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## ABSTRACT

The Salvatori Prize for American Citizenship is given annually by The Heritage Foundation to recognize extraordinary efforts by American citizens who are helping their communities solve problems the government has been unable to solve. The 1999 Salvatori Prize has been awarded to seven principals who prove that there is no excuse for the failure of most public schools to teach poor children. The seven winners show that all children can excel. The schools they lead score at or above the 65th percentile on nationally-normed examinations even though 75% or more of their students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The experiences of these principals show that there are seven common elements of high-performing schools: (1) principals must be free; (2) principals must use measurable goals to establish a culture of achievement; (3) master teachers bring out the best in a faculty; (4) rigorous and regular testing leads to continuous student achievement; (5) achievement is the key to discipline; (6) principals work actively with parents to make the home a center of learning; and (7) effort creates ability. A profile of each principal and a description of the school are attached. Each profile contains notes. (SLD)

# NO EXCUSES



## *Seven Principals of Low-Income Schools Who Set the Standard for High Achievement*

Samuel Casey Carter

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# NO EXCUSES

*Seven Principals of Low-Income Schools  
Who Set the Standard for High Achievement*

Samuel Casey Carter  
*Bradley Fellow*



# No Excuses Campaign

The No Excuses campaign is a national effort organized by The Heritage Foundation to mobilize public pressure on behalf of better education for the poor. The campaign will bring together liberals, centrists, and conservatives who are committed to high academic achievement among children of all races, ethnic groups, and family incomes.

Participants in the No Excuses campaign may hold differing views about vouchers, the federal role in education, and other policy issues. But we agree that there is no excuse for the academic failure of most public schools serving poor children. All children can learn. The principals we are honoring with the Salvatori Prize have proved it. We hope you will help us shine a spotlight on their success, and we hope you will join us in demanding that failing schools meet their standard. No Excuses.

# 1999 Salvatori Prize for American Citizenship

Irwin Kurz ,  
*P.S. 161—The Crown School, Brooklyn, NY*

Gregory Hodge ,  
*Frederick Douglass Academy, New York, NY*

Michael Feinberg and David Levin ,  
*KIPP Academy, Houston, TX, and Bronx, NY*

Nancy Ichinaga ,  
*Bennett-Kew Elementary, Inglewood, CA*

Hellen DeBerry ,  
*Earhart Elementary, Chicago, IL*

Ernestine Sanders ,  
*Cornerstone Schools, Detroit, MI*

The Salvatori Prize for American Citizenship is given annually by The Heritage Foundation to recognize and reward extraordinary efforts by American citizens who are helping their communities solve problems the government has been unable to solve.

An Italian immigrant who came to the United States as a child, the late Henry Salvatori founded the Western Geophysical Company, one of the most successful oil-exploration and contracting enterprises in the world. Through his philanthropic activities, Salvatori is insuring that America remains a land of opportunity for all people.

# Introduction

The 1999 Salvatori Prize for American Citizenship is awarded to seven principals who prove that there is no excuse for the failure of most public schools to teach poor children.

Nationwide, 58 percent of low-income 4th graders in the United States cannot read.<sup>1</sup> Sixty-seven percent of low-income inner-city 8th graders cannot meet basic math standards for their grade level.<sup>2</sup> Inner-city blacks and Latinos have suffered the worst because of this failure to teach basic skills.<sup>3</sup>

This national tragedy does not have to be. The seven Salvatori winners show that all children can excel academically regardless of race, income level, or family background. All seven of their schools score at or above the 65th percentile on nationally norm-referenced exams even though 75 percent or more of their students qualify for the free or reduced price lunch.<sup>4</sup>

- Under principal Irwin Kurz, the 6th grade at P.S. 161 in Brooklyn, New York, has the second highest reading scores in all of New York State. Ninety-eight percent of his students qualify for the free or reduced price lunch.
- KIPP Academy in Houston, Texas, under Michael Feinberg is 95 percent low-income and 90 percent Hispanic. Within one year, students who enter the middle school with passage rates of 35-50 percent on the state assessment test are

passing by more than 90 percent in both math and reading.

- Seventy-eight percent of the students in Bennett-Kew Elementary in Inglewood, California, are low-income. For 20 years, Nancy Ichinaga's school has been one of the highest performers in all of Los Angeles County.
- A neighborhood school that is 45 percent black and 55 percent Latino, David Levin's KIPP Academy in New York City's South Bronx is housed in the same building as the lowest-performing school in the district. Math scores at KIPP average in the 79th and 82nd percentile after two and three years, respectively.
- At Earhart Elementary in the southside of Chicago, Illinois, 82 percent of the children come from low-income families. Between 1991 and 1998, under the leadership of Hellen DeBerry, the national percentile ranking of the 6th grade shot from 40th to 78th in reading and from 27th to 85th in math.
- Led by Gregory Hodge, the middle school at the Frederick Douglass Academy in central Harlem ranks 12th in all of New York City, 32 percentage points higher than the city average in reading and 26 points higher in math. Seventy-nine percent of the students are black, 20 percent are Latino, and 80 percent receive the free or reduced price lunch.
- Directed by Ernestine Sanders, the Cornerstone Schools Association, a mini-school district of four privately owned schools in Detroit, Michigan, across all four schools has a national percentile ranking of 65th in reading. Seventy-five percent of the children qualify for the free or reduced price lunch.

The seven men and women profiled in these pages have proven that our nation's poorest schools can become centers of academic excellence. None of their methods is extraordinary. Nothing in their approach is beyond the reach of every school in America. Rather, their hard work and tireless dedication to academic achievement demonstrate that an excellent education can be made available to all.

This report will be followed by another on the successful practices of 25 principals in high-performing high-poverty schools. Their record of achievement shows that all children can learn, no matter what the income levels of their families

are, and that there is no excuse for the failure of schools to teach poor children. Learning from their success should be the highest priority for educators in a nation where 58 percent of low-income fourth graders cannot read.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Patricia L. Donahue et al., *NAEP 1998 Reading Report Card for the Nation and the States*, National Center for Educational Statistics, March 1999, p. 81. Low-income children are those who qualify for the free or reduced price lunch in the federal school lunch program.

<sup>2</sup>"By the Numbers: The Urban Picture—Poverty and Achievement in Urban and Nonurban Districts," *Education Week*, January 8, 1998, pp. 58–59.

<sup>3</sup>Urban students are more than twice as likely to attend high-poverty schools; 86 percent of these children are either black or Latino. See "By the Numbers: The Urban Picture," *op. cit.* Across the country, in high-poverty urban schools, more than two-thirds of the students fail to meet even minimum standards of achievement. See U.S. Department of Education, *Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: A Guide for State and Local Leaders*, May 1998, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Schools where at least 75 percent of the children qualify for the free or reduced price lunch score, on average, below the 35th percentile on national exams. Michael J. Puma et al., *Prospects: The Congressionally Mandated Study of Educational Growth and Opportunity*, Abt Associates, Inc., 1993, pp. 76–79.



# Seven Common Elements of High-Performing High-Poverty Schools

## **Principals must be free.**

Effective principals decide how to spend their money, whom to hire, and what to teach. Unless principals are free to establish their own curricula, seek out their own faculties, and teach as they see fit, their teaching will not be its best.

Without freedom, a school principal is powerless. Effective principals either are given their freedom or take it for themselves. Principals whose schools develop a reputation for academic achievement usually are left alone; but in order to get there, great principals often are mavericks who buck the system or low flyers who get the job done quietly.

Schools serving low-income children are often poorly funded. Even on shoestring budgets, effective principals make their schools work, but innovation and flexibility are the keys to their success. Unless principals are free to spend their budgets as they see fit, their schools will be compromised.

## **Principals use measurable goals to establish a culture of achievement.**

High expectations are one thing—the relentless pursuit of excellence is another. Tangible and unyielding goals are the focus of high-performing schools. Whether the goal is calculus by 12th grade, a fluently bilingual school, proficient mu-

sical performance for all, literacy at the earliest age, 100 percent attendance, or 100 percent working above grade level, great schools set hard and fast goals that the whole school must strive to obtain.

High expectations mean nothing if they are compromised in the classroom. Once the principal sets a clear vision for the school, every teacher has to be held *personally* responsible for enforcing it.

Outstanding middle schools and high schools focus on college preparation. In order to make achievement the product, great schools make college the goal.

### **Master teachers bring out the best in a faculty.**

Improving the quality of instruction is the only way to improve overall student achievement. Master teachers are the key to improved teacher quality. Master teachers often head peer evaluations, lead team teaching, devise internal assessment measures, and keep the mission of the school focused on academic achievement. Quality, not seniority, is the key.

Effective principals scour the country for the best teachers they can find and design their curriculum around the unique strengths and expertise of their staff. Master teachers help the faculty implement that curriculum.

Students of comparable abilities have vastly different outcomes as a result of the teachers to whom they are assigned.<sup>1</sup> Effective principals turn their schools into schools for teachers. Master teachers teach the others how to teach.

### **Rigorous and regular testing leads to continuous student achievement.**

Modern-day reform jargon speaks of assessment and accountability. Principals of high-performing schools speak of testing.

High expectations without a means of measurement are hollow. Testing is the diagnostic tool that best enforces a school's goals. Regular tests at all levels and in all areas insure that teaching and learning of the prescribed curriculum are taking place in every classroom. Mock tests usually are administered three or four times a year in preparation for the national exams.

Principals eliminate all excuses for failure by taking personal responsibility for the success of their children. As head of the instructional program, the principal does this best by personally monitoring the regular assessment of every child in the school. Teachers quickly learn that they too are tested each time they test their students.

### **Achievement is the key to discipline.**

A command-and-control approach to discipline is limited by the number of guards you can hire. When self-discipline and order come from within, every extra person is part of the solution.

When a school clearly teaches by example that self-control, self-reliance, and self-esteem anchored in achievement are the means to success, that school's own success inspires confidence, order, and discipline in its students.

Effective principals hope to create lasting opportunities with lifelong rewards for their students. Without apology, they allow the rigorous demands of achievement to show the way. Children need clear and conspicuous reasons to flee from error and run toward success. The demands of achievement provide both.

### **Principals work actively with parents to make the home a center of learning.**

In high-poverty schools, a lack of parental involvement is often the first excuse for poor performance. Effective principals overcome this excuse by extending the mission of the school into the home.

Principals of high-performing schools *establish contracts* with parents to support their children's efforts to learn. In order to harness the benefits of parental support and motivation, effective principals teach parents to read to their children, check their homework, and ask after their assignments. In the end, however, each student, not a child's parents, is held accountable for his or her own success.

More than almost anything else, an outstanding school is a source of pride, a wellspring of joy, and a force for stability in an impoverished community. Great principals work with parents to make this happen.

### **Effort creates ability.**

Time on task is the key to progress in time. School is hard work, and great principals demand that their students work hard. Extended days, extended years, after-school programs, weekend programs, and summer school are all features of outstanding schools. None wastes time.

Effective principals eliminate social promotion. Students must fulfill very specific course requirements in order to advance either in class or on to the next grade level. No student is advanced without a clear demonstration of mastery.

Effective principals reject the notion that teaching is an 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. job. They expect the same of their teachers.

### **NOTES:**

<sup>1</sup>William L. Sanders and June C. Rivers, *Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement*, University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, 1996, p. 6.



## Irwin Kurz

P.S. 161—The Crown School

Grades: K-8

Students: 1,342

Low-income: 98%

National Percentile in Reading: 71

National Percentile in Math: 78<sup>1</sup>

When Irwin Kurz came to the Crown School 13 years ago, Crown's scores sat in the bottom quartile of District 17 in Brooklyn. Now they stand proudly as the best in the district and rank 40th out of 674 elementary schools in all of New York City.<sup>2</sup>

Kurz says, "It's a lot of garbage that poor kids can't succeed."

Although they have to pack their students 35 to a classroom, the teachers at Crown refuse to make class size an excuse for poor performance. More than 80 percent of kindergartners at Crown are readers, and the level of achievement only improves from there.

In 1996, Kurz added a selective middle school called the Crown School of Law and Journalism.<sup>3</sup> Now the 6th grade at Crown has the second highest reading scores in all of New York.<sup>4</sup> Taken together, the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades this year scored in the 93rd percentile in reading and in the 96th in math.<sup>5</sup> Last year, the entire 8th grade passed the algebra Regents—84 percent with distinction.<sup>6</sup>

Crown is a neighborhood elementary school made up of 91 percent black and 8 percent Latino children who come from Crown Heights, an area of Brooklyn rightly proud of its Caribbean influences but working hard to overcome the turmoil of its recent riots. From the outside, you could never tell that you were looking at one of the best schools around.

P.S. 161—  
The Crown School  
330 Crown Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11224  
718.756.3100

***Now the 6th grade  
at Crown has the  
second highest  
reading scores in  
all of New York.***

Inside, however, the signs of accomplishment are everywhere. In stark contrast to the world around it, Crown is a study in success that promotes achievement at every turn. Every square inch of hallway groans under the weight of student projects, presentations, book reports, and the certificates of excellence they have received. "The physical plant has to show the kids that you care about them," Kurz remarks. The sparkling corridors shimmer with waxed floor reflections of the lights overhead and the awards that line the walls.

Crown is a shamelessly proud institution that looks and feels like a private school from the moment you cross the threshold. Even the plaid-uniformed students sport navy sweaters with an ornate Crown insignia emblazoned on the chest. "It's pretentious, but I want it that way," Kurz says with a wry smile. "We're trying to make a very special school for these children."

The school is clearly the product of Kurz's design. Its order, efficiency, and calm self-assurance all are reflections of the man who put them in place. Yet Kurz maintains that nothing at Crown is unobtainable elsewhere. "High expectations aren't enough," he says. "You have to *intend* on actually getting the job done. If you really intend on doing it, it will happen." When Kurz instituted the school uniforms, for example, he simply sent out a letter notifying the parents where to pick them up.

Don't be mistaken: Kurz is exceedingly hardworking and equally well-organized. He gets to work by 6:15 each morning and is able to eliminate many of that day's problems before anyone else even knows they exist. "It's the easiest way to build morale in a school," he says. "If you solve the little problems, they'll trust you with the big picture."

As a reflection of this thinking, Kurz makes sure that success comes early and often to his students. Children who don't succeed in the earliest years are quick to believe that they are ill-equipped for school. In response, Kurz established literacy in kindergarten as a hallmark of his program. "If we let them, children will attribute any failure in school to a lack of natural ability. Here we teach them that hard work creates ability." As readers in kindergarten, children at Crown quickly become accustomed to hard work and to real ability.

At Crown, classrooms literally overflow with books. Blouke Carus, President of Open Court Publishing, says Crown is

the best Open Court school in the country. Much more than the school's implementation of the Open Court phonics curriculum makes this so. Irwin Kurz has figured out how to develop the reading habit.

Kindergartners who can read and older students who write five book reports each year get a certificate hung on the wall and a button they can wear on their uniform. They are the members of the Principal's Reading Club. A monthly newspaper of student book reviews called *By-Lines* keeps the school abuzz with book talk. A weekly book sale is the center of school life. Over 2,600 books were sold in the two days before Christmas, with thousands more sold throughout the year. All books are sold at a loss for \$1 each—fund-raisers cover the balance. Student advertising executives and inventory clerks earn bookstore pay to buy their own books in exchange for their work promoting and running the store. The bookstore is a tabletop.

As Kurz is quick to explain, success at Crown is primarily the work of a well-integrated staff. In all grade levels, children are assigned to a single teacher for all instruction, but the improvement of instruction is a collective responsibility shared by the entire faculty. Kurz instituted a system of peer evaluation where teachers on the same grade level observe each other solely to improve each other's teaching. The sense of professionalism among the staff is palpable.

Kurz is himself a teacher turned principal, who understands that teachers must be free to adapt their styles to the needs of their students. He believes that only the individual teacher knows what is best for the classroom and that real teacher autonomy and respect for individual teaching style are necessary to bring it out. The wide variety in classroom layout, decoration, and design shows a vibrant practice at work. It is Kurz's job to supply his teachers with whatever they need to improve their instruction, even if that means finding funds for outside seminars or additional supplies. In exchange, Kurz expects results. The average tenure at the school is 15 years.

Testing is the key to Crown's internal assessment. Mock tests in reading and mathematics are administered in December, January, and March. Teachers receive the results immediately and then tutor the children based on an exact portfolio of individual needs. Within two or three days, students requiring remediation are assigned to one of the 26 paraprofessional tutors on staff. Kurz is the test hawk behind this

*Kurz maintains that nothing at Crown is unobtainable elsewhere.*

data-driven approach. "You have to set clear and measurable objectives for everyone," Kurz notes. "I don't know what other people use. We use tests." Of the 100 students who received tutoring after one such recent mock test—50 children in reading and 50 in math—99 passed when test day came around.

With genuine humility, Kurz says his job doesn't amount to much: He might set the goal, but it is for the others to reach it. He says quite frankly, "My teachers do all the work."

#### **NOTES:**

<sup>1</sup>California Test of Basic Skills and California Achievement Test-5, Spring 1998. Provided by P.S. 161 for grades 3-8.

<sup>2</sup>Provided by New York City Board of Education, Division of Assessment and Accountability, Test Analysis Unit.

<sup>3</sup>Grades PK-5 at Crown average around 215 students each. The Crown School of Law and Journalism accepts the best applicants from the same neighborhood: Grades 6-8 average around 55 students each.

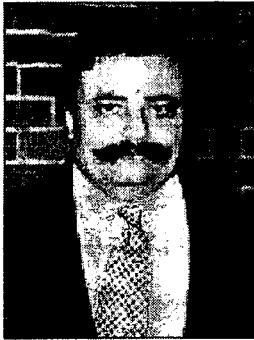
<sup>4</sup>Randal C. Archibold, "The Top Schools," *The New York Times*, April 11, 1999, sec. 1, p. 34. See *Separate and Unequal: The Reading Gap in New York's Elementary Schools*, Public Policy Institute of New York State, March 1998, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup>California Test of Basic Skills and California Achievement Test-5, Spring 1998. Provided by New York City Board of Education, Division of Assessment and Accountability.

<sup>6</sup>*New York City Board of Education 1997-1998 Annual School Report*, "P.S. 161—The Crown School," p. 6. See <http://207.127.202.63/>.

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# Gregory Hodge

Frederick Douglass Academy

Grades: 7-12

Students: 1,030

Low-income: 80%

National Percentile in Reading: 73

National Percentile in Math: 81<sup>1</sup>

Maverick school principal Lorraine Monroe established the Frederick Douglass Academy in 1991 on the site of a failed middle school in central Harlem in order to prove that low-income, inner-city minority children could match any standard of achievement in the land. She was right.

Within a few years of FDA's founding, its high school Regents scores in English, U.S. History, and Pre-Calculus rivaled those of New York exam school powerhouses, Stuyvesant and Bronx Science. Last year, 93 percent of FDA students who took the U.S. History Regents passed, compared to 58 percent across the city. Similar scores were made in English and Pre-Calculus with passing rates of 88 and 87 percent, respectively. In the Global History Regents, a two-year survey course of world civilizations considered by many the most challenging New York State exam, 95 percent of 166 FDA students passed, compared to the citywide average of 54 percent passing.<sup>2</sup>

Even after a slight decline last year, the middle school test scores ranked 12<sup>th</sup> out of 235 in New York City, 32 percentage points higher than the city average in reading and 26 points higher in math.<sup>3</sup>

Gregory Hodge took over from Monroe in 1996. Committed to extending Monroe's vision of educational opportunity, Hodge's goal is to get every graduate a full scholarship to

Frederick Douglass  
Academy  
2581 Adam Clayton  
Powell, Jr. Blvd.  
New York, NY 1003  
212.491.4107

College preparation at FDA now begins in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.... students are even required to make a certain number of college visits each year.

college. College preparation at FDA now begins in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. A required program in test preparation, post secondary research writing, and college counseling keeps the children steadily focused on their collegiate future. Again, beginning in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, students are even required to make a certain number of college visits each year.

The program is working. The school will graduate its largest class of 123 students this year sending them to Yale, Princeton, Cornell, Dartmouth, Duke, Tufts, Amherst, and the best of the traditionally black colleges, including: Morehouse, Lincoln, Morris Brown, and Xavier.

The intersection of 149<sup>th</sup> Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue used to be a proud center of black America. Stylishly dressed professionals strolled the boulevard on their way to the vogue theaters that produced the jazz greats of the be-bop era and the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes was a teacher here. Now, the embattled bunker of a school squats above the noise of the Lenox terminal subway station with only the grime of a full service car wash across the street to keep it company. Yet, amid this scene, pride is alive in Harlem.

In a hurry to get to class on time, the students pour through the front doors of the Academy inspecting their uniforms in the lobby mirrors as they pass by. Hodge pulls a few aside to say hello and then sends them off as they pass muster. Overhead, they are greeted by a mural of Frederick Douglass and a single-line from the self-educated slave turned abolitionist: "without struggle, there is no progress."

"That's what we're about," says Hodge, as if he might well conclude his tour of the school at its entranceway. "Without an education these children are slaves to the world they live in. With real learning, there's no end to what they might do."

Frederick Douglass is a local public school of choice that draws 80 percent of its students from Harlem's District 5 with the rest accepted on the basis of an interview and two written recommendations. A reflection of the local neighborhood, the student body is 79 percent black, 20 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent Asian or white.<sup>4</sup> Hodge makes an effort to open his doors to all students, but you have to *choose* FDA. "If you're not interested in hard work, then FDA's not for you," Hodge remarks candidly. "It's pretty self-selecting."

In order to establish the disciplined and orderly environment that characterizes FDA, Monroe drew up the school's

now famous "12 non-negotiables" and insisted upon a school uniform. Ranging from the banal "gum chewing and candy are prohibited" to the hortatory "learn to disagree without being disagreeable," the non-negotiables clearly dictate that school is a place where respect for one's self, one's associates, and everyone's property is a necessary prerequisite to academic success. Parents agree to enforce their child's commitment to the non-negotiables and to the rigors of a college preparatory education. The school is permitted to dismiss students who fail to comply. As for the uniforms, Monroe has memorably said, "it gets the children to focus on what's in their heads, not on their backs."<sup>5</sup>

Like Monroe, Hodge believes that discipline emerges from a clearly defined school culture focused on academics. He has recently introduced a student creed based on one from Morehouse College. According to the creed, "the community of scholars at FDA is dedicated to personal and academic excellence." This school-wide commitment to excellence and to behavior that is becoming of the school, the students call being 'Academy.' Hodge says, "the world around them openly rejects their commitment to excellence. That's why we expect them to be Academy twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. No exceptions."

Hodge wants to set his students up for success. If he had the funding, he would keep the school open from 6:30am to 10pm daily. "By giving students a safe place you may be able to increase performance. We do everything we can to help, but we place the burden on them to get the job done." For now the school is open from 7:30am to 8pm weekdays and from 9am to 4pm on Saturdays for S.A.T. preparation, AP Calculus, AP Physics, AP English, and other academic subjects.

According to Hodge, you won't get improved performance in any areas unless you expect the highest level of performance across the board. "You have to demand more of your students while providing them with the structure to meet those demands. The more difficult the curriculum, the greater the likelihood your students will be successful."

Despite extraordinarily limited resources, no activity goes wanting at FDA. A mandatory year of music theory and technique for every child in the school yields a string orchestra, a pop ensemble, and a variety of jazz combos. The school also fields nineteen sports teams including a fencing club.

Hodge says, "The more difficult the curriculum, the greater the likelihood your students will be successful."

Among a population of students the education establishment would earmark for failure, Hodge only speaks of success. He demands that everyone on his staff does the same. "Everyone—students, teachers, parents, and the surrounding community—all believe that FDA can produce scholars," he says, "and we have." Teachers have to buy into the school culture that Hodge is creating or they won't last long. "The whole school is focused on college. Every student is going to college. Every teacher is teaching a future college graduate. If you don't believe that, then I don't believe you're welcome here."

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>California Test of Basic Skills and California Achievement Test-5, Spring 1998, for grades 7–8 only. Grades 9–12 at FDA take the New York Regents, which are not nationally normed. Provided by New York City Board of Education, Division of Assessment and Accountability.

<sup>2</sup>*Overview of Examination Results and Related Statistics for the 1997–1998 School Year*, "Frederick Douglass Academy." Provided by Office of Educational Technology of the Office of the Chief Executive for School Programs and Support Services.

<sup>3</sup>Provided by Frederick Douglass Academy based on New York Board of Regents report on the Manhattan Superintendentcy. Eighty-two percent of the middle school were above passing in reading compared to the citywide average of 49.6 percent passing; 88.9 percent of the middle school were above passing in math compared to the citywide average of 63.1 percent passing.

<sup>4</sup>*Overview of Statistics and Performance Results for the 1997–1998 School Year*, "Frederick Douglass Academy." Provided by Office of Educational Technology of the Office of the Chief Executive for School Programs and Support Services.

<sup>5</sup>Dana Parnell, "From a Brokendown School to a Prestigious Harlem Academy," *Manufacturer's Association of Northwest Pennsylvania Business Report*, November 1997, p. 7.



## Michael Feinberg

KIPP Academy

Grades: 5-9

Students: 270

Low-income: 95%

National Percentile in Reading: 61

National Percentile in Math: 81<sup>1</sup>



## David Levin

KIPP Academy

Grades: 5-8

Students: 223

Low-income: 95%

National Percentile in Reading: 69

National Percentile in Math: 81<sup>2</sup>

"There are no shortcuts." This simple motto is the heart of the KIPP Academy in Houston. Nine-and-a-half-hour days, class on Saturday, school during the summer, and more than two hours of homework each night are all non-negotiable. KIPP teaches that if you want to succeed in life, you have to work hard in school. And KIPP delivers on its promise.

For the past four years running, 5th graders with 50 percent passing rates on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills have jumped to over 90 percent passing in both math and reading in their first year at the school.<sup>3</sup> After the first year, KIPP has a passing rate of virtually 100 percent in all grades and all disciplines, making it the highest-performing middle school in the Houston Independent School district. Its students are largely the children of immigrant Latino workers who come from the Gulfton area of southwest Houston. Almost the entire school qualifies for the free or reduced price lunch, and 90 percent are Hispanic.

Michael Feinberg and David Levin were two Teach for America teachers whose elementary students in Houston were failing. Like so many poor urban children, their students were prey to drugs, gangs, and a cycle of despair. In order to break

KIPP Academy  
7120 Beechnut  
Houston, TX 77074  
713.541.2561

KIPP Academy  
250 East 156 Street  
Room 418  
Bronx, NY 10451  
718.665.3555

All told, KIPPsters spend 67 percent more time in the classroom than the average public school student.

that cycle, Feinberg and Levin made college the goal. They started the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) in 1994 out of a single classroom in Garcia Elementary as an academically rigorous college preparatory program for 5th graders. Now a charter school that has plans to establish other schools under its direction, KIPP is located on a campus of 12 trailers parked just beyond the baseball fields of Houston Baptist University.

Time on task is sacred at KIPP. "If you're off the bus, you're working," says Feinberg, the no-nonsense director of the school whose boyish grin clashes oddly with his shaven head and six-foot-four frame. His charm is equally disarming; he is clearly liked by his students. Casually uniformed children wearing T-shirts indicating their class year wave to him as they hustle from trailer to trailer cycling through the various disciplines of the school's liberal arts curriculum. "What year are you going to college?" Feinberg calls out to the 5th graders around him. All in unison, they cry at the top of their lungs: "2006!"

All told, KIPPsters spend 67 percent more time in the classroom than the average public school student.<sup>4</sup> Each morning, students receive a worksheet of math, logic, and word problems for them to solve in the free minutes that appear throughout the day. "We wanted the kids to do something while we checked their work, so we came up with the worksheets," Feinberg explains. "It's all a work in progress. You have to come up with ways to meet your needs and constantly improve your teaching. We're every bit as much a school for teachers as we are a school for students."

Before founding KIPP, Feinberg and Levin scoured the country for the best teaching practices available, hoping that studying success would enable them to replicate it most effectively. Rafe Esquith, the 1992 Disney Teacher of the Year, was so important to their earliest thinking that KIPP still underwrites the travel costs of any teacher who wishes to visit him at Hobart Elementary in Los Angeles. As another example, the spectacular gains that KIPPsters make in their first year are in part the result of a dynamic teaching method that Feinberg and Levin learned from Harriett Ball, a teacher from Houston. Singing songs choreographed with movements to aid their memorization, the children quickly learn the math and language concepts they need to catch up with their peers. "We then take that success and make it a way of life," Feinberg remarks.

This being said, Feinberg maintains that no one teaching method is responsible for the school's achievement. Rather, the whole KIPP framework is built around maximizing teaching time and teacher accountability. Teachers are free to teach as they see fit, but they also are personally accountable to the director of the school for the individual progress of their students. "We put no limits on what teachers can do here," Feinberg says. "But their signed commitment to excellence makes them morally and contractually obligated to see that their students succeed. They know they *have* to teach until the kids get it."

KIPP students, parents, and teachers all sign a commitment "to do whatever it takes to learn." Teachers carry cellphones with toll-free numbers and are on call 24 hours a day to answer any concerns their students might have. "Ten calls a night might sound like a drag," says Feinberg, "but everyone goes to bed ready for school the next day."

Between the signed contract and the program's rigorous expectations, Feinberg sees that his parents have made a deal with him. "I can go to them if I need help with their children. In exchange, they can come to me if they need help keeping the roof over their heads." As part of this deal, KIPP faculty regularly visit students in their homes and, when necessary, teach parents the importance of checking their children's homework, reading with them, and supporting their college aspirations. And yes, the school also holds workshops on home ownership.

The KIPP formula already has been replicated successfully in the South Bronx. David Levin left Houston after the first year at Garcia Elementary, and now KIPP in New York is the highest-performing middle school program in the five districts that comprise the Bronx. A neighborhood school that is 45 percent black and 55 percent Latino, KIPP is housed in the same building and draws from the same population as I.S. 151, the lowest-performing school in the district.<sup>5</sup> The average reading score after two years of KIPP is in the 64th percentile. After three years, that average skyrockets to the 78th percentile.<sup>6</sup> Math scores at KIPP average in the 79th and 82nd percentiles after two and three years, respectively.<sup>7</sup>

If you go looking for KIPP, you'll have a hard time finding it. No signs anywhere announce its whereabouts, except for the signature "There are no shortcuts!" banner that hangs outside the fourth-floor wing that the school shares with a

**KIPP students, parents, and teachers all sign a commitment "to do whatever it takes to learn."**

citywide special education program. Confounding matters still more, KIPP's test scores are kept aggregated with those of another school, P.S. 156, making them impossible to find through official channels. "This arrangement is what allows us to exist," Levin states without insinuation. "Call it a price on our independence." And a heavy price it is: KIPP receives money from the Board of Education only for faculty salaries; Levin has to raise the rest of its funding independently.

At lunch on any given day, the same children eating the same food at the same time and in the same room are a portrait in contrast. On one side of the room, the KIPP students, all but two in attendance, are seated in order and eat while they talk in quiet, conversational tones. On the other side of the same room, chaos is breaking out. Although a full one-third of the students are missing, lunch parents scream at the children through bullhorns, trying desperately to maintain control. Only the KIPP commitment to excellence distinguishes one side of the room from the other.

Because of their radically different settings, KIPP in New York has made significant departures in style from its sister school in Houston. The achievement of both schools, however, is clearly the result of dedicated teaching and instructional innovation. KIPP's phenomenal success in mathematics, for example, is the work of Frank Corcoran, who came with Levin from Houston to found the new academy. Interestingly, no textbook on the market today teaches math concepts in the sequence in which they are taught at KIPP.

And then there's the music.

Outside of academics, the string orchestra is the centerpiece of KIPP in New York. In the past few years, the orchestra's reputation for excellence has helped the school raise over \$70,000 to outfit its students with violas, violins, cellos, basses, and an array of percussion instruments. Everyone in the school studies music. Everyone plays in the orchestra.

KIPP demonstrates what is possible. But both Feinberg and Levin believe that to replicate KIPP on a national scale would require a pool of educators that does not exist today. "In two communities that have nothing in common but a group of children abandoned by the establishment, we have opened schools that work," says Levin. "But what we do isn't easy. First, we need to find a way to make this level of commitment the standard. Then we need to make it attractive, livable, and affordable for teachers."



## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>Stanford-9 Achievement Test, December 1998. Provided by KIPP Academy.

<sup>2</sup>California Test of Basic Skills and California Achievement Test-5, Spring 1998. Provided by KIPP Academy.

<sup>3</sup>Provided by KIPP Academy based on Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System. These gains vary from year to year depending on the incoming students' prior rates of progress. The 1998 6th grade class, for example, had a passing rate of 35 percent and 33 percent on math and reading as incoming 5th graders. The next year, that same class had 93 percent and 92 percent passing rates. In 1998, 100 percent of the class passed in math and 97 percent passed in reading.

<sup>4</sup>This figure assumes the average public middle school student is in class 180 days a year from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. with a half-hour break for lunch and another for recess.

<sup>5</sup>See *New York City Board of Education Annual School Report 1997-1998*, "The Henry Lou Gehrig School—I.S. 151."

<sup>6</sup>These multi-year results are provided by KIPP Academy based on the California Test of Basic Skills administered by the New York City Board of Education. These gains cannot be verified easily by the New York City Board of Education because 5th grade KIPP results are not disaggregated from the test scores of P.S. 156.

<sup>7</sup>These multi-year results are provided by KIPP Academy based on the California Achievement Test-5 administered by the New York City Board of Education. These gains cannot be verified easily by the New York City Board of Education because 5th grade KIPP results are not disaggregated from the test scores of P.S. 156. The Division of Assessment and Accountability, however, can verify 6th and 7th grade mean scores of 81st and 85th percentile. P.S. 156 ends at 5th grade.

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*Nationwide, 58 percent of low-income 4th graders in the United States cannot read. This national tragedy does not have to be. The seven Salvatori winners show that all children can excel academically regardless of race, income level, or family background. All seven of their schools score at or above the 65th percentile on nationally norm-referenced exams even though 75 percent or more of their students qualify for the free or reduced price lunch.*

—From the Introduction



## Nancy Ichinaga

Bennett-Kew Elementary School

Grades: K-5

Students: 836

Low-income: 78%

National Percentile in Reading: 58

National Percentile in Math: 67<sup>1</sup>

When Nancy Ichinaga became principal of Andrew Bennett Elementary in 1974, 95 percent of her school was illiterate. In only four years, she raised the school-wide reading performance from the 3rd to the 50th percentile in the State of California. After that, achievement kept on climbing, and for 20 years, her school has been one of the highest performers in all of Los Angeles County. A mastery of reading in kindergarten is one of the keys to her success.

"As elementary school teachers," Ichinaga says, "our primary mission is to make children literate." Ichinaga has stuck to the principles she and her staff agreed upon in 1974. They determined that they needed a good reading program that had a systematic decoding component. In addition, they needed a teaching method that would make all children accountable and responsible learners beginning in the earliest years.

Beginning in kindergarten, all children in her school are taught to read and write English and are promoted according to clearly defined standards of achievement per grade level. Even kindergartners are held back if they don't meet the promotion requirement. "One of our most successful interventions has been to require kindergartners to know all the letter sounds and to be able to blend three letters to read words," Ichinaga explains. The neediest kindergartners are given an extra year before 1st grade to guarantee from the beginning

Bennett-Kew  
Elementary School  
11710 Cherry Ave.  
Inglewood, CA 90308  
310.419.2501

**In 1986, Ichinaga ... fought and prevailed against a state ruling that required whole-language reading instruction in all California schools.**

that promotion is tied to achievement. "These children generally become successful 1st graders the following year," Ichinaga notes, "thereby preventing any cycle of school failure from beginning."

The school is now bringing additional firepower to kindergarten in the form of a supplementary computer program that claims to make up for 3,000 hours of pre-reading experiences that children need to become successful readers. In its first trial year, the program seems to have advanced four out of six children who otherwise might have needed the extra year of kindergarten.

In 1986, Ichinaga organized her parents in support of her methods when she fought and prevailed against a state ruling that required whole-language reading instruction in all California schools. The State Curriculum Commission rejected reading programs like hers that had a systematic phonics component, thus forbidding her use of state funds to purchase these textbooks. Six weeks after her parents papered the Commission with protest letters, her texts were placed on the approval list.

Not even the building of the Century Freeway, which in 1992 merged Bennett with the James Kew school, has stalled her school's achievement. Although Bennett-Kew now draws many of its students from a part of urban Inglewood fraught with drugs, violence, and crime, Ichinaga is no less committed to her students' success.

"We believe every child can learn," she says. "You've already lost if you begin making excuses, so our school culture is different. Here it's simple: If you have a complaint, give me a solution."

Bilingual education has been another point of contention. Although 50 percent of her school is Hispanic and a full 30 percent have limited English proficiency, no one is segregated out to a bilingual program. According to Ichinaga, her school is allowed to do this because of an "achievement based excuse" that she gained from the State Department of Education. But this waiver did not come easily.

In 1993, a state compliance team learned that Ichinaga's school was in violation of the state's bilingual mandates and threatened to withdraw the school's Title I funding. After three years of filing for exemptions, Ichinaga finally received a waiver based on her school's high test scores and the English

fluency of her students. Without interruption, Tongan, Thai, and Spanish language students have been taught exclusively in English at Bennett-Kew and accelerated based on their individual abilities. California's recently passed Proposition 227 has lifted the bilingual constraint allowing the practice at Bennett-Kew to be the norm.

For years, Bennett-Kew students have also been district leaders in math. All students learn math concepts that are typically well above their grade level. This year, the 3rd graders averaged in the 80th percentile on the Stanford-9.<sup>2</sup> All math instruction rigorously follows a monthly schedule that is enforced through regular unit tests. The results of these tests allow teachers to regroup and re-teach the students based on their individual mastery of the concepts.

Ichinaga believes that grade-level team teaching is one of the keys to their success. In this way, the teachers work together to improve each other's skills, and master teachers are close at hand to refine a younger teacher's implementation of the curriculum. "We want experts in Open Court, experts in Saxon math," she says. "We talk about the details of implementation all the time."

When a specific grade level is not working cohesively, Ichinaga personally works with the team and gives them extra time to put their program back on track. "Out of this forum teacher leaders naturally arise," she notes. Already, she has sent three of her teachers off to principalships in other schools and believes another three or four are currently among her staff.

Professional satisfaction is another clear benefit of her methods. Sixteen teachers now on staff either have children in the school or did in the past. Ichinaga even sent two of her grandchildren to the school. Two teachers and four aides are alumni. The average teacher tenure at Bennett-Kew is 16 years.

In grades 2-5, in addition to the regular curriculum, a gifted and talented program offers certain students enrichment activities including research projects, science presentations, art, poetry, music, dance, and leadership training. "We'd gladly put our top 25 percent against any in the country," Ichinaga says, but that's not the point. These elite students are successful because her mission is to secure the success of the entire school. "We believe that all students at every level can be successful in a common, comprehensive, academically

All students learn math concepts that are typically well above their grade level. This year, the 3rd graders averaged in the 80th percentile on the Stanford-9.

oriented curriculum. We believe this irrespective of primary language or ethnic background.”

And she puts her money where her mouth is. After the most recent Stanford-9 results showed a falling off in 4th grade reading, Ichinaga directed all of her resources into that class and personally pulled 15 students for specialized instruction. “We believe all children can learn. And they do.”

**NOTES:**

<sup>1</sup>Stanford-9 Achievement Test, Spring 1998. Provided by California Department of Education, Standardized Testing and Reporting Program. See <http://star.cde.ca.gov/>.

<sup>2</sup>Stanford-9 Achievement Test, Spring 1998. Provided by California Department of Education, Standardized Testing and Reporting Program.



# Hellen DeBerry

Earhart Elementary

Grades: PK-6

Students: 265

Low-income: 82%

National Percentile in Reading: 70

National Percentile in Math: 80<sup>1</sup>

Anyone who thinks that low-performing, underfunded, poorly provisioned elementary schools can't be turned around has never met Hellen DeBerry. In her seven-year tenure as principal of Earhart Elementary in Calumet Heights, she made one of Chicago's desperately poor inner-city schools into the envy of the suburbs.

The Chicago public school system is, of course, still reeling from Secretary of Education William J. Bennett's claim that it was "the worst in the nation."<sup>2</sup> Although significant improvements have been made in recent years, 65 percent of Chicago's 433,000 students still score below the national average in reading.<sup>3</sup>

In the midst of this educational wasteland, Earhart proves what is possible. Between 1991 and 1998, the percentage of children in the entire school scoring at or above the national average soared 52 points in reading and 46 points in math.<sup>4</sup> To take the 6th grade as but one example, during that same period, the class national percentile ranking shot from 40th to 78th in reading and from 27th to 85th in math.<sup>5</sup>

Earhart Elementary is housed in a tiny, one-floor, tan brick building on the far southside of Chicago. Although the school may use a random lottery to draw up to 50 percent of its children from beyond the neighborhood, it is 99 percent black and 1 percent Latino. Eighty-two percent of the children qualify for the free and reduced lunch program.<sup>6</sup>

Earhart Elementary  
1710 E 93rd Street  
Chicago, IL 60617  
773.535.6416

**"Our mission was to provide every child with the well-rounded education necessary to make a responsible citizen."**

In 1991, the Board of Education slated Earhart for closure. With only 135 children enrolled, the school was so desperate for students that it advertised vacancies in the local post office and Pizza Hut. Earhart didn't even have its own principal; it was a branch of Hoyne Elementary, which administered the school from a half-mile away.

Under the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988, branch schools were to be newly established with their own local school councils responsible for selecting their own school principals. Luckily, Earhart had an active and interested council eagerly looking to take advantage of this greater independence, and set out to find a principal who could establish an Afro-centric school with a concentration in math and science.

Hellen DeBerry, a former teacher, reading specialist, and assistant principal at Paderewski Elementary, got the job. When she arrived, there was no reading program in kindergarten and no significant writing anywhere in the curriculum, and most of the learning was of a mundane skill-based sort that could never lead to the advanced curriculum in math and science that the council had envisioned. In response, DeBerry quickly educated her council on the school's specific needs and laid out a five-year plan to make Earhart the best school in Chicago.

First, she reestablished the school under the city's "options for knowledge" designation which allows a school to draw from beyond its local neighborhood. Keeping the Afro-centric emphasis that the council wanted, DeBerry envisioned Earhart as a school for the humanities that would first address the language arts and then move on to improving its math, sciences, and social sciences until a full liberal arts curriculum was in place. "The Afro-centric program was a means to an end. It wasn't the main focus," DeBerry notes. "Our mission was to provide every child with the well-rounded education necessary to make a responsible citizen." Reading became her top priority.

Her program concentrated not on reading methods, but on reading *comprehension*, and on developing classrooms that met the learning style of every student in the school. Phonics, sight-words, and literature-based approaches to reading were all brought together into a cohesive program that placed literacy at the center of school life.



DeBerry devoted an hour and a half each morning exclusively to reading. During this reading period, she canceled all physical education, music, art, and library hours so that the entire support staff could assist with the program. Committed to ongoing and universal staff development, DeBerry made sure that everyone in the school received sufficient training to teach the children how to read.

In line with DeBerry's vision to make Earhart a school for the humanities, this reading hour developed a love of literature in the children. At Earhart, literature is emphasized in all subjects and provides a basis for that interdisciplinary approach to study so characteristic of excellent programs in the humanities. Grammar and basic essay composition lead quickly to higher-level research writing by the 2nd grade. Monthly oral presentations provide ample opportunities for public speaking. A Junior Great Books program, complete with literary seminars, gives the children a sophisticated forum for the development of their higher-order thinking skills and art of conversation.

DeBerry believes that children will always exceed your expectations of them. "All of our children are expected to work above grade level and to learn for the sake of learning," she says simply. "We instill a desire to overachieve. Give us an average child and we'll make him an overachiever." Last year's 6th grade was reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* while another class was writing its own stage play based on the story of the slave ship *Amistad*.

In an environment fraught with failure and plagued by excuses protecting poor performance, DeBerry's commitment to excellence is unequivocal. "Economic status has nothing to do with intellectual ability," she declares flatly. "You have to set your standards regardless of constituency. Provide the free meals to those who need them, but keep your academic standards."

DeBerry invites parents to school, both to enlist their support and to show them what they can do to help their children succeed in school. But never does she let family background get in the way: "You can't rely on parental involvement without it potentially becoming an excuse. Instead, we make the child responsible. Here, children learn there are consequences for their actions." The only alternative to this, DeBerry explains, is an instructional program weakened by a principal's attention to secondary matters. "We let our chil-

"Economic status has nothing to do with intellectual ability.... Provide the free meals to those who need them, but keep your academic standards."

dren understand that so many opportunities are available even if their parents can't or won't help. We talk a lot about the future, about good role models, and about careers. A school environment of achievement itself removes many obstacles."

Finding students is no longer a problem at Earhart; if anything, the school needs to find more space. The school has doubled in size since 1991 and has plans to expand to 8th grade later this year. DeBerry, however, has moved on. She now works for the Chicago public school system as a troubleshooter helping to turn around other schools.

#### **NOTES:**

<sup>1</sup>Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Spring 1998. Provided by Board of Education of the City of Chicago, Office of Accountability, Department of Research Assessment and Quality Reviews. See <http://webdata.cps.k12.il.us/>.

<sup>2</sup>November 1987. See William J. Bennett, *The De-Valuing of America* (New York: Summit Books, 1992), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Paul G. Vallas, "Saving Public Schools," Center for Educational Innovation, December 9, 1998, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>The educational research organization Designs for Change has prepared a complete report on improved reading achievement in the Chicago public school system for a slightly different period. Of the 111 schools that substantially increased the percentage of children reading at or above the national average between 1990 and 1997, the Earhart Elementary school topped the list. See Designs for Change, "What Makes These Schools Stand Out," October 1997, pp. 5-11.

<sup>5</sup>Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Spring 1998. Provided by Board of Education of the City of Chicago.

<sup>6</sup>Provided by Board of Education of the City of Chicago. Earhart's lottery does not significantly change the demographics of its student body, largely because the entire school system is one of the most segregated in the country. In the entire Chicago system of 569 schools, 90 percent of the children are minority and 84 percent are low-income. See Paul G. Vallas, "Saving Public Schools," Center for Educational Innovation, December 9, 1998, p. 1.



## Ernestine Sanders

Cornerstone Schools Association

Grades: PK-8

Students: 625

Low-income: 75%

National Percentile in Reading: 65

National Percentile in Math: 51<sup>1</sup>

Founded in 1991 in response to a challenge issued by archbishop Adam Cardinal Maida to provide better educational opportunities for the children of Detroit, the first of these "Christ-centered" schools was up and running less than a year after it was first conceived. Since then, Cornerstone has blossomed into a privately owned mini-school district of three elementary schools and one middle school providing outstanding education to some of Detroit's poorest children. With its rolling admissions policy, Cornerstone tries to accept all interested students regardless of skill level, IQ, or special needs. The schools are nearly 100 percent black.

A Cornerstone education follows an academically rigorous, liberal arts curriculum deeply infused with character education to make what Ernestine Sanders, the President and CEO of the Cornerstone Schools Association, calls "an education where knowledge is centered in truth."

A clear record of achievement is in the making. Although the national percentile ranking of all four schools in math comes in just above the national average, last year's 3rd graders scored in the 69th percentile. As for reading, Cornerstone's scores are especially impressive in the earliest years, with the kindergartners and the 1st graders scoring in the 81st and 74th percentiles, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

To get these results, the schools emphasize real learning beginning with the youngest children. A pre-school program

Cornerstone School:  
Association  
6861 East Nevada  
Detroit, MI 48234  
313.892.1860

The greatest hallmark of this outreach to the home is the signed "covenant" that each parent makes with the school.

centered on phonics instruction and number awareness identifies the children with the greatest needs and provides them with the intensive instruction necessary to prepare them for success at Cornerstone.<sup>3</sup> Foreign language is studied every year at Cornerstone beginning in kindergarten.

Time in the classroom is especially important at Cornerstone.<sup>4</sup> An 11-month school year extends to the second week in July. For students requiring still more help, or for parents with busy work schedules, supervised study hall is available every day from 7-8 in the morning and 3-6 in the afternoon. Teachers are also provided with extra time each month to develop their lesson plans, attend workshops, and observe outside teaching methods.

Cornerstone emphasizes both the moral and academic development of the child. As Ernestine Sanders says, "At his core, a citizen is not a good citizen without virtue, without integrity, without honor, without a love for another. Cornerstone in its humble way wants every child to leave us with what it takes to be a functioning member of our world." By design, a Cornerstone education works in concert with a child's family and community to make good American citizens.

The greatest hallmark of this outreach to the home is the signed "covenant" that each parent makes with the school. More than a written contract, as Sanders says, the covenant is a bond that is "rooted in God's love for every person" and commits each parent to the spiritual, social, and academic excellence of the child. At Cornerstone, the success of its students is the joint mission of the children, their parents, and the school working as one.

Cornerstone also demonstrates how old resources can be made new. One campus in Detroit, leased from the archdiocese, reinvigorates an unoccupied building on the site of the Sacred Heart seminary. Two others are housed in the former Lutheran School for the Deaf, a massive residential facility from a bygone era that is now completely renovated and equipped to accept the latest computer technology. The fourth campus is a wonder of frugality: Operating out of the basement of a Lutheran church, the school serves 110 children in six classrooms.

The conversion of old facilities is one thing, but the key to Cornerstone's success is its people. Sanders and the whole

Cornerstone family have brought together hundreds of business, industry, and community leaders who have a vested interest in making sure the children at Cornerstone succeed. These "partners," as they are called, fund the school through "partnerships," each representing a \$2,000 gift and a personal commitment to meet with the sponsored child four times a year. There are two partnerships per student. Over 500 partners are now in the program, with a 91 percent renewal rate year after year. Some have even sponsored a child's education from kindergarten to 8th grade and are now starting over again sponsoring a different child. Some have partnered with as many as ten children at once.

The actual cost of an 11-month Cornerstone education is \$5,800 per student. Tuition is based on a "pay what you can policy," with a full two-thirds of the school receiving some tuition assistance. The lowest this year is \$300. The average tuition is \$1,200, and the maximum is \$1,950. Cornerstone seeks to nurture a culture of responsibility and ownership. Everybody must pay something.

Between the partnership program and its tuition policy, Cornerstone aims to teach its parents, partners, and students alike that the greatest gift in life is to give of one's self to help another. In this way, Cornerstone's funding mechanism complements an idea both central to the school's educational philosophy and critical to its mission of urban renewal: Change must come from within. "The biggest thing in inner city education is a transformation of attitude," Sanders explains. "Urban settings have low expectations, dilapidated buildings, and deflated children. Here we ask: what high expectations do you have for your own child? What are you willing to do to achieve those expectations? Cornerstone can help make them a reality."

The Cornerstone approach demonstrates to members of local communities that they are the real shareholders in the future of these school children. Their partnerships with the students raise the standard of achievement to a higher level. Sanders says, "When you partner with people of talent and knowledge you raise the level of expectations and the level of what you can give your children." Examples of key community partnerships at Cornerstone include an on-site health clinic, complete with a resident physician, a school agri-science garden project, and an enhanced computer network.

Sanders and the whole Cornerstone family have brought together hundreds of business, industry, and community leaders who have a vested interest in making sure the children at Cornerstone succeed.

Cornerstone was designed from the beginning to be a prototype of educational excellence. Although the school has expanded its own operation successfully, however, Sanders hesitates to say that she has developed a model that can be replicated elsewhere. "Cornerstone is not the answer to all things," she says. "We focus on helping those who come to us. If we can help others, we are certainly willing to try."

**NOTES:**

<sup>1</sup>Stanford-9 Achievement Test, Spring 1998. Provided by Cornerstone Schools Association.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>A trial pilot program before the start of 1997 reveals an achievement gap of between 20 and 30 points between students in the 1st grade who participated in the pre-school program and those who did not. Subsequent results show the continuing positive effect that pre-school has had on the later class work of the participating students. See *Cornerstone Schools 1997 Annual Report*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Cornerstone has been recognized for its effective use of time to help students meet high academic standards. See National Education Commission on Time and Learning, *Prisoners of Time: Schools and Programs Making Time Work for Students and Teachers* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994).



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