IN THEORY, YES:
How Educators of Educators Discuss the Roles and Responsibilities of Communities in Education

Conducted by Public Agenda in Partnership with the Kettering Foundation
October 2014

Kettering Foundation

PUBLIC AGENDA

A report from Public Agenda
in partnership with the Kettering Foundation

Available online at: http://publicagenda.org/pages/in-theory-yes

Public Agenda is a nonprofit organization that helps diverse leaders and citizens navigate divisive, complex issues. Through nonpartisan research and engagement, it provides people with the insights and support they need to arrive at workable solutions on critical issues, regardless of their differences. Since 1975, Public Agenda has helped foster progress on school reform, teacher effectiveness, achievement gaps, parent and community engagement, and other K-12 education issues. Find Public Agenda online at PublicAgenda.org, on Facebook at facebook.com/PublicAgenda and on Twitter at @PublicAgenda.

The Kettering Foundation, established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, is a nonprofit, operating foundation that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. Kettering's primary research question is, what does it take to make democracy work as it should? Kettering's research is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. More information may be found on www.kettering.org.

INTRODUCTION

In some communities, stakeholders – including families, educators, community organizations and businesses – have come together to define problems in education and to find solutions.[1] Some researchers believe that such community-wide engagement and problem-solving efforts are the key to achieving meaningful and long-lasting improvements in public education.[2] However, broad and inclusive community-school partnerships are rare. Instead, we frequently hear about friction between communities and their schools. Education leaders complain about disengaged parents, neighborhoods are outraged over the closing of community schools, policymakers vow to hold teachers accountable and teachers' job satisfaction continues to fall while members of the public lose confidence in public schools.[3]

How can communities work together on the challenge of educating children? What roles and responsibilities do different stakeholders play in education and who can bring those stakeholders to the table? What should educators expect from citizens and communities, and what should citizens and communities expect from their schools?

[1] Medoff, Peter, and Holly Sklar. *Streets of hope: The fall and rise of an urban neighborhood*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1994; Friedman, Will, Alison Kadlec, and Lara Birnback. "*Transforming Public Life: A Decade of Citizen Engagement in Bridgeport, CT*." New York, NY: Center for Advances in Public Engagement, 2007; Poynton, John, Carole Makela, and Don Haddad. "*Organizational training and relationship building for increasing public participation in a public school district*." *Administrative Issues Journal* Forthcoming (2014).

[2] Harbour, Patricia Moore. *Community educators: A resource for educating our youth*. Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2012.

[3] Jones, Jeffrey M. "*Confidence in US Public Schools at New Low*." Princeton NJ: Gallup, 2012. Bushaw, William J., and Shane J. Lopez. "*Which way do we go?*" *The 45th annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*. Arlington, VA: Phi Delta Kappa International, 2013; MetLife. "The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership." New York, NY: Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 2013.

This research

This research sought to better understand barriers and opportunities for citizens and communities to shape their children's education by exploring the perspectives of one influential group of stakeholders: educators of educators. As professionals who train future teachers, principals and superintendents, educators of educators influence the next generation of professionals who will serve American communities. Educators of educators' views and values can therefore provide important insights into what future educators may or may not think is possible regarding communities' potential to actively engage in children's education and educators' roles in advancing such engagement. This research asked:

1. *How do educators of educators understand the roles and responsibilities of communities in education?*
2. *How do they think of the relationships between communities and schools, and how do they feel the accountability movement has shaped these relationships?*
3. *How—if at all—are they preparing future educators to partner with their schools' communities to best educate young people?*

In the fall of 2013, Public Agenda conducted six focus groups with a total of 53 faculty members at schools of education in Washington, D.C., Chicago and Los Angeles. Each group was comprised of tenured and untenured faculty, some of whom had experience as K-12 teachers or principals. We administered a short survey to the participants after each group.

We also conducted twenty one-on-one interviews. Eleven of the interviewees were deans or department chairs at schools of education ranked highly by the National Council on Teacher Quality. Three interviewees were from alternative teacher or principal preparation programs. One leads a program at a foundation focused on training teachers and administrators. Five were faculty in schools of education who we chose to interview because they conduct research on communities' roles in education.

Key observations in brief

As with other qualitative research findings, the results of these focus groups and interviews are not necessarily generalizable to other educators of educators. But despite their small scale, they provide an in-depth picture of the complex mixture of beliefs about communities and education that these educators of educators hold. Nearly all of those 74 educators of educators we spoke with throughout the fall of 2013 felt that environment, family, and community play key roles in children's learning. Yet when discussing the greatest challenges facing K-12 education today, most interviewees talked about inadequate or unfair school funding, increasingly diverse and underprepared students, and what many described as an assault on public education from reformers, politicians and businesses.

Few had ever seen schools and other community actors work collaboratively to form a common vision for education or find solutions to local education problems. In many cases, participants longed for more robust community engagement and support, emphasizing "schools cannot do it alone." But their ideas and views on how exactly residents and institutions might share responsibilities with schools were mostly visionary and aspirational rather than practical or based on experience.

Nearly all of our interviewees placed schools at the center of the education process and considered schools to be responsible for gaining communities' trust and leveraging their resources. With some notable exceptions, these educators of educators felt that key features of the accountability movement—in particular, standardized testing, school choice and school closures—have undermined relationships between communities and public schools. Several educators of educators implemented a variety of community-oriented approaches to teacher training at their universities.

WHAT WE HEARD

1. Participating educators of educators said that community poverty coupled with inadequate and unequal school funding are among the biggest challenges facing education.

Focus group participants and interviewees agreed that increasing inequality and concentrated poverty have forced schools to take on many other responsibilities aside from providing academic instruction, e.g., the provision of basic health services and emotional and physical care for many students. Participants felt these challenges are exacerbated by inadequate and unfair public funding. A typical focus group participant in Chicago was angry about an "intentional disinvestment" in urban education over the past several decades.[4] Another faculty member in Chicago noted the broader effects of this disinvestment. He said it is not only an "attack on the schools. It's the attack on the neighborhood." Several focus group participants also cautioned that spending wisely is crucial, implying that they saw schools spend limited funds in inappropriate ways.

2. Many educators of educators were concerned about the declining status of the education profession and felt that teachers are increasingly disrespected. Many felt their knowledge about education was being ignored by reformers, corporations and politicians, who they felt are undermining public schools.

Faculty members across the focus groups and interviews expressed deep frustration that decisions about education are being made by politicians, economists, foundations, publishing companies and charter school operators. A Los Angeles focus group participant complained, "Policies that directly affect our children are being made by individuals who have no background in education." They described themselves as "disheartened," "trampled on" and "de-professionalized" by constant policy changes and administrative burdens that they said harm children, teachers, families and communities. A faculty member in Washington, D.C., told her colleagues, "I would like to give the teaching profession back to the teachers." These qualitative findings are consistent with a 2010 nationally representative survey of professors of education, which shows most are at odds with dominant policy trends in K-12 education. Seventy-one percent believe their programs are "often unfairly blamed for the problems facing public education."[5]

---

[4] Quotations have been edited for clarity.

[5] Farkas, Steve, and Ann Duffett. "*Cracks in the Ivory Tower? The Views of Education Professors Circa 2010*." Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2010.

Many faculty members criticized alternative teacher preparation programs. They categorized these programs as outsiders taking over education from the educators. They complained that alternative teacher preparation programs do not adequately prepare teachers. As one Los Angeles focus group participant put it, "They are taking inexperienced young people and putting them in the most critical schools that we have, and we need the most experienced [teachers there]."

However, the 2010 national survey with professors of education found divisions and ambivalence about alternative teacher preparation programs: 47 percent thought that "alternative teacher certification programs that are not run by schools of education" threaten to "compromise the quality of the teaching force in the public schools," as opposed to 32 percent who thought that those alternative certification programs "are a good way to attract unconventional talent to the public schools." (21 percent were undecided.) But, when asked about "programs like Teach For America that recruit and place high-achieving college graduates in struggling public schools," 63 percent thought that those programs were "generally a good idea." Only 20 percent thought those programs were "generally a bad idea." (17 percent were undecided or felt they "did not know enough to say.")[6]

3. In focus groups, educators of educators tended to agree that "schools cannot do it alone," but very few listed community engagement as a top priority in education or in training future teachers.

When talking about what needs to happen to improve public education, these faculty members were largely focused on what happens in schools – especially in classrooms – and on the relationships between teachers and each of their students. This is hardly surprising for individuals who have dedicated their professional lives to teacher training and who, in many cases, have worked as teachers or principals themselves. A focus group participant in Los Angeles said that building relationships between communities and schools is "a big piece but not the core" of teachers' jobs and of how they train teachers. A faculty interviewee explained that for administrators, "Community and parents are important; but that's additional work on top, and it's not central to what principals are trained to do. It all comes down to students' achievement."

Nonetheless, when we presented focus groups with a hypothetical comparison between an underfunded school with great community support and a well-funded school with a disengaged community, nearly all of them felt that the school with more community support would produce better educational outcomes. On a post-discussion survey administered to focus group participants, roughly nine out of ten agreed that community members outside of schools have roles to play in K-12 education. Roughly nine out of ten felt that the problems

[6] Ibid.

facing K-12 education can be solved only if communities are involved as partners. These educators of educators described schools as situated within and shaped by families, neighborhoods, communities, politics, economics and cultures. According to a dean, "Schools are a reflection of the community and vice versa. It's impossible to separate them." She continued, "It's hard for public schools to improve student's learning when so many of these issues are actually community- and health- based." Several interviewees cited what one department chair called a generational shift away from a public relations approach to preparing educators to approach communities and towards training teachers in community engagement and community partnerships. She said, "We used to teach people to market [their schools to the public]. [Now] I teach that the school is a community resource and that public engagement is much different than marketing."

Participants generally felt that community engagement is a slow and difficult process, particularly for people of color and low-income people, who may have long histories of mistrusting their local schools. Some participants pointed out that engagement efforts must first establish trust between communities and schools in order to make any substantive progress. Furthermore, many interviewees and focus group participants felt that educators do not have sufficient time, resources or support to engage with communities in the way that they ideally should. An assistant dean lamented that the principals and teachers she trained are so afraid that their students will fail standardized tests that they can no longer justify bringing community members into the classroom, involving students in community-based research and service projects, taking field trips or otherwise leveraging community assets.

Overall, although participants had many interesting things to say about community engagement when we probed them, community was not their top priority when they thought about what is needed to improve education.

4. Conversations about communities' role in education gravitated towards parents. Faculty members often worried that not all parents feel welcome at school or have the time to participate.

The educators of educators we interviewed for this project were adamant about the importance of parental involvement in children's learning and in schools. Focus group participants debated whether or not parents today are more or less involved than parents were in the past. A faculty member in Washington, D.C., insisted, "Parents need to become more accountable and be more positively involved in the education of their children." A Chicago focus group participant argued against the notion that parents were more involved in years past. "The notion that families care less than they used to – that's foolishness," he said. At the same time, several participants who were also parents felt burdened by what they described as schools' increasing demands on parents to be more involved in homework and study.

Some participants also pointed out that parents may feel "intimidated or unwelcome" at school if they have lower incomes, are immigrants or people of color, did not succeed academically or do not speak English well. Several participants advocated "parent universities" to help families better understand and navigate their children's school systems. Faculty members were well aware that parents who are barely scraping by financially or who work long hours may not have the time to get involved in school. As one interviewee noted, the communities whose schools need the most improvement are often the least equipped to advocate for change. And many educators of educators pointed out that very few parents went to high-quality schools themselves. Therefore, as one faculty member said, "It's very difficult to advocate for a kind of education that you yourself have never experienced or never even seen."

What role should parents play in the education of children in their families and communities? To many of these educators of educators, ideal parental engagement implies a much broader role than just bake sales, PTA membership or reading to children at home. A Chicago participant maintained, "Parental engagement means becoming a part of local school governance, having parents involved in decision making, having parents involved in benefitting from services at school." A representative of an alternative teacher preparation organization maintained that communities can contribute the most "not by being blindly supportive of their local schools, but by insisting that their schools set high standards, hire and develop excellent teachers, and ensure that all students—not just a subset—are successful." But many participants pointed out that often parental involvement just serves as a rubber stamp. A faculty interviewee and former urban school district leader said, "People usually say that parents should be full partners and by that they mean they should be co-opted into supporting the school's goals." Alternately, a few participants complained about overly involved or meddlesome parents. But, largely, participants were focused on how to increase parental involvement.

5. When the educators of educators we spoke with were asked specifically about the role of communities beyond parents, most could enumerate a broad variety of community assets and educating institutions.

Although discussions about community involvement tended to focus mainly on parents, most participants felt that other groups and individuals could play a role in schools, too. We probed participants' views in this area by asking them to think about "community assets" that might bolster and support children's learning. After being asked, participants listed religious institutions, immigrants' cultures and languages, community organizations, neighbors, street life, arts organizations, universities, after-school activities, sports, hospitals, retirees, local government, police departments and local businesses as community actors that also provide a type of education to local children. A participant in Washington insisted, "School is not the only place that education occurs. When students are able to take what they've learned outside of the school setting and see it operating in other environments, it makes it real for them." Many participants discussed the value of internships, mentorships, student service learning,

field trips, community-based research and community member involvement in classrooms. A participant in Los Angeles lamented, "We could actually teach kids to critically think about the world that is happening around them and then they could start to answer [questions about] what the [educating] assets are in the community. We could teach kids to actually see the world as their classroom instead of those four walls. We underutilize our community."

Participants noted that each community's assets are unique. Recognizing, assessing and leveraging those assets requires time and effort on the part of teachers and principals. Many participants talked about the need for teachers and principals to go out into communities, meet families and understand students' neighborhoods. A faculty member in Washington, D.C., said, "The first thing that schools need to do is to understand the profile of the community." Many said that schools and districts must take responsibility for preparing new teachers to work in their schools' communities, particularly young white women teachers in communities of color. But many educators of educators noted that, currently, less time and resources are available for professional development, so it is now even more difficult for schools to orient new teachers to their communities. Furthermore, with frequent turnover of teachers and administrators, communities get tired of making themselves available to new educators.

Many participants – but not all of them – believed that standardized testing and new curricula have made it increasingly difficult for teachers to justify spending time and efforts on outreach to community members and community institutions. A faculty interviewee noted sadly, "We take less field trips now because taking a tour of the zoo or the local car factory doesn't show a measurable outcome in terms of standardized test scores." A Los Angeles faculty member said, "These are long, relationship-building things. There are no quick wins on these. They're not picked up by these assessments. It's not incentivized."

6. Many said schools are responsible for reaching out to communities, building trust and leveraging community resources. Few described schools as partners to other community institutions with whom they share the challenge of educating children and youth.

Participants generally saw schools as responsible for identifying and using community assets. As a Los Angeles focus group participant said, "If you want a community that's going to be involved, you've got to dignify their input and give them some kind of responsibility to feel good about, to have a sense of pride that they've made a contribution to that school." They felt that principals and superintendents in particular are responsible for outreach and for creating a school culture that values community engagement.

Many participants held the view that parents and communities often mistrust schools, teachers and principals. They felt that mistrust is especially acute in districts that have had many closures or frequent staff turnover, or where staff are more white and affluent than parents.

They discussed the slow process of building trust by asking communities what they want, listening to their answers and following through on meeting their needs. A woman in the Los Angeles focus group described a principal who "brought the parents in and was listening to them and actually enacted some of the things that they wanted." She said that test scores, teacher retention and parental involvement all increased. "It was because she actually asked with the intention of acting on what they were saying."

Many participants noted that communities often want fairly modest things like space for events or access to a school's gyms, libraries and playgrounds. A Los Angeles participant described working on a school turnaround project that involved making the cafeteria open for community and church groups on evenings and weekends. "Now the community felt like the school was part of the community and vice versa. They felt they could go to this place." Ideally, these modest efforts spark a virtuous circle of trust, respect, engagement and input.

Some participants also said schools could provide wraparound services, such as tutoring, health clinics, social workers, mental health services and adult education; but few had seen these services in action.

7. Most participants believed that standardized testing and school closures damage relationships between communities and schools.

Overuse and inappropriate use of standardized testing was a top concern for many participants. Nearly all educators of educators who we surveyed after the focus groups (45 out of 53) agreed that the accountability movement has undermined relationships between schools and communities. Some said this was because communities place too much importance on the results of flawed tests. A faculty member in Washington, D.C., said, "It's a tragedy because you could have a great principal but their test scores aren't good. Hence, you get rid of your teachers or you leave." Another faculty member in Washington said that parents sometimes uproot their children in search of schools that look good based on flawed tests, leaving behind the children who need the most help.

By contrast, some participants felt standardized testing is problematic because parents and communities do not think of schools or education in quantifiable terms. A faculty interviewee who "bought into" accountability when he was a school principal now has doubts. "Educators are being bombarded with metrics but communities do not think of their schools numerically – not even in terms of graduation rates or college matriculation, let alone test scores." A faculty member in Los Angeles said that communities are instead concerned about crime, safety and voter participation, and might therefore judge schools based on how well they contribute to those measures of community well-being.

Most participants felt that school closures harm communities. Closures "destroy a community. It's brutal," according to a faculty member in Chicago. Many participants suggested that

children, families and communities feel punished when leaders take away schools, even if the schools are performing poorly. In contrast, many of those we interviewed believed that poor school performance should trigger more support, funding and innovation rather than closures. Closures contribute to the impression that, according to a faculty member in Chicago, "public education and neighborhood schools are being singled out, especially in communities that historically have been under-resourced." Many noted that the schools to which students are sent do not receive additional funding or support. And many pointed out that closures or rezoning can create onerous commutes for parents and children, and parents often worry about their children's safety in new schools and neighborhoods.

8. Support for standardized testing, charters and school choice was rare in our sample, but those who did support these reforms felt strongly that they are long overdue and ultimately help communities.

According to a 2010 survey, only a quarter of professors of education (24 percent) believe it is "absolutely essential" to produce "teachers who understand how to work with the state's standards, tests and accountability systems."[7] Similarly, while our research was not quantitative, it appeared that only a few of our interviewees – and seemingly no one in our focus groups – supported standardized testing, closures and school choice. Even those that did support these things criticized the quality of current tests. These interviewees were also very critical of the quality of teachers and teacher training and were angry about failing schools and achievement gaps. A dean maintained that accountability serves communities by improving education. He said, "Our definition of social justice is graduating teachers who can teach affectively in low-income communities and help students learn how to read, write, do arithmetic and give those students a future." An interviewee insisted that communities suffer when their children are not employable or prepared for college.

These interviewees felt that neighborhood schools have potential if they can provide better education and more comprehensive services to children, families and communities. But this group of faculty members largely maintained that many neighborhood schools should be closed. One said, "The only people who still believe that there's virtue in sending your child to the school closest to where you live are poor people, who invariably are brainwashed into believing that so that they don't question sending their kids to failed schools. Middle-class parents look for the best educational opportunities, and that's what we ought to encourage among all parents."

While acknowledging that closures can be disruptive, many in this subgroup of respondents felt that communities protest closures only because they do not understand how poorly their

[7] Farkas, Steve, and Ann Duffett. "*Cracks in the Ivory Tower? The Views of Education Professors Circa 2010*." Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2010.

schools are performing. A representative of an alternative teacher preparation organization said, "Charter schools and school choice may occasionally cause short-term conflict within communities, but high-quality charter schools strengthen communities over the long term by providing parents and families with better educational options that open up opportunities for students."

Members of this passionate minority said that communities must do more to "interrogate" their schools and advocate for change. A dean insisted that communities should "scream holy hell and really start mobilizing." Some spoke of engagement in more unidirectional terms; they talked about getting parents and communities on board, communicating with parents and communities about school performance and providing them with skills to navigate school systems. A dean who worked to transform a traditional public school into a public charter asked, "How do we help parents understand choice? How do we manage choice?"

9. There were considerable divisions over charter schools. Some educators of educators saw charters as part of an attack on public education and on communities. But others felt that charters were not necessarily different from traditional public schools in their relationships to communities.

Many participants associated charter schools with schools closures and saw both as part of a larger move to defund public education. Furthermore, in our post-discussion surveys, nearly seven in ten focus group participants felt that charter schools undermine relationships between schools and communities. Only three in ten participants felt that charter schools strengthen communities by improving the quality of education. For example, a Washington, D.C., participant said, "If a charter school is willing to come in and engage the community so that the community is able to thrive and flourish and the students are doing well, I don't really have a problem with that." A representative of an alternative teacher preparation organization said similarly, "In most areas, charter schools are no different than traditional public schools in their roles as anchors in the community."

A few focus group participants had decided to send their own children to charters despite misgivings about "abandoning" traditional public schools. As one focus group participant said, "I'm a strong advocate of public education, but I also live in central Los Angeles, and I wasn't willing to sacrifice my children for my beliefs; and so I sent my children to a charter school."

10. Some participants described efforts by their universities to develop community-oriented approaches to teacher training that emphasize collaborative problem solving between schools and other community actors.

Several faculty members and deans described efforts to integrate community engagement into teacher training at scales ranging from single classes to university-wide projects. Those who are working on these programs appeared more optimistic than other participants about improving public education and teacher training.

At the micro-level, several faculty members described teaching classes focused on community engagement and cultural diversity. Some are classes in which students map community assets. But many participants said that simply adding one course is not enough, whether the topic is community engagement, English language learning or special education. A faculty member in Chicago asked, "How do we blend these into the whole curriculum and not continue to ghettoize them?"

Some participants objected that short-term student teaching does not foster sustained relationships between schools and communities, and they were therefore developing "clinical residency" programs that embed pre-service teachers in schools for a year or more. Several faculty members and deans work in departments that have developed more multifaceted relationships with schools and districts. These long-term partnerships include mentorships, research and school transformation projects; in some cases, universities hold classes and locate faculty offices inside public schools. A faculty interviewee explained that her department had completely reorganized around the idea that teachers must understand the contexts in which children learn. Her department spent a year creating relationships with community organizations and listening to community members. She said, "We're not going to impose our agenda on the community. We want to serve alongside people who live in the community, and we want to do that to further the agenda of the community itself – not our agenda." Undergraduate education majors in her department are now matched with community mentors. They take all their classes at the local community center. They are also placed in residencies in community organizations, schools, after-school and weekend programs.

One dean explained that her entire university, at the behest of its president, is developing a comprehensive community engagement effort that addresses sustainability, housing, transportation, education, health and other issues. As the dean said, "Until we address these issues together, we cannot address the issues that children are having in learning." As part of this effort, her school of education is partnering with traditional public schools on transformation projects and is creating a new charter school.

We also spoke with a staff member at an alternative teacher preparation organization who is responsible for community partnerships in his region. He explained that, in addition to placing teachers in classrooms, they partner with existing community coalitions. Or they help create new coalitions in communities that do not have such coalitions. He specified that they do not

approach communities with a previously determined agenda but rely on community partners to identify their own needs, priorities and players on a range of issues including education. Community coalitions then map their own assets and set their own agendas. Often, coalitions seek out organizations that create alternative educational activities like afterschool activities, enrichment, mentorships, tutoring, college fairs and parent training. Coalitions then try to identify the activities that are not being offered and work to get those up and running. He explained that although this process is slow, it builds trust and generates sustained community engagement in education.

These partnerships have pitfalls. A Los Angeles faculty member explained that, when higher education faculty members partner with K-12 schools, they often feel pressured to "fall into step" with unrealistic accountability and curriculum reforms. A faculty member in Chicago spent three years redesigning her department's teacher preparation program around partnerships with schools and community organizations. She described the process as rewarding but very time-consuming, which is of particular concern for untenured faculty. A faculty interviewee managed to change his university's policy so that community engagement activities now count toward tenure and promotion. Several participants felt that their views on community are difficult to integrate into programs' curriculums and structures in schools of education. Some said they must fly under the radar when they teach their students to engage with communities. A faculty member in Los Angeles said, "Sometimes I feel like a guerilla warrior. I know I can't win, but you tell your candidates you have to be professional. Then you do what's right emotionally, ethically, morally."

REFLECTIONS

What do these conversations among educators of educators tell us about the potential for more robust community-educator partnerships focused on children's learning? What do they tell us about how educators of educators understand the roles and responsibilities of citizens and communities?

In these conversations, educators of educators' starting points and experiences were—perhaps not surprisingly – school-based. That is, they valued community engagement, and they emphasized the connection between children's learning and their communities' assets and efficacy. But their views on how to develop roles and responsibilities in which communities can collaborate tended to put the schools at the center of the process. They saw schools as primarily responsible for engagement. They said that schools should open themselves up to the community and serve community needs, and schools should do better at leveraging community resources. Much less frequently did participants express a vision of schools as partners with other community actors, residents or institutions that would collaboratively define and resolve education issues and problems.

Despite their interest in the role communities can play in strengthening children's learning, some of their perspectives and experiences may constitute a barrier to re-envisioning education as a community endeavor. Some faculty in schools of education may be too distant from the day-to-day operation of K-12 schools to form equal partnerships with other community entities. Many seem to feel that they are in a besieged profession. They are witnessing enormous changes and threats to the ideas they value, making it difficult for them to focus on proactively community engagement. Moreover, we heard that these educators don't feel they and their colleagues are trained in (or naturally inclined to act as) advocates for the reform policies they believe in and against those they view as undermining public education. They lament the accountability movement but feel their voices are rarely heard. Even those who are strong proponents of community partnerships around education mostly work on a small-scale in their communities and with their students—they do not advocate loudly for community engagement on a broader scale.

At the same time, these conversations highlight opportunities for a broader conversation about communities' roles in education. Our participants were intrigued by our questions and the discussions they elicited. They enjoyed being pressed on communities' roles and responsibilities in education and sharing views and experiences with their colleagues. Moreover, we heard that, although most were not personally involved in community partnerships, they agreed that other community actors contribute meaningfully to children's education. They could name these actors easily when asked to do so and appreciated their roles and contributions to children's education. And many were looking for ways to connect such community assets with their teaching of teachers.

Finally, while these faculty members had many critiques of the current state of K-12 education, several saw critique as an important part of their role as academics. A faculty member in Los Angeles said, "We should say what everybody else is afraid to say. Higher education has a critical role to play in speaking some of the hard truths." Those with a strong vision for community partnerships might voice their opinions more loudly as they gain more experience with such partnerships and meet more like-minded colleagues.