

## Corporations offer useful lessons for teacher training

*Focus on 'bottom line' could help professional development programs*

**T**he Cheesecake Factory, a \$1.2 billion-a-year corporation with 112 restaurants nationwide, spends about \$2,000 annually to train each of its thousands of hourly workers. But if you think a restaurant chain's experience with waiters, bartenders, and cooks cannot teach urban education anything about training employees—particularly teachers—think again.

The Cheesecake Factory takes a decidedly analytical approach to professional development. Training is carefully planned to meet specific strategic objectives. The company also uses a variety of sophisticated instructional approaches that are customized for employees, whether they're managers with a college degree or dishwashers who speak little English. And corporate officials go the extra mile to determine the training's effectiveness by conducting focus groups, observing recently trained staff in action, surveying customers, and even looking for changes in the size of tips that waiters earn.

"We're always re-evaluating our training," says Chuck Wensing, vice president in



Corporate training methods, such as those taught at the Disney Institute, offer urban school leaders some useful ideas on how to prepare large numbers of employees to do their jobs better—and also on how to use training to boost morale and improve employee retention rates.

charge of training for the Calabasas Hills, Calif.-based corporation. "We're always challenging the methods we [use]. Should we be using a case study? Role playing? Using video to augment a lesson, then a group discussion? We're actually trying to customize our training, as much as we can."

That level of attention and assessment stands apart from the more traditional teacher training that goes on in many urban schools. Some districts can boast a sophisticated professional development

**See Corporations on page 6**

### INSIDE

**4** Magna Awards honor CUBE districts' innovation

**9** Smaller schools tied to test scores, graduation rates

**11** School cafeterias aim for more nutritious meals

Urban Advocate, the official publication of NSBA's Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE), is published six times a year. Copyright 2007.

## 2007-08 CUBE Steering Committee

*CUBE Chair*

**Steve Corona**, Fort Wayne, Ind.

*CUBE Vice Chair*

**Lock P. Beachum Sr.**, Youngstown, Ohio

**Rashidah Abdulhaqq**, Cleveland, Ohio

**Tariq Butt**, Chicago, Ill.

**Elizabeth Daniels**, Portsmouth, Va.

**Warren C. Hayman**, Towson, Md.

**Vilma Leake**, Charlotte, N.C.

**Christene C. Moss**, Fort Worth, Texas

**Brian Perkins**, New Haven, Conn.

**Ana Rivas Logan**, Miami, Fla.

**Evelyn Shapiro**, Phoenix, Ariz.

**Karen Shepard**, Omaha, Neb.

**David Tokofsky**, Los Angeles, Calif.

**Jill Wynns**, San Francisco, Calif.

## 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 112 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 the District of Columbia, Hawaii, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

*NSBA President and Liaison to CUBE*  
**Norman Wooten**

*Executive Director* **Anne L. Bryant**

*Deputy Executive Director* **Joseph S. Villani**

*Associate Executive Director, Constituent Services*  
**Don E. Blom**

*Director, CUBE* **Katrina A. Kelley**

*Senior Manager, CUBE* **Jessica Bonaiuto**

*Coordinator, CUBE* **Kristen Freer**

*Editor, Urban Advocate* **Del Stover**

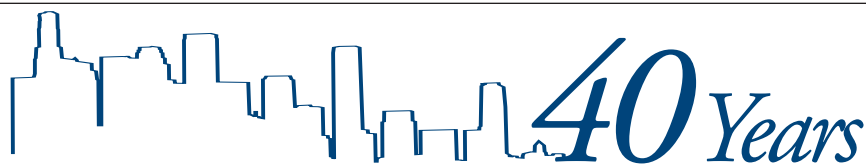
*Director of Publications* **Glenn Cook**

*Production Manager* **Carrie E. Carroll**

*Production Assistant* **Donna J. Ernst**

Urban Advocate is printed and assembled by the NSBA Office Services Print Shop

# CUBE News



COUNCIL OF URBAN BOARDS OF EDUCATION  
SERVING AMERICA'S URBAN PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

## CUBE celebrates 40th anniversary

This year marks the 40th anniversary of CUBE's efforts to help urban school boards become more effective policymakers and advocates for excellence and equity in public education.

CUBE began its existence in 1967 with a different name—the Council of Big City Boards of Education—and focused largely on the needs of the nation's largest core-city school districts.

But that mission changed slightly in 1978, when the council changed its name because many school boards had “big city” educational problems but did not meet the original membership requirement of serving a large core-city population. Urban school leaders wanted a more flexible definition of an urban school district

so they could reach out to smaller districts with similar urban problems.

Ultimately, CUBE was integrated into NSBA's Direct Affiliate (now National Affiliate) program and, in 1986, the organization's stature increased within NSBA when the NSBA Delegate Assembly amended its constitution to make the CUBE chair a full voting member of the NSBA Board of Directors.

In recognition of CUBE's four decades of service, the Delegate Assembly at April's NSBA Annual Conference adopted a resolution recognizing that “CUBE has become a significant and courageous force in advocacy for and in defense of the nation's largest, most diverse, and challenged student populations.”

## BROAD RANGE OF ISSUES COVERED AT APRIL MEETING

For urban school leaders, there was no shortage of topics to explore as they took advantage of CUBE programming during the NSBA Annual Conference in San Francisco in April.

One of the more provocative CUBE speakers was Carlos Muñoz Jr., a 1960s civil rights activist and scholar on social justice, who emphasized the school board's role in preparing children to live in an increasingly diverse nation. “Is our future destined to be one of racial and ethnic conflict that divides our nation, or will it be a future of a united American people characterized by a common purpose of liberty and justice for all?”

Other highlights of San Francisco included site tours of several successful city schools, a report on CUBE's recent school climate survey, and seminars on school safety, school bus transportation, the role of counselors in boosting student academic achievement, and how mayors are working in partnership with school boards in Boston and San Francisco.

## NEW OFFICERS TAKE HELM OF STEERING COMMITTEE

Steve Corona, a board member in Fort Wayne, Ind., was elected chair of the CUBE Steering Committee during the organization's April 13 business meeting, conducted in San Francisco in conjunction with NSBA's Annual Conference.

Lock P. Beachum Sr. of Youngstown, Ohio, was elected vice chair, while Brian Perkins stepped down as chair to assume the title of immediate past chair.

Elected as new members of the Steering Committee were Ana Rivas Logan of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools and Karen Shepard of Omaha, Neb.



Corona

# Trends & Analysis

## Houston is latest district to face serious charter competition

If you need evidence that the face of public education is irrevocably changing, then take a closer look at the level of competition that charter schools are creating in some of the nation's major urban centers.

In Houston, a well-funded charter school network—the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP)—has announced a \$100 million plan to expand significantly the number of schools serving the metropolitan area. Within a decade, KIPP could grow in Houston from eight charter schools to 42, serving as many as 21,000 students.

Officials with the Houston Independent School District (HISD) have expressed little outward alarm over this plan, releasing a statement indicating a willingness to work closely with the privately managed network of schools.

“We welcome KIPP’s announcement, and we support it,” the statement read. “Charter schools give parents and kids more choices, and HISD is all about choice. In fact, we have some of the finest school choice options to be found in any public school district anywhere.”

Nationwide, not all school policymakers are so sanguine about the growth in charter schools. While acknowledging that competition can prod officials to improve low-performing schools, some worry that a sizable charter presence ultimately draws away students and funding that public school systems desperately need to push through reforms.

Today, there are about 4,000 charter schools nationwide, with more than 280 opening in the past school year alone.

Several urban school districts, as varied as Columbus, Ohio; Detroit; Indianapolis; and Tucson, Ariz.; have seen charters begin to eat away at their enrollment.

To finance its expansion plans, KIPP relied on an aggressive fund-raising effort to philantropists and other private monies.

“It’s noteworthy that KIPP officials indicate they need more resources, more money, to provide the program they believe is needed for student success,” says



Young students raise their hands to answer a question in their classroom at Alice Harte Elementary School, a charter school in New Orleans.

Marc Egan, director of NSBA’s Voucher Strategy Center. “That raises broader implications about overall funding for all public schools and the ongoing question of whether the public and political will exists to provide all students with the education they need and deserve. Private investment in public schools can be a welcome development, but it can’t become an excuse for lawmakers to avoid the necessary public investment that all our schools need.”

## After-school programs flourish, but need outstrips funding

It’s ironic that San Diego’s leadership in creating after-school programs apparently hurt the community’s chances to take advantage of a California initiative to boost state funding for such programs to \$550 million.

Only 17 of the 2,000 new after-school programs funded this year are in San Diego County—partly because so many of the area’s schools already have a program. “I don’t know how to say it . . . it’s almost like we are the victims of our own success,” Steven Amick, after-school coordinator for the San Diego County Office of Education, told the *San Diego Union-Tribune*.

Despite that, the county—and its public schools and community organizations—have reason for pride. A decade-old effort by community leaders has built a network of 340 after-school programs.

According to the Afterschool Alliance,



California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger interacts with a second-grader at a Los Angeles school. The state has made a major investment in after-school programs, although demand still exceeds capacity.

a national organization advocating for quality after-school programs, 6.5 million children are enrolled in such programs nationwide. Yet, despite widespread political support, such programs fall short of

demand because of limited funding. For example, Congress has authorized \$2.5 billion for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, a federal program to encourage community-based before-school, after-school, and summer programs, but funding proposed for 2008 falls short of \$1 billion.

That’s unfortunate given study after study shows that after-school programs can help improve the academic success and social behavior of children, says Jodi Grant, executive director of the Afterschool Alliance.

Still, individual school districts, working with state and community groups, are doing what they can. Since 2000, for example, Philadelphia has built a growing network of programs in schools, recreation centers, and other community sites. Today, these programs serve 45,000 children.

# Struggling schools use longer day, year to boost academic success

For years, urban educators have talked about the need to give academically struggling students more time to learn—and some urban school districts are making that necessary commitment.

In Indianapolis, four of the city's worst-performing schools will add 25 days to their school year and convert to a year-long calendar, reopening July 23 after a short summer break. The extended school year will cost the school district \$1 million in teacher salaries and affect about 1,900 students.

"We have four schools struggling to achieve adequate yearly progress, and [the school district] feels this extended school year will provide students with the kind of

instruction they need to have academic success," district spokeswoman Mary Louise Bewley told the *Indianapolis Star*.

Teachers and families can opt out of the longer school year by transferring to other schools. But school officials say all of the district's middle schools will likely switch to the longer school year in 2008.

More school hours also is the plan at nine Boston schools at risk of being taken over by the state, according to a new initiative announced by Superintendent Michael Contompasis. In these newly named "Superintendent's Schools," the school day will be extended to include a full extra hour of instruction, class sizes will be

reduced, and a full-time family and community outreach coordinator will be hired.

The \$10 million initiative, negotiated with the Boston Teachers Union, also will give principals more discretion in hiring teachers, who will be eligible for pay increases and additional professional development in an attempt to improve teacher recruitment and retention.

"It is a substantial and innovative initiative to raise achievement in a group of schools in need of dramatic improvement," Contompasis says. "It is an opportunity to be bold, to enact many of the promising reforms that have shown progress elsewhere."

## Hampton, Va., and Houston recognized by 2007 Magna Awards

One more piece of evidence that America's urban school districts are as innovative as any in the nation: Two CUBE member districts—the Hampton City (Va.) Schools and the Houston Independent School District—have been named 2007 Magna Award winners.

The Magna Awards were initiated in 1995 by the *American School Board Journal* (ASBJ) to recognize school boards for taking bold and innovative steps to improve their educational programs.

The Hampton school system was honored for its In-Sync Partnerships program, designed to help forge citywide collaborations with government agencies and civic organizations.

One of the main goals of the program is to establish after-school programs in the hopes of strengthening both schools and city neighborhoods. In recent years, the district has joined forces with the city parks and recreation department and nine other community partners to set up 35 after-school sites that offer children snacks, homework assistance, academic group activities, individualized tutoring, and other services.

According to school officials, a recent evaluation of the program's impact revealed impressive results. At eight of 10 sites, students passed more than 70 percent of required learning assessment tests. At three of those sites, students passed 90 percent of the tests. In addition, parents responded positively in surveys, indicating the program is improving their children's



ABOVE: Houston's Community Builders program gives the school board access to its many constituencies. RIGHT: Hampton City Schools partners with community organizations to give students quality after-school programs and opportunities.



grades and teaching them good habits.

Houston was recognized for its Community Builders Program, which involves a monthly meeting with various political and community constituencies in the city to discuss issues.

The goal is to build stronger lines of communication, solicit public feedback on board policies, and increase public confidence in the school system, officials say. Among those invited to meet with the board has been the county's legislative delegation, local chambers of commerce, fine arts organizations, local college officials, faith-based groups, teachers, principals, and students.

To date, the program has drawn positive reviews from community members and helped the school board identify areas

of broad interest to the public. For example, discussions with the city's fine arts organizations drew attention to the need for a greater commitment by the school district to the fine arts.

This year's Magna award winners were highlighted in a special supplement to the April issue of ASBJ and honored at the magazine's School Leaders Luncheon, held in conjunction with the National School Boards Association's annual conference in San Francisco.

An independent panel of school board members, administrators, and other educators selected this year's 18 winners and 15 honorable mention recipients from almost 300 submissions.

# Grade inflation? Report suggests test scores, grades out of sync

It's possible that in some of your schools, those students receiving A's and B's might not be deserving of those grades. A few years ago, the same level of academic effort would have resulted in B's and C's.

In other words, it's possible some of your schools have fallen victim to "grade inflation."

This danger came to light after the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that national reading and math test scores have not shown any real gains, despite the fact that more high school seniors are taking rigorous academic courses and passing them with higher grades.

According to NAEP, the average reading score for 12th graders fell slightly from 1992 to 2005, while the percentage of students scoring at or above proficient levels in math dropped from 40 percent to 35 percent.

Yet, other indicators suggest that students' grade-point averages in core courses hit 2.77 on a 4.0 scale in 2005—one-third of a grade higher than the 2.47 average recorded in 1990.

At a news conference announcing the findings in March, education officials suggested this disconnect between higher grades and declining test scores reveals a



This student, along with most of her classmates, were not happy with their midterm grades at Boston Community Leadership Academy. But across the nation, some students are getting higher grades despite a lack of better performance.

serious problem.

"The findings ... suggest that we need to know much more about the level of rigor associated with the courses that high school students are taking," said Darvin M. Winick, chair of the National Assessment Governing Board.

## Mayor takes over D.C. school system

Municipal and school officials in the District of Columbia have pledged to work together following a city council vote giving Mayor Adrian Fenty significant control over the D.C. school system.

Although some board members strongly opposed the mayoral takeover, school board President Robert Bobb and Superintendent Clifford Janey joined Fenty after the council vote to say they would collaborate on the future of the 55,000-student district.

"We think it's mandatory for the future of this city, and the future of the children in our school system, that the three of us ... start discussing how we are going to work together," Fenty told the *Washington Post*.

Under the district's new governance structure, the school board will lose its policy-making powers, and its mix of elect-

ed and appointed members will serve a largely advisory role. The mayor will have authority to appoint a chancellor to run the school system and have line-item control of the schools' budget until 2010. Other duties will be assumed by a new department of education headed by a deputy mayor.

As *Urban Advocate* went to press, the mayoral takeover still needed the approval of Congress because the city council's decision contains an amendment to D.C.'s home rule charter.

The fate of Janey also remains unclear, but the superintendent indicated he intended to move forward during the transition to mayoral control. "I came here to make a difference in the lives of the children of the District of Columbia. The school system is in transition, but I am not," he said.

Across the nation, educators reviewing the findings raised the prospect that, with more students taking academically rigorous courses and Advanced Placement courses, the test results suggest the academic rigor of some programs could be in doubt.

The reports—*The Nation's Report Card: 12th-Grade Reading and Mathematics 2005* and *The Nation's Report Card: America's High School Graduates*—can be found at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>.

### VALLAS RESIGNS IN PHILLY, TAKES HELM IN NEW ORLEANS

Soon after announcing he would step down as CEO of the Philadelphia School District, Paul Vallas agreed to take over the helm in New Orleans—and persuaded a number of top aides to join him.

At least five current and former aides are expected to follow Vallas to New Orleans, where he'll take over the city's state-created Recovery School District (RSD). That mirrors the move of Vallas to Philadelphia in 2002, when he brought about a dozen people with him.

The RSD, created to rebuild New Orleans' flood-ravaged school system, currently consists of 17,600 students and 39 schools. As more people return to the city, however, student enrollment is expected to climb by as much as 14,000 in the next year.

After his appointment, Vallas said: "No school district in the country has been able to accomplish what RSD did last year in opening schools. Clearly, many challenges are still ahead, including the need for additional facilities, recruitment, finances, and, most importantly, building a strong internal team."

Vallas, who made his name as CEO of the Chicago schools from 1995 to 2001, is replacing Robin Jarvis, who resigned as superintendent of the New Orleans schools after barely a year on the job. During his stint in Philadelphia, Vallas was credited with boosting test scores, expanding after-school and summer programs, and raising public confidence in the city schools.

## CORPORATIONS

Continued from page 1

program, but the herding of teachers into a school auditorium to hear a consultant or central office administrator lecture about a new instructional approach or curriculum “is still an experience for far more teachers than we would prefer,” says Dennis Sparks, executive director of the National Staff Development Council (NSDC).

### Strategic thinking

Students are not widgets, and teachers are not factory workers. But most corporations are not interested in employing mindless drones who simply add parts on an assembly line. Today’s workforce is increasingly autonomous in its decision-making, and the training needs of corporations actually share a number of similarities with large urban school systems. Large numbers of employees must be trained, and that training must vary depending upon the employees’ specific responsibilities.

“Many companies today see their front-line workers as ‘knowledge workers’ and empower them to make decisions close to where the work is done,” Sparks says. “They involve them significantly in making decisions.”

That’s not all that different, Sparks suggests, from how urban school officials view teachers. But that similarity begins to break down when you look at how the most successful corporations train their employees, says David Fagiano, chief operating officer of Dale Carnegie Training and Associates Inc., a global management training company.

Fagiano says the best-run companies have a laser-like focus on strategic objectives and the company’s “bottom line.”

Other corporate trainers agree. The Disney Company sees customer service as key to its theme park success, and an image of wholesome entertainment and friendly employees is emphasized from the first day of employment, through the training provided at the Disney University, and in ongoing training throughout an employee’s tenure with the company.

“The training process is like a river,” says Bruce Jones, programming director for the Disney Institute. “From orientation through on-the-job training, it continues to flow and is continually refreshed through ongoing training such as mentoring, continuing education, and leader training.”

No one is suggesting school officials



At Dale Carnegie Training and Associates Inc., one lesson taught is that the most successful corporations keep their employee training focused squarely on strategic objectives and the “bottom line,” says David Fagiano, chief operating officer of the global management training company. It’s a lesson school boards should keep in mind.

don’t understand this concept. Many districts have taken a serious, long-term approach to helping teachers, for example, boost reading competencies.

But some believe school policymakers should monitor whether that focus remains consistent. In his many years in corporate training, Fagiano says he’s observed his share of professional development programs for teachers, and he’s seen training sessions that didn’t appear to have a strategic focus.

“It was my opinion that a lot of folks who showed up for a program were there because the schools had some extra training dollars around,” he says. “That’s exactly the wrong way to go.”

One sign that training is not designed to enact serious change is when the instruction is a one-shot deal with no support once teachers return to the classroom, Fagiano says. “If the principal sends me off to go for a course on a [new math program], and I get back to the job and what I’ve learned is not supported, then it is a total and complete waste of money.”

That lesson is repeatedly heard at education conferences these days, and Fagiano says a good place to start is by sending administrators, mentors, or teacher coaches through the same training—and whatever additional training is needed to support teachers afterwards.

“When you do sales training, it’s equally important to be training the sales manager to understand the system you’re implementing and to support that system

and be a coach on the job,” he says. “If that element isn’t there, don’t even spend the money.”

### Beyond technical skills

At Disney, which can hire as many as 900 employees in a day, technical training often is secondary to what the company sees as an essential ingredient to its success: creating a powerful corporate culture.

That culture can appear intense at times, what with Disney’s insistence on calling employees “cast members,” its rigid dress code, and the expectation that even the highest-ranking managers will stop to pick up a piece of trash they spot on park grounds. But Lynch says reinforcing this culture ensures a more enthusiastic and motivated workforce—and, again, promotes the corporate priority for better customer service.

For new employees, training begins with a day-and-a-half introductory program that outlines corporate values—a message that is reinforced throughout the year, he says. “We undertake a variety of training efforts to define and portray the heritage, traditions, quality standards, and shared values which we believe are critical factors to success,” Jones says.

Using professional development time to improve the school culture is an approach seldom given attention. But with numerous studies—including CUBE’s recent school climate survey—underscoring the link between student performance and a healthy school culture, perhaps this corpo-

rate model deserves a second look.

Such training also might prove valuable to schools because of its impact on employee satisfaction—and staff turnover. Retaining trained employees is now a “persistent worry” for 75 percent of corporate employers recently surveyed by Compensation Resources Inc., a human resources consulting firm. Yet some companies report cutting their turnover rate significantly by implementing the right type of training.

At the Quad/Graphics Printing, the nation’s third-largest printing company, officials interviewed ex-employees and discovered that a lack of training was a major source of frustration—and the second-biggest factor in their decision to leave the company. Their comments mirrored those of new teachers, whose high turnover rate in urban schools is consistently linked to a lack of support and training in their early years on the job.

But teaching technical skills and foster-

ing a corporate culture isn’t all that employees need, says Sue Barrett, the company’s manager of training and education. Employee satisfaction also is enhanced when workers receive training in communications, interpersonal relationships, dealing with diversity in the workplace, and other human-related skills that foster a more positive work environment.

### Teaching a path to success

Recognized by both *Newsweek* and *Fortune* magazines for its quality service and exceptional work environment, Quad/Graphics has another important component in its training program: It teaches employees how to “flourish” within the company.

Too often, Barrett says, companies hand out an employee handbook and leave it to workers to figure out “how things work” in the workplace. Quad/Graphics teaches employees how to raise complaints or make suggestions for change, provides

training that helps workers do their jobs more efficiently, and offers advice and training on career advancement.

A former teacher herself, Barrett sees a real need for such training in urban schools. “I wish, as a new teacher, someone had said to me, ‘You only have four lab stations with 25 to 30 kids ... but here are some methods you can use to manage those 30 kids with four lab stations.’”

Disney does something similar. And in a move that would easily translate to a school environment, the company encourages workers to take training that will allow them to transfer to other positions, including non-managerial leadership posts.

For Disney, an employee who can operate several rides in a theme park, for example, gives the company more flexibility in staffing, and the employee has an opportunity to take on new experiences, Jones says. And, while some cast members may hope to move into management, others are quite content to stay in a job that

## STARTING WITH GOOD TEACHERS

A good professional development program can make a huge difference in whether new teachers survive their first years in an urban classroom, but such support is far more successful if these teachers are properly prepared by colleges of education in the first place.

One model designed to provide that practical urban preparation is found in Jacksonville, Fla., where the Duval County Public Schools operate five “professional development schools” in partnership with the University of North Florida (UNF).

These schools serve as a training ground for aspiring teachers but focus on very practical, real-life experiences in an urban setting, says Lisa Dunn, coordinator of the school district’s transition to teaching program.

Classroom experience is as extensive in this program as any teacher preparation model, says Cathy O’Farrell, director of educational field experiences at UNF’s College of Education and Human Services. As college students move through the program, they start off observing classrooms, advance to tutoring, and conduct 50 hours of clinical work over two semesters before they begin their semester-long internship running a classroom.

The program also boasts a significant support system, she says. In addition to guidance from master teachers trained to work with college students, the district and UNF share the cost of two “clinical educators” to provide additional coaching and instruction, and college professors come out to the campuses to provide on-site instruction, as well. Ten to 12 interns work in each school at any given time, a number that allows mutual support and makes it easier to arrange on-campus group instruction.

This model benefits both institutions, O’Farrell says. Working in real schools provides UNF with valuable feedback and experience to improve its practical instruction,

while the school system gets a leg up in future recruitment by giving student teachers experience with the school system.

An emphasis on practical experience, particularly in an urban environment, has been an increasingly important part of teacher preparation programs in recent years—sparked in part by criticism that colleges of education were disconnected from the realities of the classroom.

As recently as last year, a panel of distinguished educators, led by Arthur E. Levine, former president of Columbia University’s Teachers College, criticized teacher preparation programs as “unruly and chaotic,” with lower admissions standards, professors with lesser credentials, and poor preparation for today’s standards-based, accountability driven classrooms.

But many teacher colleges are way ahead of critics, says Jane Leibbrand, vice president of communications for the National Collegiate Association of Teacher Education. For years, NCATE standards have called for accredited colleges to partner with local school practitioners to improve the practical instruction for aspiring teachers. Today, about half of NCATE-accredited colleges are working in professional development schools.

Such partnerships make sense for local school boards that want to ensure that newly hired teachers are prepared for the challenges of their urban schools—and that want to see their teacher retention rates go up, Leibbrand says. And such partnerships should be extensive.

“You can’t put one student teacher in an urban school, a hard-to-staff school, and expect that student teacher to succeed on his or her own,” she says. “You need a cohort of trained people in those schools ... and they have to have the opportunity to work with a few student teachers at the same time. You need a true partnership.”

allows them interaction with park guests but lets them take an occasional break to serve as a trainer of new staff.

“Lateral moves are perceived and celebrated as promotions,” Lynch says. “That speaks to a small part of what we’re about. Like teachers, some people have no interest in moving out of the front-line capacity or operating capacity.”

Such training may not be as strategically focused, but employees often know what they need to learn—and when you add in personal satisfaction and job loyalty, the cost-benefit ratio is favorable, corporate trainers say.

That’s one reason Nike encourages employees to seek out new opportunities. “Figure out where you want your career to go, and when you see something that would help you get there, ask us for it,” Nelson Farris, Nike’s director of corporate education, told *Fortune* magazine earlier this year.

It’s an approach that makes good sense, says Stephanie Hirsch, who will assume the helm at NSDC this summer. “If I’m interested in career path development ... if I want to be a mentor teacher or help other teachers in other capacities, then I might want to take courses that allow me to move along that career path.” She says NSDC is a “strong advocate for a career path for teachers that attracts and retains good teachers.”

### Getting the job done

Urban schools don’t need the corporate world to explain the value of mentors and teacher coaches—the equivalent of using employee trainers pulled off the “factory floor.” But it’s worth noting that the most successful corporations are more aggressive than schools in taking advantage of this valuable training resource.

At Quad/Graphics, the company hires some “very bright entry-level people,” but it depends heavily on “machine operators” who are senior plant employees to supplement computerized and classroom training.

“We have a very thorough training program,” Barrett says, “but it’s the step-by-step [personal guidance] where everyone learns the most.”

A somewhat similar approach is used at Disney, which pulls its most talented cast members “off stage” to train other employees because they know exactly what new staff members will confront on the job. Jones says their experience also brings credibility to the training.

“The person who does this job day in and day out will be believed by the 40 people in that classroom,” he says, noting



School teachers received extra training on English Language Development last summer at 96th Street Elementary School in Los Angeles. Corporate training experts say inadequate training is a key factor in employee dissatisfaction with their work.

the training includes real-life experiences that are “just not possible for a professional trainer to provide.”

Some corporations are taking this kind of practical approach to the next level by encouraging employees to form teams and develop their own training programs that meet their specific needs, Hirsch says. It’s a model that makes good sense for schools. Who has a better understanding of what is needed to boost reading skills for a particular group of fourth-graders, for example, then fourth-grade teachers working in the classrooms?

That’s not to say central offices don’t have a role to play in the larger strategic planning for professional development, she adds. But such training is supplemented when teachers receive additional training to help them cope with the unique needs at their particular school. “The most effective professional development occurs at the school site and is planned with the students’ needs in mind,” Hirsch says.

Along with this “job-embedded learning” is what corporations call “just in time learning,” meaning that on-demand computerized instruction, web-based training, or immediate personal intervention from upper management allow employee teams to react quickly to changing market conditions or sudden problems, Hirsch says. It’s a concept that educators will find useful, because when a classroom or school of students are having problems, teachers cannot wait until the summer to get the professional development they need.

“That’s the sense of urgency we want,”

adds NSDC’s Sparks. “We want this training to be on time for the kids in our classrooms now.”

### A good investment

It’s obvious that what works in a corporate setting won’t always be applicable for an urban school environment. But, if nothing else, school policymakers need to take their cue from the nation’s most successful corporations that investing in the “intellectual capital” of a company—their workers—is essential, Sparks says. “We need to be continually learning how to improve the process of the organization and the practices of the people close to our customers—our parents and our students.”

And it should never be forgotten that successful corporations see an absolute correlation between their investment in training and the performance of their company, he adds.

The good news is that more urban districts have learned many of these lessons—and could teach corporate America a thing or two, Sparks concludes. “Every year there are more schools that tightly focus teacher learning and administrator learning on the quality of teaching and student learning. School and district leaders are becoming more sophisticated in designing [their training programs], in much the same way that progressive business is doing those things.”

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

## Study: Smaller schools offer opportunities for urban districts

*Relationships key to higher test scores, improved graduation rate*

*Research & Reality is an occasional section examining education research and its practical application in urban school policy and administration.*

By Carol Chmelynski

Is the national movement to break up large schools, particularly in urban areas, making a difference? That question was asked by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has committed \$800 million to fund 2,000 small schools nationwide.

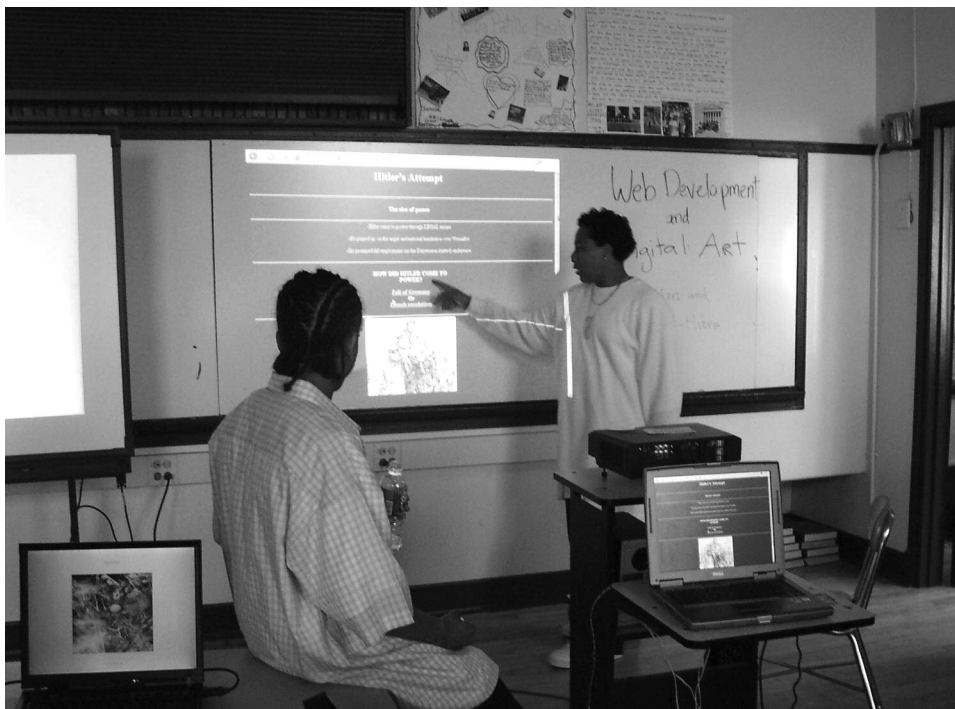
At the request of the Gates Foundation, WestEd, a nonprofit education and human development research and service agency headquartered in San Francisco, has tried to provide an answer with its recently released *Rethinking High School: Five Profiles of Innovative Models for Student Success*.

The idea that small, more-personalized schools might be better at providing a high-quality education for students—as opposed to the struggling big-city schools sometimes serving thousands on a single campus—has been around for some time. About 20 years ago, a small-schools movement began with trials in Boston, Dallas, and Chicago, as well as some suburban areas.

Two types of small schools emerged from these efforts: autonomous small-by-design schools and schools-within-a-school, in which larger schools were reorganized into distinct entities of about 300 students within the same campus.

The No Child Left Behind Act outlined the important purpose of smaller learning communities and nearly \$700 million in federal grants has been spent since 2000 to establish them in U.S. high schools, says Braden Goetz, who oversees high school grants for the U.S. Department of Education. As of 2003, about 23 percent of all public high schools were offering one or more specialized career academies in a smaller setting.

WestEd performed the survey to gain a better understanding of what five schools



look like in their initial years of implementation, who their students are, and how their students are doing.

Based on interviews with school leaders and available student data, the 49-page report provides a snapshot of the progress made by the schools, whose administrative reorganizations have been replicated in

several sites across the country.

The study found

- The five schools serve ethnically and socioeconomically diverse students—and, in doing so, reach students who have not succeeded in a traditional education setting.
- The schools are highly sought after

### PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

High-tech learning aids are a key resource at TechBoston Academy, but the smaller learning environment—the school enrolls only 360 students—has helped boost academic performance, says Headmaster Mary Skipper. Getting to know students has allowed teachers to provide better support and built a level of trust “that means students stay after school, try harder on tests, and accept help when we identify weaknesses.”

by students of all abilities, although many enter these schools performing below grade level. Each school has a waiting list of approximately 200 students.

- Students engage in rigorous and engaging curricula and take Advanced Placement classes.
- Schools develop and maintain supportive learning environments.
- Attendance rates at all five sites are higher than the district average.
- Students show increased scores on state academic achievement tests, high graduation rates, and high college admission rates.

TechBoston Academy is one of the study's profiled schools. Part of the Pilot

## ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

Just making schools smaller will not guarantee student success. Fact is, the small-schools movement has met snags in some towns.

One example is in the blue-collar, single high school town of Lebanon, Ore. In 2004, the 1,300-student high school was broken up into four smaller "academies" to try to reduce the dropout rate.

School officials believed the concept held great promise—and still do—but there were plenty of growing pains along the way.

Parents complained that course choices were narrower, teachers cited scheduling confusion, and students didn't like being separated from friends in different learning academies.

Parents also balked at having their children choose a career path at 14. The townspeople, who make their living in the lumber mills, were angry that the new system focused on college prep classes instead of vocational education.

Citing a lack of community support, the Gates Foundation withdrew a grant worth nearly \$1 million—not the first time the foundation has pulled away from faltering small schools it previously backed.

Yet, "we're proceeding well," says Assistant Principal Steve Kelley. "Losing the Gates grant was a bit of a shock for us, but it was also a relief in a lot of ways. We're still committed to the structure," which the district had moved toward even before receiving the foundation grant.

"Communication is never easy, even when it's done well," says Kelley, who

Schools Network established by Boston Public Schools in 1994 to meet the needs of underserved students, the academy opened in 2001 to provide students with a technology-based, college-prep curriculum.

The school prepares 360 students, 50 percent of whom are African-American and 85 percent of whom live in poverty, for work in the high-tech industry by offering industry certifications in information technology and access to advanced technology courses.

"Our ninth-graders came to us with scores showing that only 25 percent passed a state benchmark in English and 10 percent passed in math. Those same

indicated that if school officials had it to do over, they would "communicate better, particularly with the community."

"A segment of our community believes that we have fewer vocational classes. We don't," Kelley says. "But we've had to shift from woodshop and welding classes to the more high tech to reflect the times. That's where the tension came."

"Close partnerships with the school's community" is one of the common principles of successful small schools as defined by the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), which was founded in 1984 and has led the small-schools effort nationwide.

Based on decades of research and practice, CES says other attributes of successful small schools include personalized instruction to address individualized needs; an environment where teachers and students know one another well and work in an atmosphere of high expectations; and democratic and equitable school policies and practices.

"Small schools are not just the same public schools with fewer students," says Mara Benitez, senior director of school development at CES. "It can't be a superficial change."

Mary Skipper, TechBoston's headmaster said: "Success is not necessarily about being small; it's about being personal. Small is a step in that direction. A larger school with good systems in place can be very personal; also a smaller school can be impersonal because of a lack of systems."

kids, in 10th grade—18 months later—passed a state benchmark at rates of 95 percent in English and 94 percent in math, with proficiency rates of 60 percent," says Mary Skipper, TechBoston's headmaster and CEO.

The school had a 100-percent graduation rate with its first senior class last year. "One student had to go to summer school, but he graduated. Ninety-eight percent of the class has gone on to college," she says.

Skipper credits the success of the school to many factors, with personalized relationships being key. "Our school has been built by the entire staff, not by a couple of people in isolation who think they know what education is about," she says. "The voices of all the stakeholders are seen as important in the ongoing success of the school."

The faculty uses technology and data to figure out how to give students the support they need and, through this support, a level of a trust develops among students, parents, and staff, along with the expectation that students will graduate and go on to college, Skipper says.

"That means students stay after school, try harder on tests, and accept help when we identify weaknesses," she says. "Also, our staff of dedicated, passionate, intelligent, creative entrepreneurs is awesome."

The school also has managed to create a supportive environment where students know that, if they don't succeed the first time, they will be supported to try again and again, she says. "Students don't slip through the cracks."

The WestEd study also identifies elements within the school that principals consider essential to school success, including high-quality teachers and staff; an innovative, clearly defined plan designed to provide personalized and rigorous learning; a strong curriculum; and flexibility in school governance, with autonomy from outside control.

The report recommends further study to determine:

- Key conditions that allow these schools to help students achieve;
- The role the district plays in supporting these schools;
- The role of school leaders in sustaining efforts over time;
- How curricular strategies affect school climate, teacher satisfaction, and student achievement; and
- How graduates perform in college. ■

*Carol Chmelynski (cchmelynski@nsba.org) is an associate editor of School Board News and contributing editor of Urban Advocate.*

# School cafeterias are finding success with healthier fare

By Joetta Sack-Min

Five years ago, officials in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district decided its elementary school cafeterias were sending the wrong message about nutrition to young students.

So they tore out all the deep fryers. High-calorie desserts were downsized and made healthier. Made-to-order chef's salads and sub sandwiches replaced pizzas and chicken nuggets. Students now have at least four choices of fruits and vegetables—things like black-eyed peas, squash and onions, vegetable soup, hot apples, baked beans, spinach, and sliced fresh fruit—each day.

Soon, all of the district's cafeterias will feature more vegetarian and vegan entrees, and bread rolls will be made with whole grains. The menu makeovers at the elementary schools were so successful that this year the district's nutritionists took on the middle school cafeterias.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg's actions should be a model for many other urban districts, according to one influential health group. The Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), which annually grades the country's largest districts on their food quality, says more districts need to promote improved food selections in their cafeterias to help stave off childhood obesity and poor nutrition, problems that disproportionately affect disadvantaged children.

So far, the district has gotten quite a bit of positive feedback from students and parents, as well as positive coverage from local media, says Amy Harkey, the assistant director for child nutrition.

"These nutritional changes really have not hurt participation, and it is the right thing to do," she says. Further, the district saw its grade in PCRM's *School Lunch Report Card* increase from a "C" in 2004 to an "A-minus" in 2006.

That's heartening news. More students than ever—an average of more than 30 million each day—are participating in the federal school lunch program, according to the School Nutrition Association. Erik Peterson, the organization's spokesman, says those numbers have increased in recent years as more



Students wait in the cafeteria lunch line for chicken and steamed vegetables at The Promise Academy, a charter school in New York City.

schools offer healthier meals.

"We've seen an increase in paid meals, as well as free and reduced price participation," he says. "It's almost harder to find districts that haven't done anything than those that have made changes."

Dulcie Ward, a PCRM staff dietician who helped evaluate districts for the group's annual report, says the key to a successful cafeteria makeover is replacing high-fat, high-calorie foods with alternatives that students still want to eat.

"It's all about taste—you have to have really tasty food that's good for kids," she says.

Offerings such as veggie burgers and bean burritos with salsa have become popular in many districts and meet the group's nutritional recommendations, she says.

And even some time-tested favorites can be improved. For instance, a pizza could be made with whole-grain crust, reduced-fat cheese, and low-fat sausage. Manufacturers of breakfast cereals are making whole-grain, reduced sugar products for schools.

Some districts are also turning to ethnic foods as their populations grow more diverse, Peterson says. For instance, in Minnesota, which has a large Somali population, some schools are experimenting with Middle Eastern recipes that use staples of rice, corn, and beans.

The challenge, in addition to making meals nutritious and palatable, is keeping costs in check, says Peterson. Fresh selections and whole grains tend to cost more, and food distributors are not facing much demand outside of schools to offer more nutritious supplies. The Detroit school district, for one, has had a tough time

finding a reasonably priced veggie burger that meets nutritional guidelines, according to PCRM.

The impetus to overhaul a school lunch program can come from a number of sources: a state legislative action or executive order, a school board vote, or sometimes from parents or students themselves.

That was the case in Clark County, Nev., which won PCRM's 2004 "Most Improved" award. Parent Terri Janison lobbied the district several years earlier to ban candy in school vending machines and student stores. She also formed a coalition that urged teachers and

students not to give candy as a reward for good behavior or serve it during classroom parties.

Janison, now a school board member, says the push to overhaul the district's cafeteria offerings began when members of a high school student council complained to the board that the portion sizes at their school were too large, and each meal included a large chocolate-chip cookie. They asked for changes.

Now, the district's nutritionists are working with representatives from celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck's renowned restaurant group to create better-tasting, healthier recipes and find ways to store and preserve food that must be prepared in advance.

These healthier spreads are found in school breakfasts as well, Peterson says.

Milwaukee expanded its "universal free breakfast" program to more than 60 elementary schools this year, for a total cost of \$1 million. Students receive a "breakfast box" that usually contains cereal, juice, and milk, which they can eat in their classrooms as the school day starts.

It may take several years before students become accustomed to the healthier fare, Ward says, but it's imperative that they can make the selection from the first time they enter a school.

"If the whole school lunch environment was different when kids started school, they wouldn't come to expect nachos and corn dogs on the menu," she says.

*Joetta Sack-Min (jsack@nsba.org) is an associate editor of School Board News and contributing editor of Urban Advocate.*

# CUBE Ad - Full Page