

Urban school boards put focus on 'college readiness'

Preparing students for college requires multifaceted strategy that's tough to pull together

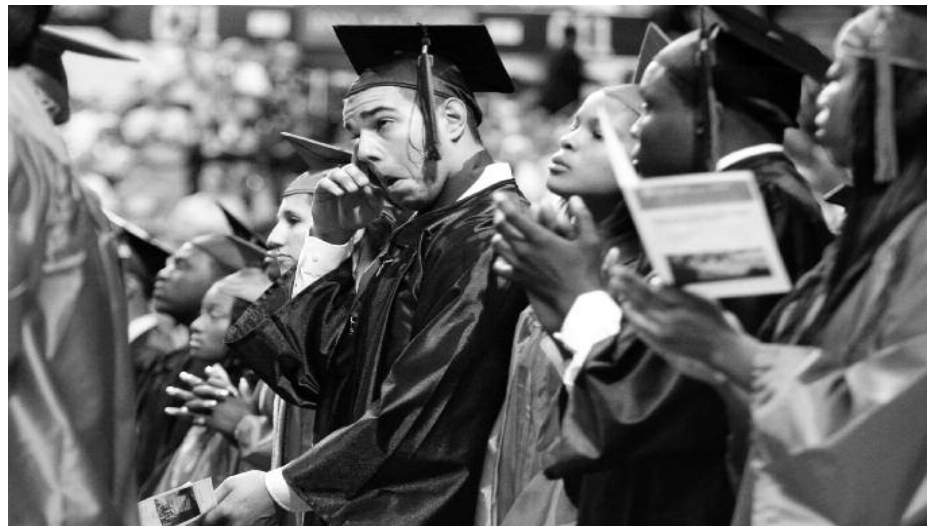
Del Stover

School officials in Elgin, Ill., asked themselves a tough question not long ago: If the goal was to graduate students who are "college ready," why were city high schools offering courses that lacked sufficient academic rigor?

"Consumer mathematics—what does that really do for a school system that's preparing students for college?" asks Greg Walker, assistant superintendent for secondary education. "We don't have it anymore. We are eliminating courses that are not aligned with college readiness."

College readiness—everyone is talking about it these days. National policy-makers say the nation needs a highly educated workforce for today's high-tech, globally competitive economy. Business leaders say new young employees lack necessary communications and problem-solving skills. University leaders complain too many incoming freshmen require remedial help.

And urban school leaders, responsible for the education of 15 million American schoolchildren, are all too aware of their responsibility to respond to these concerns.



This graduate of Pittsburgh's Schenley High School attends his graduation ceremony this past July. Maintaining a 4.4 GPA, John Tokarski III had his eye on a private college, which only became possible because of the Pittsburgh Promise, a community organized scholarship program. Helping students find a way to overcome the financial obstacles of college is a key component of any college-ready effort.

Certainly the work of urban school boards is cut out for them. Not only are urban high school dropout rates disturbingly high, there's also plenty of evidence that too many students who graduate aren't as academically prepared as their diploma would imply. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, for example, 28 percent of college freshmen enroll in at least one remedial course so they can be prepared for the academic rigor of college classes.

Another sign of trouble: ACT Inc. recently looked at the results of its college entrance exams and found only 23 percent of graduating seniors scored well enough to meet college-readiness benchmarks in four key academic areas: English, math, reading, and science. These benchmarks weren't all that high, merely indicating whether students could be expected to earn at least a C in first-year college courses.

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About CUBE

NSBA's Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE), the urban initiative of NSBA's National Affiliate program, addresses the programmatic, fiscal, and governance challenges of urban public education on behalf of its 118 member school boards and the more than 8 million students they serve. Through legislative advocacy, conferences, workshops, seminars, and publications, CUBE has been in the forefront of cultivating excellence in urban public schools for four decades.

About NSBA

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of Hawaii and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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CUBE News

CUBE welcomes three new members

Three school districts recently joined CUBE and its growing network of school boards and superintendents dedicated to providing urban schoolchildren with a high-quality education.

Recently, the School District of Lancaster signed up, joining Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Reading as CUBE districts in Pennsylvania. The Grand Rapids Public Schools has added its name to Detroit, Pontiac, and Lansing as districts from Michigan.

Finally, the Mount Vernon City School District joined its peers from Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Yonkers, and Wyandanch in New York state.

As CUBE expands, it's experiencing a trend of growth in urban school systems with smaller enrollments, says Kevin Scott, CUBE's membership services manager.

The trend, he adds, probably reflects the reality that size doesn't change the similar educational challenges confronted by school boards in an urban setting.

"School board members in these districts tell us that they benefit from



As a new CUBE member, Grand Rapids Public Schools can share information about its exciting learning programs, such as this outdoor class lesson at C.A. Frost Environmental Science Academy.

CUBE's expertise and resources on matters that impact their districts," Scott says. "They attend CUBE conferences and often learn about CUBE's benefits from other school districts that have been long-time affiliates."

All of the benefits of CUBE are made possible by a local district's membership with their state school

boards associations. The CUBE Steering Committee hopes that urban school leaders will share the information they gain from CUBE with other like-sized districts in their states, Scott says.

"The more districts that share the CUBE story and begin to join the network," he says, "the more influence CUBE will have with policymakers and stakeholders to help students in urban districts achieve great things nationwide."

CUBE's growth has been steady over the last several years as more districts see the benefits first-hand, Scott adds. "For over 40 years, CUBE has provided an outlet for urban school board members to learn from one another, share successes, and work together to strengthen urban districts."

Here's how your CUBE is governed

Questions occasionally arise from urban school board members about how CUBE is governed and who makes decisions within the program. So here's a brief summary of the governance structure.

As the urban component of NSBA's National Affiliate program, CUBE is governed by a Steering Committee consisting of 15 local school board members serving in CUBE-member districts. Committee members are elected by the CUBE membership at the organization's annual business meeting, scheduled in conjunction with the NSBA Annual Conference, scheduled next year for Chicago.

The Steering Committee's mission and

purpose is "to create opportunities for urban school board leaders to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective policymakers and advocates for excellence and equity in public education."

The committee meets in conjunction with CUBE conferences to plan upcoming meetings, set goals for projects, and works closely with NSBA, as well as CUBE's own national staff, to guide the program in meeting its goals.

For school board members interested in becoming more active in CUBE by running for an open Steering Committee seat, information will be available on the CUBE website in December at www.nsba.org/cube.

Trends & Analysis

Atlanta wins CUBE award for excellence

The Atlanta Public Schools was honored with the 2009 CUBE Annual Award for Urban School Board Excellence in October.

The Broward County, Fla., school system, was named a finalist for the award, with CUBE judges citing its work in closing the achievement gap, especially in reading and math.

Special recognition also was given to the school districts of Baltimore City, Md.; Wake County, N.C.; and Jefferson, County, Ky, for their commitment and service to diversity and school board leadership.

But Atlanta received top recognition for demonstrating the most progress in educating urban schoolchildren and serving as a “role model for excellence” in school board governance.

“Atlanta has shown that when a district’s governance team works together and focuses on the common goal of improving student achievement for all, progress and results will follow,” says NSBA Executive Director Anne L. Bryant. “We hope that the promise

Atlanta has demonstrated will be held as an example for other large districts that may be struggling.”

Over the years, the Atlanta school board and its superintendent, Beverly Hall, have put in place a comprehensive reform agenda that focuses on student achievement and strengthening low-performing schools.

Progressive Leadership Award

Baltimore was singled out by CUBE with the Progressive Leadership Award for improved governance, particularly in the area of policy related to parent and community involvement.

“Baltimore City truly has transformed itself around governance and policy-setting,” says CUBE Director Katrina Kelley. “Baltimore may not be all the way there, but there has been a major turnaround, particularly in the area of parental involvement. The judges felt it was important to recognize districts that are making significant progress as they’re going along.”

CUBE AWARD HONORS JOHN HARDING LUCAS SR. FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

For more than half a century of service to the education community, John Harding Lucas Sr. of Durham, N.C., was awarded the Benjamin Elijah Mays Lifetime Achievement Award at the CUBE Annual Conference in Austin.

A teacher, counselor, principal, and school board member, Lucas served as president of the North Carolina Education Association, a member of the board of directors of the National Education Association, and president of Shaw University.

He also has been recognized by the North Carolina School Boards Association.

“Dr. Lucas’ life’s work has been in service to children—working to ensure an education system that guarantees all students the very best learning opportunities,” says CUBE Director Katrina Kelley.

Duncan speaks on mayoral role in urban school reform

Attendees of the CUBE Annual Conference in Austin, Texas, were the first to see a new video interview of U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan talking about the mayoral role in big-city school reform.

The interview, conducted by NSBA Executive Director Anne Bryant, queried Duncan about mayoral takeovers, fruitful partnerships between mayors and school boards, and the importance of rallying the entire community behind public education.

While supportive of mayoral takeovers in some situations, Duncan also acknowledged other roles for the mayor in urban schools.

“The biggest thing for me is the power that the mayor brings to the equation ... to try to rally the entire city behind the efforts for schools to improve,” he said. “Quite frankly, [school boards] can’t do it alone. You need everybody. You need the business community. You need the philanthropic community. You need the

non-profits. You need the social service agencies. You need the religious community ... the parks and recreation, the health and human services ... who is the best person who can rally an entire city behind the efforts to create a great, great school system? I think often the logical place is the mayor.”

Asked about mayoral takeovers that haven’t worked well, Duncan suggested the problem often involves mayors who were brought into the process reluctantly.

It takes huge political courage to oversee a school system, he said, and “if you have a mayor who doesn’t have the will or courage to do it, I think it sets up failure. If you have a mayor who micro-manages ... that’s not going to work either.”

“The goal of the mayor,” he reiterated, “is really to rally the entire city behind the efforts to create a world-class school system and to create the political capital and will to make some tough choices in places where often there hasn’t been the courage

to make the difficult decisions that are nevertheless absolutely the right thing to do for children.”

Duncan disputed the argument that mayoral takeovers disenfranchise voters. “I would argue very vociferously that if a school board isn’t listening, if a mayor isn’t listening, they should be voted out of office.”

He said, “To me, it’s really about the ultimate accountability, and it’s absolutely in the mayor’s best interest to listen to the community. If they’re not doing it ... I think they deserve to lose their job.”

The interview is part of NSBA’s efforts to provide urban school policymakers with more information about the education secretary’s views on governance issues. It also follows up on an article, “It Takes a City,” that Duncan wrote for the October issue of *American School Board Journal*.

The interview will be posted on NSBA’s website for urban school leaders who were unable to attend the annual conference.

Baltimore is a leader in overhauling school food standards

Homemade cheese lasagna is just a small example of the revolutionary changes that are taking place in school kitchens throughout the Baltimore City School District.

As part of a state initiative, the school district is now using locally grown fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and better quality meats to create healthier school lunches, instead of the highly processed, precooked meals that were once staples.

Some schools are even growing their own vegetables and herbs. And, in a first for large urban districts, Baltimore has rolled out “Meatless Mondays”—all cafeteria items will be vegetarian that day.

More districts may soon follow Baltimore’s lead. The district’s changes were held up as a national example by federal authorities who recently stopped in to eat lunch and gather ideas for rewriting the School Nutrition Act.

For the first time in 15 years, the federal government is planning to overhaul school food standards, and it’s currently taking comments from school officials



Baltimore is not alone in improving nutritional practices. This student at Louisa May Alcott Elementary School in Chicago carries a tray with an organic pizza and a banana.

and others interested in children’s health. The move comes at a time when activists and parents are demanding that school cafeterias provide healthier

options, food safety issues and government regulations have made headlines, and school budgets are strained.

The childhood obesity crisis, which is particularly prevalent in low-income areas, has also highlighted the issues.

Currently, the federal government gives most districts \$2.68 for each free lunch it provides to eligible students from poor families.

In Washington, D.C., Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) has sponsored legislation that would increase that amount by 70 cents, in hopes that schools would use those extra funds to buy fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads, and other nutritious foods. She is also co-sponsoring a bill to ban trans fats in school kitchens and give the U.S. Agriculture Department more power to regulate the a la carte items sold in cafeterias.

“If you feed a kid chicken nuggets and canned peas and Doritos and canned fruit as a school lunch, or you feed him grilled chicken, steamed broccoli, and fresh fruits and a whole grain roll, the difference is night and day,” Gillibrand told the *New York Times*.

SUPERINTENDENT TURNOVER STILL PLAGUES URBAN DISTRICTS

When Terry Grier accepted the job as superintendent of Houston schools this past summer, he left San Diego’s board to face yet another search for someone to lead the school district.

After going through three chiefs in four years, the district, which is also facing a severe budget crisis, had seen Grier just begin to implement new programs to boost achievement and curb dropouts.

High turnover in a district’s top office can disrupt initiatives and reforms, which then can lead to low morale and a host of problems for those left behind.

Grier’s departure “puts us in a difficult position on so many levels,” school board member Katherine Nakamura told the *San Diego Union-Tribune* in August. “It doesn’t look good for us. Here we are on the cusp of a new school year. What about all the initiatives he set in motion?”

Across the country, urban districts traditionally have had a tough time keeping leaders, and the average term for an urban superintendent was 3.5 years in 2008, according to the

Council of the Great City Schools. That was actually an increase from 3.1 years in 2006, but only 18 percent of those superintendents had been in office for five or more years, and 33 percent had been in office for one year or less.

So San Diego is hardly alone in its recurring hiring process.

In St. Louis, Kelvin Adams is the eighth chief to lead the district in six years. Prince George’s County, Md., has seen five superintendents this decade, Providence, R.I., is on its fourth in nine years, and Albuquerque Superintendent Winston Brooks is the fifth person to hold the title in the past 10 years.

Brooks, for one, recently said that high turnover at the helm of the district has meant a lack of continuity in programs designed to boost graduation rates.

What’s more, superintendent searches are time consuming and expensive. Local newspapers reported that Houston spent \$100,000 in the search that resulted in Grier’s hiring. Some educators met Grier’s arrival in

Houston with skepticism, largely centered on his short stay in San Diego and decision to leave after less than 18 months.

San Diego board member John de Beck is worried that some of his newer colleagues do not understand the time involved in searching for a new chief. He predicts San Diego will get many resumes from eager but relatively inexperienced candidates.

In many cases, pundits blame the school board for a superintendent’s departure. That theory has circulated through San Diego, where the school board had changed since Grier was hired.

Yet that’s hardly the full story, school board President Sheila Jackson told attendees at the recent CUBE annual conference. But convincing skeptics can be tough.

“We’ve had to use whatever means we could to reassure everyone that the transition of our superintendent is not necessarily a reflection of the board,” she said. “People leave for a variety of reasons ... not all related to the board.”

Detroit violence is anomaly as school safety improves nationally

Even as school violence levels decline nationally, the Detroit Public Schools is starting this school year with the painful memory of two students shot and killed and at least eight others wounded in the past 11 months.

“Do we have problems? The answer is absolutely, yes,” Mayor Dave Bing told a forum of about 200 parents and educators Aug. 17 at Cass Technical High School, according to an Associated Press account.

“Do we have solutions to some of them? The answer is absolutely, yes.”

In addition to the shootings, the school district reported at least 68 robberies and more than 1,100 assaults between July 2008 and April 2009, Detroit Police Chief Warren Evans told the forum.

Elsewhere around the nation, a spate of teenage deaths have become headline



Police are on the scene after a drive-by shooting directed at teenagers at a bus stop near a Detroit school last June.

news, with the victims identified as students and school systems associated with the violence, despite most incidents occurring off school grounds. Some have noticed. After one tragic death, a letter to the *Chicago Sun-Times* complained about recent media coverage, noting “few of the violent events have happened near schools. This is a Chicago community crisis, not a Chicago Public

Schools crisis.”

The uproar in Detroit comes amid a general decline in school violence nationally. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the violent crime rate for students ages 12-18 fell from 58 incidents per 1,000 students in 1995 to 24 per 1,000 students in 2005.

The decreasing level of school violence comes amid a general drop in crime rates nationwide, says Lynn Addington, an expert in school crime statistics at American University in

Washington, D.C. However, “there are no quick, easy answers” to explain this trend.

Crime, she says, is “location specific” and influenced by a number of factors. “You can say, ‘Here’s the national picture—here’s what going on,’” Addington says. “But each area has its own story.”

Detroit schools hope to add a different chapter to their story this year.

Budget realities trim school bus fleets, force more kids to walk

A growing number of cash-strapped school districts are cutting back on bus service—a trend that, according to a bus industry representative citing federal research, will likely result in more student injuries and fatalities nationwide.

“Statistically, [riding the bus] is the best way to keep kids safe and reduce injuries,” Michael J. Martin, executive director of the National Association for Pupil Transportation, told *Urban Advocate*.

Among the many districts reducing bus services are urban systems in Hartford, Conn., and Memphis, Tenn., which stand to save \$3 million a year and \$6.6 million a year, respectively; and schools in Gainesville, Fla., where students living within two miles of school will not have bus service for the second year in a row, according to published reports.

“We’re finding that far too many districts are putting [bus service cuts] on the table and leaving it on the table,” Martin says. “Probably one out of every two that considers it, ultimately does it.”

Usually, these decisions are made to avoid cuts in the classroom. The downside, Martin says, is that more students will be walking to school or taking private vehicles—far less safe modes of transportation.

According to a 2002 report by the National Academy of Science’s Transportation Research Board, school bus accidents account for only about 2 percent of child deaths during normal school travel hours, whereas 74 percent occur in private passenger vehicles and 22 percent result from bicycle or pedestrian accidents.

School districts began cutting bus service a couple of years ago when gas and diesel prices spiked, Martin says. The recession has only exacerbated the



School buses across the nation are being taken out of service—and students told to walk to school—as a cost-saving measure.

problem: Daily bus ridership dropped about 5 percent during the 2008-09 school year to about 25 million students.

Martin says some districts have avoided cutting bus service by finding creative ways to use federal stimulus funds. For example, a school system might replace a heating-and-air-conditioning unit with stimulus funds and use some of the savings in the general operating budget on bus transportation.

COLLEGE READINESS

COLLEGE

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Yet, test results in many urban school systems fall short even of that lowly measure. In at least one school district, only about 2 percent of students met all four ACT benchmarks. In Tulsa, Okla., officials were dismayed to learn that only 7 percent of their students were college ready.

“That’s pretty alarming,” says Kevin Burr, the district’s area superintendent for high schools. It also was eye-opening given that close to 60 percent of older students score satisfactory or better on the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests. “One of the things policy wise that we recognize now is that there is not a direct correlation in how students do on the state assessment tests and their college preparedness.”

Today, Tulsa—as well as many other urban school systems—is putting a new emphasis on getting students ready for college. But creating a clear vision of how that effort should be packaged isn’t so easy. There is no standard, articulat-

ed definition of college readiness, says Joni Finney, professor of education at the University of Pennsylvania and vice president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

Equally troublesome, she notes, school boards are falling short in detailing their expectations regarding preparing students for college.

“A lot of places will say they have something, but truth is, [these policies are] very weak and shallow,” she says. “If you’re a board member, you need to ask if there’s a set of college readiness standards in place [and] how can you make sure teachers and students are aware of those standards.”

It’s important that such standards articulate more than a simple list of course credits needed for graduation, educators say. To succeed in college, students also need to learn to solve problems, think innovatively, and work as part of a team—skills that are not so easy to quantify nor so simple to institutionalize into classroom learning.

Obviously the first place to start is with the obvious: insisting on greater

academic rigor in schools. As noted in the summer issue of *Urban Advocate*, urban schools already are aggressively tackling this need. And that’s crucial. According to a 1999 U. S. Department of Education study, *Answers in the Tool Box*, a key determining factor in college readiness—particularly for minority students—is exposure to academically rigorous courses.

Yet good classes aren’t enough. Access to guidance counselors, remediation, and intervention, as well as a school culture promoting college and high academic expectations, also are critical in making college a viable option for students. That means school boards must develop a detailed, multifaceted strategy—and be willing to invest the resources and long-term oversight required to see that strategy succeed.

For Dallas, setting up a special office to oversee college readiness efforts has been helpful, says Lilita Valadez, the district’s executive director of college and career readiness. A college readiness office is a good approach, says Jim Nelson, executive director of AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), a nationally known college preparatory program.

“The big districts where we see the most success have got some sort of structure—they’re not just approaching this issue willy-nilly,” he says.

Success also depends on using data for planning. In Elgin, officials are using their state’s database and academic records from a community college to track graduates and compare their high school academic records with their college performance.

“For example, what we’re trying to determine, of the students that graduate in any given cohort, how many actually left with Advanced Placement experience, as well as left school with a score of 3 to 5 on the AP exam,” Walker says. “What percentage of these students are African-American or Latino?”

In the end, urban school leaders won’t find any simple solutions in their quest to boost college readiness, says Superintendent Bernard Pierorazio of the Yonkers (N.Y.) Public Schools. Success depends on tackling the issue from many directions.

Del Stover (dstover@nsba.org) is editor of Urban Advocate and a senior editor of American School Board Journal.

SOME STUDENTS FIND MONEY THE OBSTACLE TO COLLEGE

Chances are that your high schools are filled with students academically ready for college and university—but who will never enroll. Many simply can’t find the money to pay the rapidly rising tuition costs.

It’s not that money isn’t available. State and federal scholarships and loans, along with private funding sources, are waiting to be tapped. But, say researchers at the University of Chicago’s Consortium on Chicago School Research, “many students lack a knowledge of what financial aid is available, what they are eligible for, and when and how to apply.”

What’s more, researchers conclude in their report, *Barriers to College Attainment*, “low-income students are more likely to state that financial aid is too complicated to apply for and believe that costs of college are too high for them to apply.”

Some might suggest a school district’s responsibilities end once it’s met the academic needs of students, but that attitude isn’t found

in many urban high schools. In fact, urban educators say educating students and their parents about available financial aid is a key component of their college-readiness efforts.

In Yonkers, N.Y., Superintendent Bernard Pierorazio recently opened a new “college center” at Lincoln High School that provides students with counselors and support staff as they seek out scholarships and fill out applications.

The Dallas school system has an aggressive professional development program for its guidance counselors that include regular training in financial aid matters. During the year, the district hosts a College Round-Up, where hundreds of students spend part of a day working with district and local college counselors to fill out college enrollment, scholarship, and loan applications.

“Financial aid is a huge issue,” says Lilita Valadez, the district’s executive director of college and career readiness.

INTERVENTIONS, SUPPORT ARE NECESSARY STRATEGIES

What about those students with B and C averages who should go to college—but are challenged by your schools' more rigorous coursework? Who is encouraging college readiness among students from families where college has never been a viable option?

These questions can be answered through targeted support programs, such as AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), which provide support to students capable of more advanced work but who need tutoring, help with study skills, and more personal attention with college planning.

School officials also are turning to federal GEAR UP money to bolster college-readiness efforts. These funds also are being channeled to community groups who work in partnership with urban schools to provide after-school tutoring, guidance counseling, and college tours and other motivational activities designed to push students onto a college track.

Some schools are partnering with community colleges that provide help with admissions and financial aid or create dual-credit programs that give high school students early exposure to college classes.

If urban school boards really want to help their less academically successful students, they also should



Above: Students practice their skills in logic and analysis during an AVID class at Clairemont High School in San Diego. Right: students check out computers at the opening of a new college-readiness center in Yonkers, N.Y.



look at remediation strategies that accelerate student progress, says Jennifer Cohen, policy analyst for the New America Foundation.

“There are programs that some schools are using where they simultaneously enroll students who need assistance in remedial courses but also in [more rigorous] courses,” she says. “They are, for example, in both an algebra class and a math tutorial [where] teachers give them the support they need.”

As useful as such initiatives are, they require a significant commitment

from school leaders, warns Greg Walker, assistant superintendent for secondary education in Elgin, Ill.

For example, he notes, “AVID has caused some challenges [for us] in scheduling as it competes with other programs [in the school day],” he says. “We tried to work with principals and schools to look at our best options, but we had to make some hard decisions. Space availability is another issue.”

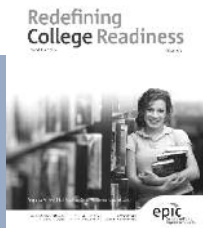


Students at Brownsville Early College High School learn more about college as part of a collaborative program between the Brownsville Independent School District and the University of Texas at Brownsville. The school is designed to increase the number of Hispanics and under-represented populations in the science and technology fields by providing the support, skills, and counseling necessary to be successful at the college level.

COLLEGE READINESS

Exactly what is college readiness?

There are 1,001 interpretations for how public schools can graduate college-ready students. Here are just a few resources you can find online.



Redefining College Readiness

Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC)

www.epiconline.org



College-Ready

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

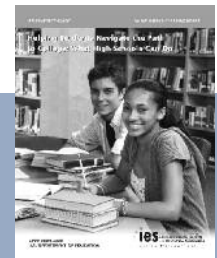
www.gatesfoundation.org



The Forgotten Middle: Ensuring that All Students Are on Target for College and Career Readiness before High School

ACT Inc.

www.act.org



Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do

Institute of Education Sciences, Department of Education

<http://nces.ed.gov>

Boards must shield guidance counselor ranks

This fall, Detroit's Crockett High School started the school year with only one counselor for more than 800 students—and he'd just received a layoff notice. At one point, the city's school leaders proposed slashing in half the school system's counseling staff.

More recently, school leaders have indicated they'll restore many counselor positions. That's good news. A shortage of guidance counselors in the high

schools can only undermine efforts at college readiness, say education leaders.

Counselors play a critical role in college readiness efforts by guiding students into more academically rigorous coursework, helping fill out college and financial aid applications, and simply serving as a cheerleader for students who might otherwise not see college as a viable option, says Liliana Valadez, executive director of college and career readiness for the Dallas

Independent School District.

"To me, they are the hub of the work we do on campuses," she says.

Yet, even before the most recent economic downturn, high schools were understaffed in counselors, according to the American School Counselor Association. It recommends a 250-to-1 ratio of students to counselors; the national average is 475. Some urban schools can't even manage that.

COLLEGE READINESS SHOULD BEGIN AT AN EARLY AGE

If an incoming high school freshman reads at a fifth-grade level, how likely is he or she to take advantage of a school's Advanced Placement (AP) classes or other rigorous coursework?

Not very likely, as you well know. So it should come as no surprise that school officials in Yonkers, N.Y., are looking to strengthen their elementary and middle-grade programs as part of their college-readiness initiative. That effort includes a switch to K-8 schools that will allow a more seamless academic path and reduce academic difficulties that sometimes occur when students make the transition to a new school.

Already, these efforts have led to significant gains in middle-grade test scores, says Superintendent Bernard

Pierorazio.

The school system also is trying to put the college option in the mind of disadvantaged students at an early age. The Colleges in My Future program brings together preschool students (this year, the class of 2022) and parents to talk about how a college education is necessary for a lot of jobs. (And, yes, preschoolers still express a disproportionate interest in being police officers, firefighters, and, occasionally, even a princess.)

Another program takes sixth- to eighth-grade students to college campuses over the summer for a week of enrichment activities. Kids live on campus. "Basically we want them to experience the college community," Pierorazio says. "When do 12 and 14-

year-olds from the inner city have that experience?"

In Elgin, Ill., school officials are looking to remediation efforts in the middle schools as an important strategy to prepare students for tougher courses in high school. Students who don't do their homework, for example, can find themselves pulled aside for an hour of help during the lunch hour.

This focus on middle school should pay off, experts say. According to *The Forgotten Middle*, a report by ACT Inc., "the level of academic achievement that students attain by eighth grade has a larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school."

Best Practices

School-city partnerships focus on after-school programs

Greater resources, community approval mark joint efforts

Aaron Dorsey and Lane Russell

In an effort to extend the school day and provide students with safe and affordable afterschool care, urban school boards are finding great advantage in collaborative partnerships with the mayor's office and city hall.

Such partnerships offer many advantages to local school leaders. For one, these efforts garner the good will and approval of municipal leaders, as well as from parents, teachers, students, and other community members who recognize that a joint effort can focus additional resources on the after-school and educational needs of young constituents.

School leaders recognize that schools cannot meet these needs on their own. By working with city hall, an urban school system taps the resources of municipal agencies, such as libraries, museums, and parks and recreation departments.

As important, these initiatives often expand school board access to civic groups, nonprofit organizations, local businesses, and community volunteers that provide after-school activities for children or are willing to put resources into new extended learning opportunities.

Such resources—whether funding, programming, or manpower—provide a cost-effective means to ensure children receive after-school care. City and community collaboration can lead to a more coordinated effort to put a more educational focus on that care.

It's a focus that could prove crucial to the nation's efforts in meeting such educational goals as closing the achievement gap, helping English language learners, preparing students for the global workforce, and keeping children safe and healthy in the hours after-school.

These are goals both school boards and municipal leaders support—and are essential if today's students are to graduate with a mastery of 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving,



This youngster stays busy after school, thanks to an ongoing partnership between Boston school and municipal leaders to rally community resources into after-school programs.

teamwork, and a proficiency in technology. According to the 21st Century Workforce Commission of the National Alliance of Business, these skills will help determine the future health of America's economy.

Not surprisingly, several school boards already are moving aggressively to work closer with municipal leaders. In Charleston, S.C., a school-city partnership has begun transforming public schools into community learning centers that provide an array of services and programs to children and their families.

In Tulsa, Okla., the mayor is working with the school district and police department to expand after-school programs in neighborhoods with high juvenile crime rates. Meanwhile, Hillsborough County, Fla., school leaders, along with the mayor of Tampa and the Children's Board of Hillsborough County, are working to develop an online service to help parents find after-school programs across the city.

From Helena, Mont., to Providence, R.I., mayors and school boards are demonstrating tremendous vision, leadership, and creativity in developing these extended learning opportunities. They are helping build public support for after-school programs, strengthening relationships with community stakehold-

ers, and making education a higher, more visible priority among community leaders.

To highlight and celebrate these partnerships, the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, in partnership with the National School Boards Association, American Association of School Administrators, and Afterschool Alliance, sponsored the 2008 National City Afterschool Summit in Washington, D.C.

This summit provided municipal leaders, school board members, and administrators with an opportunity to celebrate and promote leadership in building city-wide systems of high-quality after-school programs. More than 110 participants attended the two-day summit to learn and discuss strategies for improving after-school opportunities.

And that's just the beginning. Municipal and school leaders share a common goal: ensuring a positive future for children, families, and communities. By working together, they can create and sustain high-quality extended learning opportunities that promote academic success, safety, 21st century skills, and community engagement.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

NSBA's Extended-Day Learning Opportunities Program
www.nsba.org/edlo

National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families
www.nlc.org/iyef

Mayors' Challenge
www.mayorsforkids.org

School Health

Urban school boards wrestle with policies on HPV vaccine

States won't mandate vaccine, so local school leaders are left to navigate policy issues

Naomi Dillon

It is a startling statistic. Every year, more than 6.2 million people in the U.S. contract the human papillomavirus (HPV), most commonly through sexual contact. Many of the 40 some strains of HPV that affect the genital area are benign and symptomless, but some can lead to cervical cancer and other health issues.

Here's another stunner. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), roughly 12,000 U.S. women are diagnosed with cervical cancer annually. Worldwide, cervical cancer is the second-leading cancer killer of women in the world.

Fueled by this data, the Food and Drug Administration in 2006 approved Gardasil as a vaccine against the potentially deadly strains of HPV. A year later, the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases launched its pre-teen vaccine campaign, recommending immunizations against HPV, Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and acellular pertussis or whooping cough), and MCV4 (meningitis).

Before this trifecta of immunizations, there hadn't been a vaccine regimen recommended specifically for pre-teens. But the new recommendations have not been welcomed by all. Indeed, many school districts and states have been reluctant to mandate the HPV vaccine for 11- and 12-year-old girls before being admitted to school.

Although nearly half the states initially proposed legislation to require the HPV vaccine to attend school, only Virginia and the District of Columbia have enacted laws so far. In an embarrassing scenario, Texas Gov. Rick Perry unilaterally mandated Gardasil in schools but later had to repeal his decision after news reports that he'd received money from the drug's maker.

Some parents and school leaders have



In this 2007 photo, Tucson, Ariz., high school juniors chat as they wait outside a county mobile clinic that offered testing and education to students about the HPV vaccine.

opposed mandatory vaccines on the grounds that there is a tacit encouragement of sexual activity in the vaccine's promotion.

In a scene surely being played out across the country, meetings of North Carolina's Guilford County school board became a moral battleground as members debated the issue earlier this year, and school leaders ultimately decided to allow school health clinics to vaccinate students with Gardasil.

"If we have an opportunity to offer a vaccination for free to young women who would not be able to access it otherwise, I think we should," board member Kris Cooke told a local reporter for the *Greensboro News & Record*. "Yes, abstinence is the way to go, but the reality is that doesn't happen a lot."

Fellow board member Garth Hebert told the same newspaper he was worried the school system was allowing students to become human Petri dishes as the drug is still fairly new.

"Not every school district will be willing to host or recommend HPV vaccinations for its students," says Brenda Z.

Greene, the National School Boards Association's director of school health programs. "But keeping in mind what's in the best interests of students usually is a wise approach, as is using data to inform decision making."

According to the latest survey done annually by the CDC to gauge vaccination rates, only New York, Arizona, and New Hampshire have vaccinated 50 percent or more of adolescents, above the national average of 37.2 percent.

In December 2008, Gardasil's manufacturer, Merck & Co., asked the FDA to approve the vaccine for boys in the prevention of genital warts and other lesions, another symptom of HPV. A decision is still pending.

The National Network for Immunization Information, which operates a science-based resource site, has additional information useful for policymakers. Visit: www.immunizationinfo.org/HPVvaccines_detail.cfv?id=125

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Research & Reality

Urban schools often overlook needs of long-term ELL students

One group of students in urban schools—long-term English language learners (ELL)—often fail to receive the instructional attention they need. What’s more, this group actually can be harmed by a school district’s approach to serving the general ELL population.

Those are among the findings of researchers Kate Menken, Tatyana Kleyn, and Nabin Chae, who are developing instructional strategies for this student population at several New York City schools.

These researchers define long-term ELL students as those who’ve attended U.S. schools for seven years or more but continue to need language instruction. They’ve failed to transition to regular classrooms for a number of reasons:

- students’ English instruction was interrupted by families moving back and forth between the U.S. and their countries of origin;
- students’ progress was hampered by an inconsistent instructional strategy, with students repeatedly shifted among bilingual classes, English as a Second Language programs, and mainstream classes with no language support at all; and
- students simply are struggling and need more time to acquire strong English skills.

Their numbers vary with the demographics of a district, but long-term ELLs can prove a sizable at-risk population. In New York City, they account for 12.8 percent of all students learning English—nearly 19,000.

Many of these students are “orally bilingual,” yet their literacy skills in English are limited, with reading and writing skills below grade level and a greater likelihood of failing courses, researchers say. Too often, these students are just moved through the system, receiving “adequate grades from teachers simply for completing the required work.”

For local school policymakers, the real surprise of researchers’ work is how local instructional policies can exacerbate the challenges of these students. For example, students might be assigned to an ESL program for two years, and then be switched prematurely to a mainstream classroom with no language support.

If later moved to a bilingual program, students not only are academically behind because of weak English skills but they also confront a bilingual classroom setting after their native language literacy has been neglected for years. The students suddenly are academically ill-prepared for instruction in English or their native language.

Such mismatched instruction occurs because schools often lack the resources to provide trained teachers, forcing principals to make do with what’s available. An elementary school with several bilingual teachers might opt for a bilingual program, while a middle school sets up an English as a Second Language (ESL) program because it only has ESL-certified teachers. Such staffing problems can result in varied programs from grade to grade in the same school.

Another issue, of course, is that senior school administrators and the school board fail to recognize the problem—or underestimate the negative educational impact of such practices.

At the same time, state and federal policies aren’t helpful. Federal policy that encourages ELL programs to mainstream students within three years “contradicts research which indicates that it typically takes an English language learner at least five to seven years to acquire sufficient academic English to succeed in classrooms

where instruction is only in English.”

State laws that encourage English-only instruction also are a challenge to local school officials.

How officials overcome their instructional obstacles will vary widely, researchers acknowledge, but key is designing coursework to be mutually supportive. For example, a sizable Spanish-speaking ELL population could be taught in their native language, followed by a class building upon those same academic lessons to teach English literacy.

While working with New York City schools, it’s clear that “the administration really has to understand who these students are, then provide proper support for teachers,” says Kleyn, an assistant professor at the City College of New York. “They need time to collaborate and plan ... maybe make some classes smaller, make scheduling with more flexibility. They have to make space and time and money for professional development for teachers.”

For more information, visit the website of the Research Institute for the Study of Language in Urban Society: <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/Linguistics/rislus/projects/LTELL/index.html>. An article of note, *The Difficult Road for Long-Term English Learners*, can be found in the April 2009 issue of *Educational Leadership*: www.ascd.org/publications.

QUICK GUIDE TO HELPING LONG-TERM ELLS

Researchers acknowledge that limited resources can make it difficult for urban schools to provide consistent instruction for ELL students. Still, if school officials are aware of the problem, good planning and sound policy decisions can greatly improve the educational services available.

According to researchers, officials should look to the following:

- Develop a strategy to identify long-term ELL students so that their needs can be addressed.
- Insist schools develop a clear, coherent schoolwide language instruction policy, so that students do not move in and out of bilingual education, ESL, and mainstream classrooms.

• Develop a district-wide strategy so that students can transition between schools without jarring changes in instructional strategies. For example, elementary school students who spend several years in a bilingual education program might be promoted to a middle school that can continue bilingual instruction.

- Screen new ELL students to ensure they are enrolled in an instructional program that mirrors their previous classroom experiences.
- Put more focus on the instructional needs of older ELL students in high school, where educators have limited time to improve students’ literacy skills.



2010 CUBE MEETINGS CALENDAR

CUBE Issues Forum & Congressional Luncheon on Capitol Hill

(held in conjunction with NSBA's FRN Conference Jan.31-Feb. 2, 2010)

January 30 & February 2, 2010

Hilton Washington Hotel

Washington, DC



CUBE Issues Forum

January 30, 2010

CUBE Congressional Luncheon

February 2, 2010

CUBE Site Visits & Urban Programming

(held in conjunction with NSBA's Annual Conference April 10-12, 2010)

April 9-11, 2010

The Palmer House Hilton Hotel

Chicago, IL



CUBE Site Visit and Conference programming

April 9-11, 2010

NSBA Annual Conference Programming

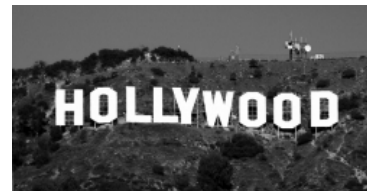
April 10-13, 2010

CUBE Issues Seminar

June 24-26, 2010

Renaissance Hollywood Hotel

Los Angeles, CA



CUBE Annual Conference and Awards Luncheon

September 30-October 2, 2010

Renaissance Harborplace Hotel

Baltimore, MD



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