

Pre-K for All

Chester Finn presents a misleading portrait of the campaign for voluntary, quality pre-kindergarten (“The Preschool Picture,” *features*, Fall 2009) and excludes the vast body of evidence driving the movement.

Pre-K-for-all programs with research-based quality standards have led to larger enrollments of low-income children than targeted efforts and produced impressive outcomes regardless of family background. Oklahoma’s program has narrowed the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income children while elevating early math and literacy skills for all participants. The advances made by middle-class students are vital; one in three does not know the alphabet at kindergarten entry. Data suggest that low-income children have benefited more by learning alongside upper-income classmates instead of in the isolation of targeted programs.

Higher graduation rates and other lasting effects have been documented in large pre-K programs like Chicago’s Child-Parent Centers—conspicuously ignored by Finn. Though in relatively early stages, ongoing longitudinal studies in Michigan, South Carolina, and West Virginia are finding similar outcomes. Among New Jersey 2nd graders, those with two years of state pre-K were half as likely to have been held back.

Public pre-K regularly enhances and coordinates efforts to help the most disadvantaged. Enrollment policies typically prioritize children at greater risk of failing school. Many states combine pre-K dollars with funding from other sources, such as Head Start, to provide more comprehensive programs to high-need children. In Illinois, a portion of each appropriation toward its “pre-K for all” goal is dedicated to services for at-risk infants and toddlers.

Most important, parents’ quality pre-K options have expanded. Private



and charter schools, for-profit and nonprofit centers, and faith-based groups are delivering state-funded early education, gaining the means for crucial quality improvements in the process. In Wisconsin, more than 80 school districts collaborate with businesses and organizations to give families a wider choice of pre-K settings.

States’ pre-K budgets rose 37 percent from FY06 to FY09, to \$5.2 billion, because policymakers know that this investment is the first step in K–12 reform and offers a great return, a return that is maximized when all children are eligible.

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Defending PISA

If Mark Schneider has doubts about the usefulness of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (“The International PISA Test,” *check the facts*, Fall 2009), he should consider whether the U.S. has used PISA effectively. Among the G8 economies, the U.S.

assessed the second smallest number of students for PISA and collected the least contextual information, limiting the inferences that can be drawn for states and the usefulness of PISA for policy. While much of the industrialized world has extended PISA toward interactive electronic tests, the U.S. stuck to paper-and-pencil versions. While Schneider rightly notes that only longitudinal studies can establish causality, Australia, Canada, and Denmark are already implementing them, keeping track of the students assessed in PISA to find out how their knowledge and skills shape their subsequent life opportunities. In virtually every other federal nation, whether it is Canada or Mexico in North America; Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, or the U.K. in Europe; or Australia in the Pacific, individual states have implemented PISA successfully, employ it effectively, and find it useful for policy formation. They recognize that the yardstick for educational success is no longer improvement by state and national standards alone, but by the standards of the best-performing education systems internationally.

Schneider worries that international assessments, like any evaluations, embody judgments about what should be measured. That is so, and much of their value lies in allowing states to see their own standards through the prism of the judgments that the principal industrialized countries make collectively as to what skills matter for the success of individuals in a global economy.

Do international assessments provide causal evidence on what makes school systems succeed? No, but they shed light on important features in which education systems show similarities and differences, and, by making those features visible, can help to ask the right questions. Are the contextual data currently used for this perfect?

Certainly not, and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations constantly review and refine them. The methods used, however, are far more robust than the ways in which Schneider's organization is patching together data from U.S. states and international assessments to suggest to states that they can pass over a process of thorough international benchmarking.

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Schneider responds:

Mr. Schleicher fails to address my concern that because PISA's policy advice is not based on methodologically sound analysis and often fits preconceived notions, states will not get reliable guidance. Second, it is for this nation to decide how PISA fits into the U.S. system of testing and data-collection efforts in which we have invested hundreds of millions of dollars, including, for example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and student-based longitudinal data systems. Mr. Schleicher's comparison of the United States to countries that have not made similar investments is unhelpful. Finally, states have spent millions of dollars to ensure that their tests match what they expect schools to teach in each subject. How can states align with an international test that admits, even celebrates, not testing what schools teach?

Opportunity Scholarships

I applaud Professor Patrick Wolf for his excellent review of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) ("Lost Opportunities," *research*, Fall 2009). Three of Professor Wolf's main points warrant further amplification.

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First, the evidence is clear and unequivocal that the program is working for the children and families who participate in it. Professor Wolf methodically dissects the evaluation conducted by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and notes that the program improved the reading achievement of the treatment group students overall across all subgroups examined. Importantly, the evaluation suggests that such gains will continue over time. While it is true that there were no statistical gains in math achievement found for the treatment group, it must also be noted that the review covered a three-year period compatible with the program's infancy. It is reasonable to project that the longer a student is in the OSP, the more benefit will be realized in all academic areas.

Second, Professor Wolf points out how striking the OSP's achievement results are when compared to the results of other programs. According to Wolf, only 3 of the 11 experimental evaluations conducted by the National

Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) at IES have demonstrated statistically significant achievement impacts overall in either reading or math. The reading impact of the OSP is the largest achievement impact yet reported in an evaluation overseen by the NCEE. This finding is extraordinary.

Finally, in discussing the OSP's impact on expanding school choice for parents, Professor Wolf relates that approximately 81 percent of parents placed their child in a private or public school of choice three years after winning the scholarship lottery, as did 46 percent of those who lost the lottery. He points out the high level of satisfaction with the program among parents. District parents are becoming more sophisticated about education options for their children, and they are sharing their knowledge with their neighbors and friends. The OSP, along with the successful D.C. charter school experiment, has created an atmosphere of receptivity for changing how we view K-12 education in our nation's capital.

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NCLB 2.0

As I was reading "The Future of No Child Left Behind" (*forum*, Summer 2009), I found myself agreeing with both authors. I support the tenets of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in theory, but in practice I think it misses the mark. And while the authors spend time debating the theoretical issues, neither one addresses how to change the law at the ground level. The problem is that lawmakers, theorists, and educators look at the law and what changes should be made to it, rather than scrutinizing how the changes will affect students. The new NCLB needs a "regs" before the law approach.

The number-one change that should be made: judge schools on a set of measures that together create a school quotient score. Sixty percent of the quotient should reflect the average of two sets of test scores, one set based on state standards and tests and the other based on national standards and tests (NAEP, the Stanford 10, etc.). The rest of the quotient should reflect such measures as opportunities for gifted students, including AP classes; participation in the arts, music, and extracurricular programs; attendance and dropout rates; community service projects; special education exit rates; use of technology; staff turnover; participation in state tests and pass rates among English language learners; and parent involvement. The quotient could be used to judge schools against established benchmarks and ensure they are developing well-rounded, capable learners. The quotient could also be used to judge the progress of schools over time.

NCLB needs to change. One option is developing a school quotient score that would maintain the tenets of NCLB while acknowledging other school strengths as well.

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School Discipline

Richard Arum and Doreet Preiss have identified an often-overlooked impediment to education reform (“Law and Disorder in the Classroom,” *research*, Fall 2009). Due process was initially introduced into the public school context to protect basic fundamental rights. Today, an overly expansive understanding of what the law requires has produced rigid, bureaucratic discipline procedures that undermine the flexibility needed for intelligent, effective school management.

We have seen repeatedly that successful school reform, charter schools, and turnaround initiatives focus first on discipline and culture to establish a foundation for learning.

A culture of order and respect is the foundation of every successful school. It makes sense intuitively, and we have seen repeatedly that successful school reform, charter schools, and turnaround initiatives focus first on discipline and culture to establish a foundation for learning. Children cannot learn in disorderly schools where educators feel powerless and teachers spend as much time on discipline as they do on instruction.

Strong leadership, respect for authority, and perception of fairness are essential to create a positive, productive school culture. And yet the encroachment of due process into daily discipline decisions has undermined all three. Arum and Preiss show that the threat of litigation is a real presence in the lives of educators, one that casts a shadow over their decisions.

If we take just one lesson from Arum and Preiss’s research, it should be that we are on the wrong path. To reverse course, we need a dramatic reclarification of authority and an

endorsement of educators as the leaders of schools. We also need to reeducate parents, students, educators, and the broader community about the value of strong leadership. Finally, we need to make school culture a priority and encourage all members of the school community to participate in promoting the values and discipline protocols in schools.

PHILIP K. HOWARD
Chair
Common Good

Union Voice

In “Brighter Choices in Albany” (*features*, Fall 2009), New York’s anti-union charter spokesmen misstated New York State United Teachers’ (NYSUT) position on charter schools.

As a union of more than 600,000 professionals, NYSUT proudly represents teachers in charter schools and regular public schools across New York State. Our local unions are strong partners in their schools. As the single strongest advocate for the public resources that benefit charter and regular public schools, NYSUT supports members with research, professional development, and advocacy. That includes pressing charter management on issues of accountability, just as we do in district schools.

We believe quality charter schools can strengthen public education by piloting and sharing replicable practices that advance student learning. But not all charters or their corporate arms are created equal. Too many put profits before performance, are run by operators who don’t know what they are doing, get lackluster results, and aren’t, as envisioned, collaborating with district schools.

Intended to be exemplars, only 17 percent of charter schools outperform their public counterparts, according to Stanford University’s June 2009 study. That means all of us—teachers, principals, administrators, researchers, and policymakers—

in charter and in public schools alike, must redouble our commitment to scholarship and transparency in identifying “lessons learned” from the charter movement.

Are the Brighter Choice test scores a result of changed educational practices? Of millions in corporate and philanthropic support? Or an apples-to-oranges comparison? (The *Albany Times Union* reports Albany charters enroll and test only a fraction of students with disabilities in district schools.)

The questions matter. Honest answers should be sought through forums that go beyond “charter corporate” to include unions as a leading force in education reform. Union leaders at the local, state, and national levels are committed to ending the achievement gap as an essential part of our mission. We are dedicated to a principle of fairness that means support for charter or regular public schools should not come at the other’s expense.

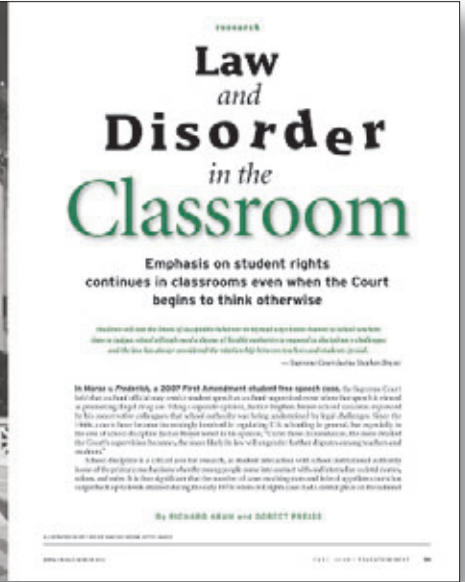
As NYSUT’s policy and practice attest, we embrace high standards, accountability, and transparency for regular public schools and charter schools alike. Our members, who walk the walk every day in the classroom, deserve no less.

RICHARD C. IANNUZZI
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A New Model of Teaching

In “How to Get the Teachers We Want” (*features*, Summer 2009), Rick Hess urges us to rethink the teacher challenges of the 21st century. He argues convincingly that to ensure that all our schools have sufficient numbers of high-quality teachers to teach all our children well, we need to move away from outdated assumptions about teacher recruitment and the irrational arrangements of teachers’ work.

Taken together and implemented meaningfully, the changes Dr. Hess



promotes would constitute radical, almost revolutionary, reform. Oddly, Dr. Hess ends on a moderate note, suggesting that we ought to “recognize that institutions change slowly and celebrate incremental advances” toward a “more flexible, rewarding, and performance-focused profession.”

We respectfully disagree. We believe that a large-scale transformation of schooling in America is just over the horizon and therefore the professional arrangements of the teaching enterprise will have to change sooner rather than later.

American schooling, as we’ve known it for more than a century, has already been disrupted. The Internet and an aggressive network of education entrepreneurs have exploded the monopoly that teachers and textbooks have long held over students’ access to knowledge. It is becoming increasingly clear that to truly educate all children well, instruction must be personalized for every student yet at the same time directed toward common goals.

Dr. Hess notes that to meet these instructional challenges, teachers’ roles must be specialized. We wholeheartedly agree, adding that what we term “unbundled education” requires that

schools implement what we’re calling (in “Toward the Structural Transformation of Schools: Innovations in Staffing,” a paper from Learning Point Associates) a “neo-differentiated” staffing model. This model differentiates instructional roles according to staff skill and expertise and puts each student at the center of the organizational chart. It outsources some of the work of teachers to experts in the community in virtual learning spaces.

Structural transformation and differentiated staffing sound intimidating, but the work has already begun. Take a look at New Hampshire’s Extended Learning Opportunities (ELO) initiative or the newly piloted School of One in New York City. These innovations reject schooling’s “industrial rhythms” of the past. The options in 2009 are only as containable as we allow them to be. Now is the time to begin working together toward a system that helps to facilitate success for all learners.

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