September 1–13, 2009. Additionally, for purposes of these surveys, “lower income” was defined as U.S. household with incomes lower than \$40,000 a year.