



*Assignment for Civics Class  
Due Monday  
Five-page paper (Ugghh!! 😞) on how  
to save urban public education*

# H



The Magazine of The Heinz Endowments

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The Heinz Endowments was formed from the Howard Heinz Endowment, established in 1941, and the Vira I. Heinz Endowment, established in 1986. It is the product of a deep family commitment to community and the common good that began with H.J. Heinz, and that continues to this day.

The Endowments is based in Pittsburgh, where we use our region as a laboratory for the development of solutions to challenges that are national in scope. Although the majority of our giving is concentrated within southwestern Pennsylvania, we work wherever necessary, including statewide and nationally, to fulfill our mission.

That mission is to help our region thrive as a whole community — economically, ecologically, educationally and culturally — while advancing the

state of knowledge and practice in the fields in which we work. Our fields of emphasis include philanthropy in general and the disciplines represented by our five grant-making programs: Arts & Culture; Children, Youth & Families; Education; Environment; and Innovation Economy.

In life, Howard Heinz and Vira I. Heinz set high expectations for their philanthropy. Today, the Endowments is committed to doing the same. Our charge is to be diligent, thoughtful and creative in continually working to set new standards of philanthropic excellence. Recognizing that none of our work would be possible without a sound financial base, we also are committed to preserving and enhancing the Endowments' assets through prudent investment management.

**h magazine** is a publication of The Heinz Endowments. At the Endowments, we are committed to promoting learning in philanthropy and in the specific fields represented by our grant-making programs. As an expression of that commitment, this publication is intended to share information about significant lessons and insights we are deriving from our work.

**Editorial Team** Linda Bannon, Linda Braund, Donna Evans, Carmen Lee, Douglas Root, Robert Vagt. Design: Landesberg Design

**About the cover** The illustration on the cover by Pittsburgh artist Stacy Innerst makes the too-often-overlooked point that educating today's youth, especially in urban public schools, requires everyone pitching in to help students succeed.



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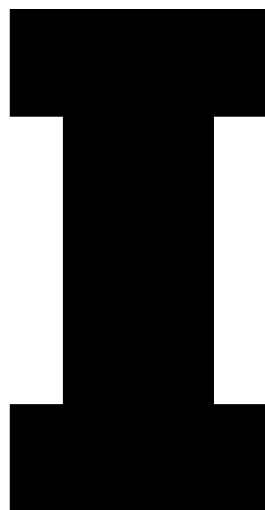
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# message

By Teresa Heinz  
Chairman, The Heinz Endowments

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I continue to be deeply disappointed that, after 25 years of intense work helping to reform city school systems, we in Pittsburgh's foundation community are not nearly as far along as we had hoped to be...I know that we at the Endowments will continue at full pace and not settle for anything less than that every child is provided the best education we know how to provide.

It is always an uplifting beginning of summer when I am able to meet the 35 students selected for The Heinz Endowments' Youth Philanthropy Internship Program. As they begin their orientation to a demanding experience, in which they will recommend a total of \$200,000 in grants and discover that giving away money for a good purpose is not as easy as it might seem, I sit down with them for my own orientation.

I want to know about the audacious ideas and big dreams of the young people who will be building on what we are doing now—not just in grant making over a summer, but in community making over a generation.

We do our best to form a group that truly reflects the region in which the Endowments works.

Some interns come to us as remarkable products of the highest-quality learning environments. They are confident in their abilities, poised in their social interactions, and motivated to take on challenging academic programs at great universities. Others come to us from school and family situations that are far from ideal, and many have faced significant adversity; but it is often the case that these students achieve the most impressive development gains from the internship.

In last summer's meeting, I was thinking especially about the stark differences in educational opportunity as the interns introduced themselves, announced the high schools from which they had graduated and what they would be doing in the fall. In the discussion that followed, one young woman observed that there are many Heinz Endowments grants that have made life better for people in so many areas. Then she asked, "Is there one area where you haven't been as successful as you would have liked and that you want to continue to work on in the future?"

My response was to say exactly what was on my mind: I continue to be deeply disappointed that, after 25 years of intense work helping to reform city school systems, we in Pittsburgh's foundation community are not nearly as far along as we had hoped to be in ensuring that young people, no matter their circumstances, receive a high-quality education so they can reach their full potential.

In a powerful commencement address in May at Harvard University's Kennedy School, Geoffrey Canada, the president and CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone, told graduates that he has not lived up to what he promised his role models from the previous generation. The founder of one of the most effective urban education-reform organizations ever created with one individual's vision and the help of philanthropy acknowledged to some of the



country's best and brightest: "The fact remains that most of the children who are poor in this country still cannot get a quality education. We haven't kept the promise that I made to the generation before me to eliminate those places where children don't have a chance. Today, America's children who don't get a decent education are more in peril than ever."

In 1995, Geoffrey received the first Heinz Award in the Human Condition category, and we knew from his moving acceptance speech the heavy burden he had placed on himself to come up with a scalable, effective education plan that could be replicated and used to rid the entire country of what he described as "the monsters preying on the children in the depressed inner city."

In the years since Geoffrey received his medal and went on to create the Children's Zone, (now mirrored in Pittsburgh through the Homewood Children's Village), we at the Endowments have accelerated our own efforts to help turn around the terrible educational outcomes for thousands of children in Pittsburgh's poorest communities. Other foundations and community groups have ramped up their work as well, and all of us share Geoffrey's frustration with achieving only pockets of success in what was supposed to be a transformation of the urban public education landscape. For too many of the city's public school students, the monsters are still lurking.

For that reason alone, my answer to our young intern's provocative question also demands a more thoughtful explanation to the larger community. We have attempted to do that in this special issue of *h*, which focuses on the problem that is confounding nearly every city across the country: How do we turn our urban public education systems from learning graveyards to centers of learning excellence? For every year that we fail to answer that question and implement solutions that work, hundreds of thousands of students pass through a deficient system to face bleak futures.

What does it say about us as Pittsburghers that on the list of the very best city life has to offer—the arts, sports, entertainment, business opportunities, real estate development and medical care—public education is glaringly absent? What does it say about us as a country that we do the easy duty of setting a date certain when every child must be proficient in math and reading but shrink from the tougher duty of providing the resources for stakeholders to meet the deadline?

Unprecedented in its size and number of contributors, this *h* issue sets out to address those questions and many others that have emerged in our decades of making grants to support public

education. We begin with a recommitment to the cause: National education expert Pedro Noguera makes the case that, despite lack of reform progress and the emergence of a lengthy menu of alternative systems over the past two decades, urban public education also must be worth saving.

With the Pittsburgh Public Schools as the focus, we report on the historical and modern barriers to progress, test our ideas for reform, cite program successes and failures, and amplify some voices that are often drowned out in the high-decibel debates over policymaking and resource allocation.

I am especially proud that this issue devotes a section to reporting on youth opinions about the state of the city's public school system and their ideas for improving it. This includes an impressive speech that Dynae Shaw, a senior at Barack Obama Academy of International Studies, gave during the Clinton Global Initiative dinner, recounting her role in a student protest last year in the halls of the Pennsylvania Legislature over education budget cuts. She makes a powerful argument that public education policymaking would be more effective if students were given a seat at the adult table.

In fact, next-generation opinions and perspectives are evident throughout this issue. That is on purpose. It is shocking to me how often our grand public education reform plans are put in place with no thought to the possibility that the powerful and influential might not be immediately successful. We depend on the next generation to learn from our mistakes, expand on our modest achievements and, I pray, be the generation that finishes the work.

"Ten years from now, when I am puttering in my house and playing with my grandchildren, I know I will be constantly smiling about the state of the work to save the children of this country," Geoffrey told the Harvard graduates. "And my wife, knowing how I worry about things, will ask how it is that I am so sure. And I will say that it is because those young people, so smart and talented and able to do anything with their lives, they promised to fulfill the promise I made to save all these children."

Even in thinking about all of our unfinished education work in Pittsburgh, I share Geoffrey's confidence. I know that we at the Endowments will continue at full pace and not settle for anything less than that every child is provided the best education we know how to provide. For any part that is left unfinished, I need only look into the faces of our summer interns to know that the work will be completed. *h*

As part of a Heinz Endowments-funded consulting contract with the Pittsburgh Public Schools, education scholar Pedro Noguera, right, participated this winter in the "We Promise" African American Male Summit organized by the city district and the Pittsburgh Promise scholarship organization. Noguera joined district and community leaders such as School Superintendent Linda Lane, below left, in encouraging male students to get the most out of their classes so that they are academically eligible for the Pittsburgh Promise scholarship program.

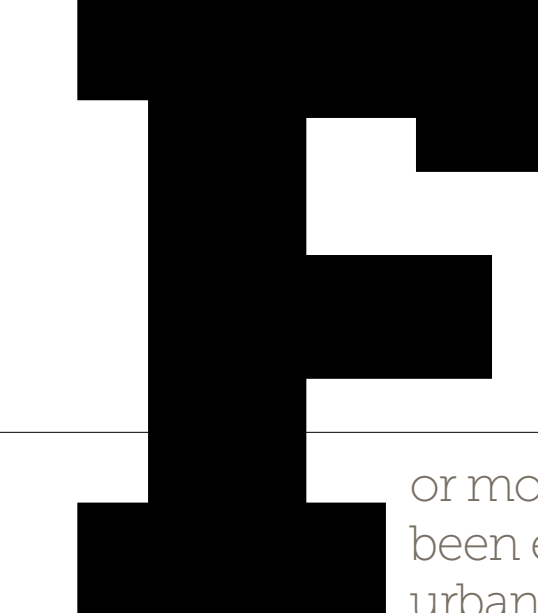


PEDRO A. NOGUERA, PHD, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Joshua Franzos

# IS URBAN PUBLIC EDUCATION A LOST CAUSE?





or more than 30 years, the United States has been engaged in a relentless effort to reform its urban public schools. Despite this work, dropout rates remain high—more than 50 percent in several cities—test scores remain low, and, according to the U.S. Department of Education, thousands of schools are in a state of perpetual failure and dysfunction.

So how is it that these policies have failed to produce a greater degree of success?

This is a complex question and there are no simple answers, but clearly something is wrong with the way we have been approaching reform. In the 1960s and 1970s—the period when the greatest progress was achieved in closing gaps in performance between students from different racial and socioeconomic groups—much of the work of school reform focused on desegregation and anti-poverty efforts. School busing, Head Start, magnet schools, the Elementary and Secondary School Act, and a variety of academic programs financed by Title I were all aimed at addressing the legacy of racial segregation and the deliberate funding of schools serving African Americans and other minorities.

A 2010 study by Barton and Coley titled “Why Aren’t We Making More Progress?” revealed that these efforts were producing steady progress in raising achievement levels. The authors found that by countering the pernicious effects of racial segregation and concentrated poverty in inner-city communities, schools were in a better position to address the academic and social needs of children. For supporters of these initiatives, the hope was that they would eventually make it possible for education to serve as a means to break the cycle of poverty. School reform was, in effect, a central component of the nation’s strategy to expand equality.

However, by the 1990s, much of the progress came to a halt as the nation’s reform focus changed. Instead of addressing the effects of poverty, education policy increasingly stressed altering curriculum, such as promoting phonics over whole language, changing structure by advocating for smaller schools, improving instruction and expanding access to technology. With the adoption of No Child Left Behind in 2001, standards and accountability with an accompanying emphasis on high-stakes testing became the central focus of education policy and reform. The assumption guiding these efforts was that improved academic outcomes could be obtained by applying greater pressure on schools and requiring greater accountability. This meant less emphasis would be placed on addressing the social and economic needs of poor children and of the communities where the most disadvantaged schools were located.

As a result of this change in focus, there has been relatively little progress in improving school performance or student outcomes over the last two decades, despite the investment of vast sums of public and private funds in educational reform. Rather than producing clear evidence of change, the reforms implemented over the last 30 years have not succeeded in bringing

about sustainable improvements in the most disadvantaged schools. But misguided federal policies are not the only obstacles to progress. In some city districts, political conflicts among school board members and between district leadership and teachers have halted reform plans. And often, there is little public will for change. In most urban districts, most residents have no personal connection to the public school system other than as taxpayers.

In an exhaustive study of many of the reforms carried out in Chicago during the years that Education Secretary Arne Duncan was chief education officer, sociologist Anthony Bryk and his colleagues at the University of Chicago found that unless elements such as effective leadership, strong parent–community ties, teacher effectiveness, and a student-centered learning environment were present, sustained school improvement did not occur. They also found that in schools where poverty was most heavily concentrated, the reforms failed because students faced so many other challenges. Their findings provide further evidence that the approach our nation has taken to improve public education has been deeply flawed.

The reform landscape sketched out from recent experience and research offers a bleak view. But there is cause for hope. Despite the magnitude of the challenges, public school districts in our cities can be significantly improved. In my work with the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education at New York University, I have seen examples of sustained education success in schools serving ethnically and economically diverse students in urban settings.

Maryland’s Montgomery County Public School system, for example, has made significant progress in its decade-long effort to eliminate racial disparities in student achievement. The district changed policies such as those governing enrollment in Advanced Placement courses. Now, students can self-select rather than

BASED UPON YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, I BELIEVE THAT CHANCES FOR SUCCESS ARE HIGH IN PITTSBURGH BECAUSE WE ARE STARTING FROM A POSITION OF STRENGTH.

relying solely on teacher recommendations. District officials provided diversity training for staff and reached out to community leaders and groups to help expand efforts to recruit black, Hispanic and Asian teachers and administrators. They reduced class size in schools serving the poorest children and developed special programs for African American and Hispanic students who needed additional academic help. Finally, the district adopted a marketing campaign that was tailored to students—explaining what the achievement gap meant in their lives and encouraging them to apply themselves on standardized tests. Among the returns on these investments have been several important educational gains. The district has experienced the largest increase in black and Hispanic students’ access and success in AP classes in the nation, and it has improved reading performance in early grades.

Similarly, the Ysleta Independent School District in El Paso, Texas, and the Long Beach Unified School District in California have been hailed for their across-the-board increases in student achievement, including standardized test performance, over several years. Both districts have developed sophisticated systems for analyzing student performance data that allow them to effectively respond to student needs. They also have invested heavily in teacher and principal training, including coaching and mentoring. In Ysleta, where racial and economic achievement gaps have been steadily narrowing at all school levels for the past five years, officials highlight their district’s culture of collaboration established by requiring teachers to work together in teams to ensure they are pursuing students’ best interests. Long Beach has been recognized internationally as a successful school system that receives an abundance of community and parental support because of its effective communication with the public.



For nearly a year, I have been working closely with educators and community leaders in Pittsburgh to figure out how to apply the lessons we have obtained from other successful schools and districts to address the challenges confronting local public schools. In the fall, Superintendent Linda Lane released the Equity Plan that has real potential to reduce the racial achievement gap, improve school performance and otherwise further educational equity. There are, of course, obstacles that will make implementation of the plan difficult. Among the most challenging are declining student enrollment and the anticipated budget shortfalls the district will face in the years ahead. Both problems occur while concerns continue about middle-class white and black students leaving the public school system, if not the city itself. However, the road map that has been outlined in the plan takes into account both the impact of poverty on learning and the need for changes within the classroom. If implemented with fidelity by the school board and administration, I think there is a strong chance that it will lead to genuine success.

The Pittsburgh Equity Plan recommends several measures similar to those used in other districts noted for student success. To help boost achievement among African American students, the plan calls for teachers to receive ongoing training on how to build strong relationships with students so that they can teach effectively across race and class differences. It also includes strategies for bringing culturally relevant learning materials into the classroom and providing training to teachers on how to use these materials to enhance learning for all students. The plan recognizes the impact of the city's history of racial discrimination, including residential segregation, and addresses it by requiring schools to receive assistance in developing partnerships with parents and community organizations. In this way, all parties—parents, teachers, administrators, students and community residents—are working together to support black student achievement.

Professional development and coaching also are a top priority in the Equity Plan, with an emphasis on tailoring the training to meet teacher needs. This will require administrators at the school and district level to be more collaborative and responsive to their staff. Part of what had been missing from the district's previous efforts to improve teacher effectiveness was an acknowledgment that the needs of teachers vary. Support must be tailored to help each individual improve. While some teachers require help in

instruction, others are not as strong in content knowledge as they need to be. Still others experience difficulty in building positive relationships with students, especially those from different racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Researchers have grown increasingly aware that if reform efforts ignore school culture—attitudes, norms, values and relationships and the overall ethos of a school—any improvements rarely last. In the next five years, the Pittsburgh Public Schools will attempt to pay greater attention to key school culture indicators such as student discipline; teacher morale; teacher expectations; and the quality of relationships between parents and teachers, students and teachers, and administrators and personnel. If the effort to transform school culture is successful, we can expect to see school environments that are conducive to great teaching and learning in the years ahead.

With support from The Heinz Endowments, the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education has been working closely with district staff to establish an improvement strategy at two high schools with a history of difficulty: Perry and Westinghouse. The goal is to put in place systems and practices that can support improvement and sustain change at Perry and Westinghouse, and then apply what we have learned at other schools in the district.

We are looking closely at the data, and we will know fairly soon if our efforts are yielding results. We are pragmatic about the difficulty involved but optimistic about our chances for success. In contrast to the national policy debate, we are not arguing over whether to focus on poverty or school change. We are doing both, and we are working closely with community-based organizations such as the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh and the Homewood Children's Village to provide additional support to the schools.

Based upon years of experience in urban school districts throughout the country, I believe that chances for success are high in Pittsburgh because we are starting from a position of strength. There is a large number of high-performing schools in the district, and there is strong, stable leadership in place. Only time will tell if the city's stakeholders—parents, educators, elected officials and members of the broader community—are willing to stay focused on the work to create the schools Pittsburgh's children deserve. *h*

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# PUBLIC SCHOOL DAZE

OPENING ESSAY | **MARK KRAMER**

Not long after the beginning of the school year, I spoke with Alan Lesgold, dean of the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh, to get his perspective on the challenges facing the Pittsburgh Public Schools. When he began to use a football analogy, I was put at ease at first because I'm a sports fan. Then, as the father of two children in the city schools, alarm bells went off as I heard him compare my kids' district to a football team hitting the field with no coaches.

Suddenly, I saw images of teammates running into one another or sprinting in the wrong direction.

A good team, he said, consistently employs proven strategies, and trains and supports its players and coaches over the long term. It doesn't send coaches packing every year, recruit a whole new staff and then expect the team to perform effectively.

"And yet," he insisted, "that's what we're doing in the most challenged schools in Pittsburgh."

High operating costs and declining enrollments have forced the Pittsburgh school district to close dozens of buildings. Principals have had to say good-bye to staff and programs, often those in low- or borderline-achieving schools. Meanwhile, Pennsylvania districts have received nearly \$1 billion less from the state budget in the last two years, which, along with reductions in federal aid, meant a loss in Pittsburgh of \$37.8 million in 2012 alone.

These cuts have come as the district struggles with a high school graduation rate of only 68.5 percent. Only about half a dozen of the district's 56 schools are meeting the state's adequate yearly progress goals. And African American students, as a whole, are scoring significantly lower than their white peers on state assessment tests.

Yet, the Pittsburgh Public Schools boasts a low teacher–student ratio, about one teacher per 13 students. In 2009, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation awarded the district a \$40 million grant to fortify teacher effectiveness. The Pittsburgh Promise, which provides academically qualified city public school students with college scholarships, has received \$160 million in contributions in five years. In addition to these and other advantages, the district maintains a fairly healthy fund balance of \$85.9 million—for now.

I'm generally pleased with my children's elementary school education. But I wonder why the Pittsburgh school system, which educates 70 percent of the city's children, is not providing a high-quality education for all of its nearly 25,000 students—and I'm concerned about the district's future.

Unique attempts have been made in the past to put the district on the right track. In 2002, only one-half of all Pittsburgh Public Schools students could

read at grade level. Even fewer were proficient in math. As part of an effort to leverage their combined influence to provoke change, three local foundations, including The Heinz Endowments, withheld \$3.5 million in grant funding from the district. In a move unusual for philanthropies at that time, the foundations' leaders publicly announced the funding suspension, contending that the district had an ineffective superintendent, a dysfunctional board and a disengaged citizenry. These conditions, they argued, were preventing the district from being a system worth investing in, one that maintained accountability, met objectives and focused on student performance.

The approach worked—at least in terms of moving people to action. Mayor Tom Murphy assembled a task force of city luminaries in education, finance and management who gave recommendations for improving the district's performance. A more engaged public voted new school board members into office. New leaders were sought and held to performance-based contracts, including the next superintendent, Mark Roosevelt, who used a business-like approach to measure progress and shed liabilities.

Yet, problems continued. While some commended Roosevelt for tough measures such as shuttering 22 schools in 2006, others complained that several closings were made without sensitivity to communities or thorough consideration of other options. Budgetary concerns mounted because of state and federal funding cuts and the fact that the district hadn't had a tax increase in 12 years. The district has put 19 closed buildings up for sale because they are no longer needed at its current size. In fact, the number and age of buildings, programs for the large number of disadvantaged or special education students, and staff expenses have contributed to the district's historically high per-pupil cost, which averaged around \$18,400 last school year, among the highest in the state.

School officials have responded to the financial conditions by eliminating teachers and staff positions, refinancing debt, and closing more schools. But budget deficits are projected to increase significantly, threatening to deplete the district's fund balance.

"Timing's everything," says Roosevelt's successor Linda Lane. "We are in kind of the perfect storm because, during a period when state revenues have declined, we are in the spot of trying to adjust our spending."

These budgetary and operational constraints have helped to make significant academic improvement an elusive goal for the district. State test scores had risen in recent years only to drop

significantly last year. Many staff blamed budget cuts that eliminated positions and programs. A state advisory committee countered that tighter security measures had prevented cheating, which it claimed skewed previous years' results. But that reasoning was roundly criticized by administrators, teachers and parents.

Regardless of the causes, the low scores bring the district's racial achievement gap even more into focus. An annual report by the advocacy group A+ Schools describes a gap of about 30 percent between black and white students' test results. Poverty is a likely factor, yet, some schools with the same racial and socioeconomic demographics are closer to eliminating their gaps. Principals at those schools "run their buildings with intentionality," says A+ Schools Executive Director Carey Harris, and make sure they are offering courses that students find rigorous and relevant. "Schools without a gap are doing things a bit differently—sometimes a lot differently."

Compounding the problems of high per-pupil costs and low academic achievement is the impact of families moving to suburban districts or choosing charter schools, says Carnegie Mellon University economics professor Dennis Epple. State public education funding is supposed to "follow the child," but the reality is more complicated. The departure of children to charters means less money for districts, which already have to pay higher employee and other operational costs. As enrollment declines in traditional schools, says Epple, per-pupil expenditures rise. Sometimes this also means that disadvantaged students are left behind "in a milieu of low student academic achievement and low parental involvement."

Other observers note, however, that districts generally pay charter schools only a portion of the calculated per-pupil expenditure, resulting in those students receiving less state funding for their education than their peers in traditional schools. Also, some charters struggle with the same academic achievement and parental engagement obstacles as other public schools.

To overcome these challenges, says Stanley Thompson, the Endowments' Education Program director, Pittsburgh's school district must engage students more, excite them more and collaborate with them more, so they recognize that they are part of a larger community.

"That's true proficiency," says Thompson. "That's true learning."

And that's the type of school district I want my children to experience before they graduate. *h*

# OPTING OUT

**T**

By Katharine B. Dansby-Dean

*Katharine Dansby-Dean is a human resources and benefits representative who lives on Pittsburgh's North Side.*

'm a North Side resident with four children who have attended private school at some point or are in the process of doing so. Each child has a different perspective on life, but all have developed a strong sense of curiosity, leadership and desire to serve others.

My decision to pursue an educational path for my children outside of the Pittsburgh public school system began several years ago. My oldest son, who is now in the military, was enrolled in a public elementary school where he was preparing to enter the third grade. That year he was to begin a newly instituted curriculum, and the school had a new principal and many new members on the teaching staff because two schools had merged. That level of transition and instability from one year to the next was not something our family wanted for our children; even a year of our child's academic development was more than we wanted to risk. I believe schools are heavy influences on children's moral values, social development and work ethic. Learning can accrue at a much faster pace when the school system is stable and nurturing, and demonstrates acceptance by both teachers and peers. I did not think that my son was receiving those things at the time, so I placed him in a small Catholic school.

Because I believe that the freedom to learn without distractions is paramount to a successful school system, I began seeking out schools where my children could focus on learning and developing as young people. I wanted them to attend schools where teachers are excited about enriching the lives of their students, and the students are excited and take pride in their academic growth. The Fund for Advancement of Minorities through Education, known as FAME, helped me in that pursuit through private education. In turn, my children's schools have expanded their exposure to literature, placed a strong emphasis on writing, provided a more diverse student population than the public schools they attended, and offered a wide range of educational and extracurricular activities.

For example, my second-oldest, Maya, was given a FAME scholarship so that she could attend St. Edmund's Academy for middle school and The Ellis School, where she is a senior. When she was in grades six through eight, her strong desires to learn were met by teachers who specialized in their respective fields. The rigorous studies in her social studies class heightened her awareness of the world. She composed a 10-page research paper in eighth grade. Over the years, her school experience has included multiple sports, including track, softball, soccer, basketball and lacrosse; two languages, Spanish and Latin; and participation in annual school plays, concerts — as a saxophone player — and fine art shows.

The FAME program also has had a profound impact on Maya's college preparation and maturation as a young adult. The organization provided funding to help my daughter access a full range of educational opportunities. It has advocated on her behalf and is intentional about creating a cohort of FAME scholars, which has motivated Maya to do her best. She and the other scholars have learned how to balance their daily academic workload, while attending leadership symposiums and college tours, and participating in summer internships. Maya has had several summer internships and participated in leadership forums at local companies through FAME. And with the financial support of FAME and The Ellis School, she recently returned from a 10-day Spanish immersion program in Costa Rica. Maya now has her sights on becoming a biomedical engineer. She received acceptances from a range of outstanding universities and will attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the fall.

I have made these educational choices for my children, which include placing my two youngest boys in St. Bede, a Catholic school, because I think schools are instrumental in how children view themselves in the world, their talents and their purpose. I remain confident that our family has made the right decisions for our children.

## A DIFFERENT CHOICE

Families seeking an alternative to public schools in Pittsburgh and surrounding communities have a number of independent and parochial schools in the region to consider. The Fund for Advancement of Minorities through Education makes it possible for parents such as Katharine Dansby-Dean to send their children to these schools by working with participating institutions to provide 90 to 100 percent of the tuition funding. Students are selected for the FAME program based on the eligibility requirements of the schools that the students apply to, the students' leadership potential and interests, and their financial need.



### St. Edmund's Academy

ANNUAL TUITION  
 Full-day kindergarten: \$14,700  
 Grades 1-4: \$16,850  
 Grades 5-8: \$17,950  
 Students receiving some type of financial assistance: 43 percent



### The Ellis School

ANNUAL TUITION  
 Full-day kindergarten: \$16,000  
 Grades 1-8: \$18,770-\$25,040  
 Grades 9-12: \$26,960  
 Students receiving some type of financial assistance: 33 percent



### St. Bede School\*

ANNUAL TUITION  
 Catholic student parishioner: \$4,000  
 Non-Catholic or Catholic student from other parishes: \$5,650  
 Students receiving some type of financial assistance: 12.5 percent

\*not a FAME participant

# HEAD OF THE CLASS

BY MARK KRAMER

Without ... ctions, PPS ... y mid-2015

	2013 est.	2014 est.
Revenue (Millions)	\$ 511.68	\$ 512.13
Operating Expense	\$ 524.58	\$ 535.07
Operating Profit (Funding Gap)	\$ (12.90)	(\$ 22.94)
Beginning Balance (F)	\$ 30.69	\$ 37.79
Year-end Balance (F)	\$ 17.79	\$ 14.85
	Meets 5% Fund Balance Requirement	No

**L**inda Lane still has the musical theater playbills she collected in the 1960s when she was an eighth-grader falling in love with the arts.

“We’re trying desperately to hang onto arts in our schools,” she says, “because we all know that arts programs have taken a hit nationally. But we’re an arts city.” She nods her head, emphasizing the point: “I mean, we’re an arts city!”

For Pittsburgh School Superintendent Linda Lane, discussing less-than-encouraging budget figures has been an ongoing part of her job, as was the case when she made a presentation during a Superintendent’s Teacher Round Table last year.

Now, as superintendent of Pittsburgh Public Schools, she recalls those playbills while reflecting upon the duties of managing an over-extended district with increasingly tighter budgets.

Lane spends a lot of time grappling with her district's priorities—the arts being one among many—and its academic and fiscal challenges. As a whole, her students are underachieving. And the district has been scrambling for several years to avoid or reduce projected deficits that threaten to destabilize budgets.

But she also sees great potential in the students and the district, and believes high achievement is within reach. “I think part of my role is to take advantage of opportunities to go before students and encourage them to dream big and set goals for themselves,” says Lane. “I talk with parents and want them to understand our commitment, the other issues notwithstanding. I think being a voice for that is important. I also believe I need to be a model of a learner myself. A lot of our students know I'm a reader. I want them to see me as someone who sees herself as also needing to get better.”

Still, the challenges ahead are significant.

As Pittsburgh's population and school enrollments have decreased—including a 28 percent drop in the number of district students over the last decade—school officials have made difficult and unpopular decisions to end programs, close schools, furlough staff and increase class sizes. State and federal revenues have declined, with losses amounting to \$37.8 million last year alone. Ballooning deficits are forecast for each of the next three years and are expected to reach \$53 million in 2016.

Employee costs are driving much of this, says Lane, with health care expenses increasing faster than inflation. Also, the state retirement system is underfunded, and retirement costs are set to increase significantly by 2015.

Ask Lane about “low-hanging fruit”—manageable cuts that haven't been made—and she responds, “I think we've done the low hanging and the medium hanging. It's not like you can go in and say we're just going to get rid of 'x' and that'll take our student costs down. It's all through [the system]. Plans have been made, salaries have been set, negotiated agreements have been put together.”

Lane has tried to do her part by forgoing \$35,000 in pay increases and bonuses in the last two years. And she knows that making the district fiscally sound is at the heart of her highest priority: student achievement. Following several years of gradual improvement, however, state test scores fell last year.

While she acknowledges that many Pittsburgh schools are doing commendable work, Lane emphasizes that teachers must maintain a robust curriculum and high expectations, and rely on precise data—even day-to-day, mental-snapshot assessments—on how children are performing. The same principle applies, she says, to teachers, who need individualized professional development and evaluation.

As in other urban districts, white or more economically advantaged students have better test scores and graduation rates overall than African American students or those from low-income families. Lane contends teachers need to be sure that “[we are] not letting race, poverty, English-language-learner status get us to a place where we think, ‘Well, they're a really nice child, but I don't know if they're going to be able to get this.’”

Lane recalls telling urban education expert Pedro Noguera that Pittsburgh has put in place the same highly regarded approaches used in other districts to increase academic performance and close the achievement gap. Then she asked him what else could be done.

“His diagnosis was that we need to do what we're doing better. I once worked with someone who said in order for a new initiative to have the impact that it should, you have to have 80 percent of the people doing it with 80 percent fidelity. If you don't get to that 80–80 place, you're not going to know whether it works because not enough people are doing it the right way. So getting to that 80–80 place is what we have to do.”

She tries to reflect that determination as she connects personally with students and their families. Having begun her career as a first-grade teacher, Lane wants to “say something, while I'm with [students], that leaves them better than I found them.”

As for parents, she recognizes that some know how to advocate for their children, while others may not. And some can guide their children toward a college education, while others may not. It's the district's job, she says, to serve as “a safety net for kids who need a safety net,” regardless of family background.

That's why Lane likes to admonish students to stay in school and to finish their homework, even as she greets them warmly.

“I'm on their case, and I'm on their side.” *h*

**PARENT SATISFACTION SURVEY:**

# WE AGREE

**D**espite the challenges that the Pittsburgh Public Schools face, a majority of the parents who responded to the district's annual parent survey last year indicated they were satisfied with the schools their children attended. However, the results dropped below 50 percent for several questions involving district-wide issues. Here are excerpts from the survey findings; most reflect the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statements provided.

**School Satisfaction**

**74**

Satisfied with my child's social progress

**74**

Satisfied with my child's academic progress

**69**

Would recommend my child's school

**District Satisfaction**

**53**

District provides variety of school options and programs for my child

**46**

District does a good job of providing information on educational opportunities past high school

**47**

Teaching is improving (down from 66 percent in 2011)

**48**

District students receive high-quality instruction

**41**

Most effective teachers should be assigned to the neediest students

**78**

Factors other than seniority should be taken into account when there are layoffs

**Student Treatment**

**68**

All students are treated fairly

**63**

My child has the same opportunities as others

White parents and parents of the youngest children were slightly more likely to agree that schools are fair and offer equal opportunities

**Treated Fairly:**

PreK: **79%**

White: **71%**

Black: **67%**

**Same Opportunities:**

PreK: **68%**

White: **65%**

Black: **60%**



# SIDE NOTES

## Communication between School and Home

# 94

Awareness of major district initiatives:  
Pittsburgh Promise

# 49

Awareness of major district initiatives:  
Empowering Effective Teachers

### Communication frequency is sufficient about:

Policies: **83%**

Expectations: **79%**

Events: **78%**

My child: **68%**

### School's responses to parent questions:

Are timely: **70%**

Were useful: **68%**

### School provides opportunities for parents to make recommendations:

On school events and activities: **56%**

On school agenda items: **54%**

That are considered: **45%**

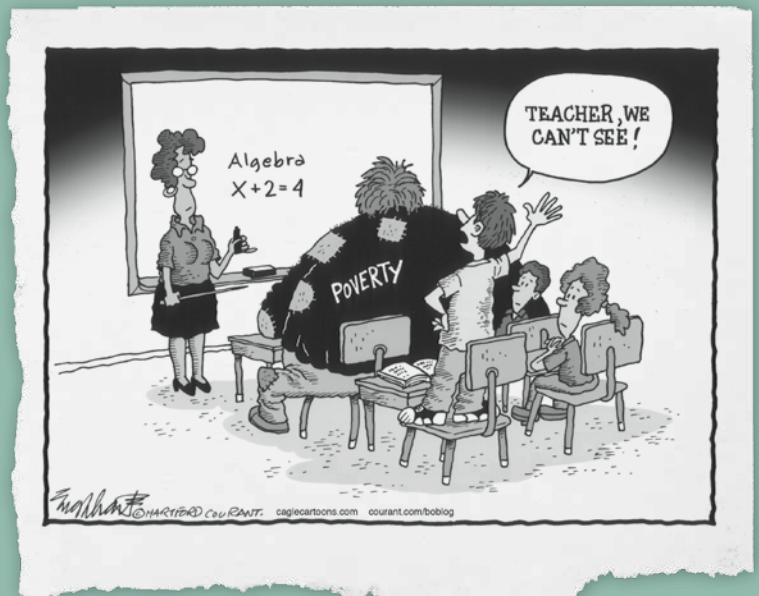
For several years, the Pittsburgh Public Schools has been surveying parents, teachers and students about their experiences within individual schools and the district overall. Results are provided to district staff and school officials as part of the system-wide school improvement process.

“... when I can look at your ZIP code and I can tell whether you’re going to get a good education, can I honestly say it does not matter where you came from, it matters where you are going? ... This is the civil rights issue of our day.”

*Condoleezza Rice, former secretary of state, in her Aug. 29, 2012, speech at the Republican National Convention*

“Can hard-core, low-performing schools be transformed without transforming the district? Of course they can. But can they stay transformed? The answer to this is no.”

*Larry Cuban, Emeritus Professor of education at Stanford University, from a speech on urban school reform given at the OERI Conference on Comprehensive School Reform, Denver, Colo. July 2001*





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# BLUEPRINT FOR REFORM

OPENING ESSAY | **CARMEN LEE**

Nearly 20 years ago, Pittsburgh's school district was in turmoil over school reform. But it was the unraveling of changes from the 1970s and 1980s that had people packing auditoriums, not the possibility of new initiatives.

The rallying cry of "school reform" wasn't on the lips of activists in volatile debates of the mid-1990s. Instead, the incendiary catch phrase was "re-segregation" as school officials had proposed closing some schools, opening new ones, and reworking busing routes in response to state and federal officials relaxing integration mandates. As a newspaper reporter covering the district at that time, I recall competing factions shouting about the virtues of neighborhood schools or the perils of creating those with primarily black or white students, changes that also would increase the number of African American children at schools in low-income communities.

I tried to tell the full story in my articles, but I could see from the anger and frustration of parents, teachers and administrators how difficult it was to provide quality education for students in urban schools. Many people agree on the reasons to reform urban public education: racial and economic achievement gaps, poor test results and high dropout rates. But when funds are cut, laws are changed or people transfer their children elsewhere, the challenge of creating or maintaining good schools increases exponentially. And while adults yell at each other in the heat of the moment about their preferences, students pay long-term costs when ineffective schools limit their opportunities for the future.

The following pages offer examples of current efforts to improve education in Pittsburgh. At the same time, in this region and across the country, educators and school activists are promoting bold innovation, entrepreneurial spirit and social justice as necessary ingredients for cultivating high-quality urban public education. These factors can foster and support reform while encouraging more students, parents, teachers and communities to invest in their schools and ensure that children learn.

Bill Isler, a longtime Pittsburgh school board member, and Richard Wertheimer, co-founder and retired CEO and principal of City Charter High School, describe the city district as an innovation leader in the 1980s. They credit former Superintendent Richard Wallace with ushering in golden years of new approaches to teaching, curriculum and accountability that gained support from the teachers' union and improved students' learning. When Wallace retired and state funding cuts ended certain initiatives, the exposure to the different ideas continued to influence several teachers and administrators. Some, including Wertheimer, left the district to create or staff charter schools that could start fresh with alternative methods for educating children.

Barnett Berry, president and CEO of the Center for Teaching Quality in Carrboro, N.C., a research-based advocacy organization, believes that what passes for school reform on a district level today too often involves continually layering new programs on top of the old.

“Despite some of the rhetoric you might hear, most reformers don’t want education to look that different from when they were in school,” Berry contends. Wertheimer recalls his increasingly jaded colleagues in the Pittsburgh Public Schools commenting that “this too will pass” as they labored under the weight of one reform after another. The remedy, says Berry, is to have entrepreneurial ideas transform school systems by replacing practices that are no longer relevant.

An example could be changing the day-to-day operations of schools to better fit 21st-century lifestyles. Most districts continue to cling to a century-old school calendar, and the overall structure of the school day has not changed much either in the past 100 years. Berry suggests that transforming a school system should involve using technology, workplace opportunities, and cultural assets such as museums and public libraries to offer educational experiences at varied times of day, seven days a week.

Other school activists focus more on addressing societal problems as a critical aspect of reform. Wanda Henderson, a member of the Pittsburgh district’s Equity Advisory Panel and co-chair of the Advocates for African-American Students in Pittsburgh Public Schools, believes that frequently the main goals of urban school reform are curbing white flight and maintaining a city’s tax base rather than helping students of color.

“Everyone ignores the elephant in the room — institutional racism and how it affects education,” she argues. “Until we deal with that, we won’t have true school reform.”

Henderson describes initiatives that boosted black students’ performance at some predominantly African American schools in Pittsburgh in the 1980s. She believes district and teachers’ union politics limited the commitment to replicate the efforts and caused them to end too soon. She says current programs to improve teacher effectiveness could increase achievement among all students, if implemented correctly. But Henderson also is hopeful that the district’s recent equity plan, a result of a 1992 discrimination complaint her organization filed with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, will improve educational opportunities for black students.

Schools are, in fact, a microcosm of society, notes Endowments Education Program Officer Melanie Brown, with the same issues playing out in classrooms. That’s why she and Education Program Director Stanley Thompson, both former educators, revamped their program’s strategy to make equity a primary focus. Thompson adds that effective reform occurs in individual schools, but it is difficult for initiatives to take hold systemically because students’ learning is intertwined with local, state and national problems—“and people don’t want to deal with the larger issues.”

Many experts believe the country’s most dramatic system-wide education reform is taking place in New Orleans. After Hurricane Katrina devastated the city in 2005, officials rebuilt the school district using a “portfolio strategy” that has enabled 84 percent of the city’s 43,500 public school students to attend charter schools of their choice, and allowed 72 of the 90 schools to become charters. The overhaul faces challenges, such as inconsistent test results across schools, unclear governance structures, and debates over sustaining funding as federal emergency support decreases.

Still, Tulane University’s Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives reports that the percentage of students attending failing schools in New Orleans, as determined by state evaluations, has dropped from 64 percent before Katrina to 32 percent this school year. Overall test scores also have improved significantly, increasing 33 percent, though researchers caution that the population displacement caused by the hurricane could have affected the results. In a city where 79 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—compared to 77 percent pre-Katrina—the outcomes nonetheless indicate progress.

The long-term effectiveness of the New Orleans experiment is still unknown, and a charter-based district may not work elsewhere, especially as charter schools continue to get mixed reviews nationally. But people across the United States are watching to see what happens when a city dares to create an entirely new system for delivering public education.

Bold ideas for improving urban school districts exist in this country. It just shouldn’t take a natural disaster to muster the political will to try them. The stakes for our children and our nation are too high. *h*

**"IN SHORT, WE LEARN THEIR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES, WE BUILD TRUST, WE SET GOALS."**

Beth Baranowski, learning support teacher and Cristine Smith, English teacher, City Charter High School

Beth Baranowski, center left, and Cristine Smith, center right, enjoy getting to know students personally as well as instructing them in class.

# FIRST person:

## Feels Like Family

By Beth Baranowski and Cristine Smith

**L**ife moves fast. So does high school. Hence the City Charter High School motto "High school at life speed." What that motto doesn't tell you, though, is that at City High, we actually take things slowly. This is possible because teams of teachers remain with the same students from freshman year until the day they walk across the stage at graduation. We get to know our kids over time, starting in ninth grade. We establish routines, teach the rules of the business-casual dress code, and educate them on the care and use of their individual laptops. We also introduce them to advisory time, where they meet in small groups with a teacher who acts as their liaison, academic coach, post-high school planner and much more for the next four years. In short, we learn their strengths and weaknesses, we build trust, we set goals.

Our students are given time to adjust to the length of their workday—8 a.m. to 4 p.m.—the trimester schedule, each other and us. This allows them to "buy in" to the school culture and climate and to create personal and academic connections. As a result, we are able to focus on students' academics and their individual needs much more since the expectations for the next four years are set at the beginning.

These are some of the key elements of City High, which was established in 2002 by Richard Wertheimer and Mario Zinga. Another aspect of the school's success is sustained teacher collaboration. The two of us have worked together as part of the cultural literacy team for the past seven years, sharing not only space, but also our struggles and triumphs, and growing professionally as a team. Cultural literacy is one of the interdisciplinary classrooms where English and history are taught simultaneously. Sharing planning time increases communication and

## “WE ARE WORKING TO BUILD COMMUNITY AMONG PARENTS CITYWIDE AND TO TEACH LEADERSHIP SKILLS THROUGH ORGANIZING AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING.”

Maria Searcy, A+ Schools parent volunteer

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collaboration. In many ways, the teams of students and teachers become families, an idea that does not exist at many other public schools.

City High also is a truly full-inclusion school. Students who receive learning support services are in the general education classroom 100 percent of the time. Partnerships between special education and general education teachers permit learning differentiation for every student, not just those receiving support services. There is no divide between “special education students” and the rest of the class. Each is treated as an individual, with particular strengths and weaknesses. It is up to the team of teachers to work together, using their varying expertise and creativity, to meet all of a student’s needs for both independent learning and collaboration. Common planning and close relationships create an environment essential to the success of all our students.

Over the four years that groups of students and teachers spend together, we all learn about school, life, the world, each other and ourselves. Everyone cries on graduation day—students, school staff, family and friends—because we had the opportunity to tackle the skills of succeeding at “life speed” gradually and to build a family bond in the classroom and beyond. That is the true difference of City High.

*Beth Baranowski is a learning support teacher and Cristine Smith is an English teacher at City Charter High School in Downtown Pittsburgh.*

### School Volunteer Spirit

By Maria Searcy

**I**’m a proud graduate of Pittsburgh Public Schools and a lifelong resident of the city’s North Side. Some of my fondest childhood memories are walking to school with my friends— through West Park, past Lake Elizabeth— and seeing the caged peacocks at the National Aviary.

My two daughters, Brett, 14, and Chandler, 12, take a more complicated route to school. They catch a bus across town to the Barack Obama Academy of International Studies. While I appreciate the education they are getting through a rigorous international curriculum, there was something poignant about my school experience that I wish they could have.

I began my volunteer work in the city district at Brett’s elementary school. A trip to Reilly’s pumpkin farm was my first experience as a chaperone. Subsequently, I joined the Parent-Teacher Organization and Parent School Community Council. That school seemed like a good fit for my daughter; however,



I eventually realized that there were racial disparities in the classroom. African American students were disproportionately underrepresented in the gifted program, and the school employed only one African American teacher. My desire to address these inequities and ensure Brett’s success required a different level of parental involvement.

Within the next few years, I became a member of the Title I State Parent Advisory Council, a group of parents from across the state who volunteer under the direction of the Pennsylvania Department of Education in Harrisburg. Through that affiliation, I was nominated to the Pittsburgh Public Schools Equity Advisory Panel, a volunteer group that monitors data concerning the treatment of the district’s African American students. I participated in Courageous Conversations, a national training program for educators to help schools close their racial achievement gaps. Additionally, I received state certification as a tutor, completed training with Pittsburgh Coro Leaders in Learning, and received certification from the Pennsylvania Parent Leadership Academy to build capacity and empower other parents in the district.

Currently, I volunteer with A+ Schools as a parent ambassador. We work to build community among parents citywide and to teach leadership skills through organizing and relationship-building. With A+ Schools’ support, I established a Parent Information Resource Center at Pittsburgh Obama. The PIRC will give parents a space to obtain resources, attend trainings, and create unique opportunities to partner with teachers.

Because of my experiences, I believe that parent involvement—through intentional relationship-building, shared leadership and community engagement—is crucial to ensuring that all students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools are successful.

*Maria Searcy is a cosmetologist and entrepreneur who lives on the North Side of Pittsburgh.*

# "COLLEGE AND PRODUCTIVE CITIZENSHIP ARE OUR PRIMARY GOALS."

Jodie Moore, President and Rev. Tom Johnson, head of school, The Neighborhood Academy

## Building Community

By Jodie Moore and Rev. Tom Johnson

**T**he Neighborhood Academy is an accredited, faith-based, college-preparatory high school designed specifically to meet the needs of students who don't have the academic background or financial resources to access an independent school education. College and productive citizenship are our primary goals. One hundred percent of our seniors are accepted to college every year, and 85 percent of our students graduate from college in five years or less.

Yet, what makes us "us," what makes the "data" possible, is a set of commitments that, on the surface, have little to do with the "3 Rs." Obviously, we place great value on well-crafted curricula and ongoing teacher professional development. However, at The Neighborhood Academy, we also emphasize more qualitative factors that we believe are often ignored in the current dialogue about education of the urban poor. What is foundational and critical to a successful school, we contend, is the establishment of a healthy community and the single-minded commitment that makes the creation of community possible. This commitment, coupled with clarity about instructional practices and the goals of those practices, makes The Neighborhood Academy successful.

We view ourselves as a school community because, most important, we are a school of faith. The role of faith in the public square, in general, and in education, in particular, has been a source of great contention because faith has been politicized to such an extent that God has been reduced to a particular political ideology. At The Neighborhood Academy, faith is rooted in theology common to the world's major religions: Human beings have an infinite value, and the challenge of living a meaningful life is to treat others and self in a way that reflects that value. Truth telling, commitment, the safety of self and others, and the

Opposite: Maria Searcy, center, makes sure her daughters, Brett, left, and Chandler, right, are receiving good quality education by getting involved in their schools.

This page: For The Neighborhood Academy co-founders, Jodie Moore, left, and Rev. Tom Johnson, right, promoting faith-based values and self-respect among students has been key to the school's success.

development of one's gifts to the benefit of all, these are the cornerstones of our community.

We also are a school that values manners and civility. We teach students how to shake hands, make and maintain eye contact, how to greet strangers and make them comfortable. We have found that teaching teenagers the habits of civility and insisting that they act on what they know are critical to their self-confidence and build pathways to self-respect.

This issue of self-respect commands much of our thought and attention. How do you build authentic self-respect in a world where many young people are given an award for merely showing up or advanced with minimal or no accomplishment? Our students have pride in their school and themselves, and are poised and confident young adults because they have earned, through grit and determination, the self-respect that comes from hard work well-accomplished, athletic competitions fiercely contested, and artistic endeavors practiced and reworked, again and again. In the end, our students experience the pride, confidence and self-respect that come from genuine accomplishment.

It is this admixture of faith celebrated and enacted, life lived comfortably with others, and self-respect born of authentic achievement that shapes and defines us as a unique community of learners.

*Rev. Tom Johnson is head of school and Jodie Moore is president of The Neighborhood Academy, an independent school they co-founded that is in Pittsburgh's Garfield/Stanton Heights neighborhood.*



HITS

### The Pittsburgh Promise

The Pittsburgh Promise scholarship program is designed to complement the school district's efforts to improve student achievement and to help reverse declining enrollment. Graduates of city public high schools and certain charter schools who meet eligibility requirements are awarded scholarships of up to \$40,000 to attend accredited post-secondary institutions in the state. Scholarships were awarded to 3,285 graduates during the first four years of the program. A recent University of Pittsburgh study shows they are continuing their post-secondary education at rates higher than the national average. Test scores in city public schools have improved since Promise scholarships were offered, the district graduation rate has risen from 63 percent to 68.5 percent, and the enrollment decline has slowed.

### Summer Dreamers Academy

Summer vacation may be a long-anticipated break from school for students, but it's downtime when it comes to learning. In July 2010, the Pittsburgh district began working with community organizations to create the Summer Dreamers Academy, which keeps students engaged in learning in ways that don't steal the fun from their summers. During the free camp, students begin their day with 90 minutes of math and a 90-minute reading block based on a National Geographic content curriculum. After that, activities range from learning judo and dance to making music and designing video games. The camps are popular: Some 4,000 children applied for 2,300 openings last summer.

### RISE

Pittsburgh Public Schools administrators and teachers were unhappy with a former teacher evaluation process that was often based on a single classroom visit by a principal and little else. Teachers were graded simply as "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory," offering little insight into their effectiveness, let alone what they could do to improve. That ended with the Research-Based Inclusive System of Evaluation (RISE), the product of nearly three years of collaboration among administrators, teachers and their union to build a more thorough, instructive evaluation process. Today, teachers' evaluations take into consideration planning, preparation, classroom environment, teaching and learning, and other factors essential to assessing effectiveness and improving instruction.

# HITS MISSES & MAYBES

RESEARCHED AND COMPILED BY JEFFERY FRASER

Similar to urban districts across the country, the Pittsburgh Public Schools has launched or joined a number of initiatives over the years as part of its effort to improve teaching and learning. Some have been promising — others not so much. Here are examples of programs that reflect the range of ways administrators and staff have attempted to promote quality education in city public schools.





## MISSES

### Single-Gender Education

Proponents wanting to convert underperforming Westinghouse High School into two single-gender academies argued that it would improve the learning environment by eliminating social pressures and raising self-esteem. Critics said single-gender schools are discriminatory, foster stereotypes and limit opportunities to learn social skills needed in a coed world. The experiment's failure had little to do with the concept. Because the American Civil Liberties Union questioned the legality of the single-gender academies, school officials decided instead to create one academy that offered some

single-gender classes. When the school opened in August 2011, there wasn't a master schedule. The curriculum was unfinished. The computer system wasn't ready to track grades and attendance. Boxes of supplies lined hallways. Discipline eroded. Enrollment fell. The two co-principals were put on administrative leave. And the ACLU still threatened to sue. By February 2012, the single-gender approach had been scrapped.

### Seniority Rules, Again

Last spring, some 300 Pittsburgh Public Schools teachers faced losing their jobs because of deep budget cuts. Although furloughs were inevitable, disruption to individual schools and damage to the quality of instruction could have been limited if the least effective teachers had been laid off based on evidence gained from the Research-Based Inclusive System of Evaluation. But all Pennsylvania districts base layoffs on teacher certification area and seniority, a contract provision firmly embraced by teachers' unions whose members have been judged for years by evaluations more subjective than objective. Despite having collaborated on developing RISE, teachers and administrators failed to reach an agreement to consider effectiveness in selecting who would be laid off. Seniority ruled, again. Schools were disrupted district-wide.



## MAYBES

### Empowering Effective Teachers

Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and federal and state grants, the Pittsburgh district's Empowering Effective Teachers initiative aims to improve student achievement by increasing the number of highly effective teachers, exposing more high-needs students to great teachers, and making sure all students learn in environments that promote college readiness. Program components include RISE, the new teacher evaluation process; a "teaching institute" that puts some of the best teachers in high-needs schools; and a Promise-Readiness Corps of effective teachers and staff who help get ninth-graders on track for Promise scholarships. In the past few years, the district has recognized 1,400 effective teachers, and more than 100 unsatisfactory teachers have left. But RISE data wasn't considered in teacher layoffs last year.

### Accelerated Learning Academies

Accelerated learning academies were created in the wake of the 2006 "right-sizing" plan to assign Pittsburgh district students whose schools were closed to higher-performing ones or those with enhanced educational programs. The seven academies, which use the America's Choice School Design model, feature longer school days, rigorous coursework, support for low-achievers, emphasis on quality teaching, accountability for student outcomes and frequent student assessments. On state exams, the increase in reading proficiency among academy students has been twice that of students district-wide since 2007. Their improvement in math proficiency was 1.7 times that of other students. But the academies are not immune from district financial problems. Last year, one academy was closed in the latest round of budget cuts.

### Culturally Responsive Arts Education

In 2009, Culturally Responsive Arts Education was introduced in four Pittsburgh schools. By incorporating African culture into teaching and engaging students in the arts of the African Diaspora, the hope was to stimulate interest, encourage ownership of learning and inspire achievement. Principles included viewing race and culture as assets; teaching students about racism's impact and ways of overcoming it; and demonstrating how artists can help build relationships among children, schools and communities. While the district has struggled to design an effective program, there have been successes. They include reports of teaching artists having positive impact on schools such as influencing partner classroom teachers to improve their instruction culturally and causing issues of ethnicity, race and culture to be considered more often in the overall arts curriculum.

### Equity: Getting to All

Nowhere is the student achievement gap between races more pronounced than in urban public schools, and Pittsburgh is no exception. In an effort to narrow that gap, the district launched Equity: Getting to All, which began last year in Perry High School on the city's North Side and in Westinghouse 6-12 in Homewood. Strategies include improving the quality of teaching in high-needs classrooms; engaging parents and communities; offering a more culturally relevant curriculum, such as courses in African American history and literature; and making access to a wider variety of subjects, including advanced courses, more equitable. If successful, the plan is to apply the lessons learned from the pilot schools to others throughout the district.

# OUTSIDE IN

## Youth Organizing: A+ Schools, Amachi Pittsburgh, Community Empowerment Association and Hill District Consensus Group

Students across the Pittsburgh region, such as those below who staged an education rally at the Pennsylvania state capitol in Harrisburg, are learning how to use their youthful energy and voices to improve their schools. They are being guided by organizations selected to launch the Endowments' Youth Organizing for School Change agenda. The initiative seeks to increase the participation of young people as active agents in education reform. A proven strategy for transforming schools and communities across the country, youth organizing involves training young people as community organizers and advocates. Adult allies assist them in employing these skills to create meaningful institutional change. The four nonprofits chosen to be in the first group to receive support in developing youth organizing programs are A+ Schools, which coordinated the Harrisburg rally; Amachi Pittsburgh; Community Empowerment Association; and Hill District Consensus Group.



Courtesy of A+ Schools

**A**cross the United States, legions of individuals, organizations and institutions that are not part of school systems participate in initiatives designed to help educate children and assist them in growing into productive adults. These Heinz Endowments–supported efforts in the Pittsburgh region use different approaches to boost students' learning.

### After-school Learning: Neighborhood Learning Alliance

More than a decade of research has concluded that the benefits children receive from attending well-conceived and well-implemented after-school programs include improvement in their academic and social outcomes and development of healthier lifestyles. The Neighborhood Learning Alliance offers several after-school programs in Pittsburgh. For kindergarten through fifth-grade students, Pittsburgh LEARNS uses a "learn throughout play" model aimed at improving language fluency, reading and math skills in interactive ways that children find more fun than tedious. For middle and high school students, the comprehensive Community LEARNS program focuses on academics and works closely with teachers, administrators and others to ensure that students are on track to graduate from high school. Pittsburgh LEARNS began last year, and early indications suggest the children, many of whom enter with severe academic and personal challenges, are making progress toward proficiency in math and reading, improving their grades and reducing the number of days they miss school. All of the students who participated in Community LEARNS three years ago graduated, and 73 percent are either in college or hold a job.

Keith Boyer, IUP



Neighborhood Learning Alliance

### Community Support and Services: Homewood Children's Village

The community celebration below recognizes the Homewood Children's Village, which was inspired by the successes of the Harlem Children's Zone in New York. University of Pittsburgh professor of social work John Wallace started the Homewood initiative in 2007 to improve health, educational and social outcomes of children by concentrating community support and comprehensive services in one of Pittsburgh's most distressed neighborhoods. Among the efforts under way are a project to secure safe routes for children who walk to school and a four-day-a-week college preparation course for high school students. Twenty-five staff members were added to the neighborhood high school faculty to provide mentoring and case management services. Another program helps families acquire benefits and services needed to avoid financial crises.

Such an approach produced impressive results in the Harlem Children's Zone, which began more than a decade ago and serves 10,000 children and their families. Evaluations suggest that more parents read to their children, more than 99 percent of 4-year-olds have been certified "school ready," racial gaps in math and literacy have narrowed, and more teens graduate from high school. The Homewood Children's Village recruited some 20 community partners to realize similar benefits for its children.

### Recruiting African American Male Teachers: Indiana University of PA

African American men make up only about 1 percent of the nation's schoolteachers. Increasing those numbers could have a profound impact on the diversity of school faculties and help boost achievement among black boys, whose dropout rates are estimated at 1 in 4 or higher, making them the least likely in the nation to finish school. To draw more African American men to teaching, Indiana University of Pennsylvania is leading a region-wide recruiting project that includes promoting achievement in middle school and high school so that African American youth are able to pursue college degrees. Among the strategies are producing DVDs featuring black male teachers such as Corey Burnett and Terence King, above, creating mentoring programs for young students and those in college, and developing strong relationships with community and regional colleges, where more than 20 percent of today's teachers began their journey to a teaching career. California University of Pennsylvania, the Community College of Allegheny County and Point Park University also participate in the initiative.



Carol Moye

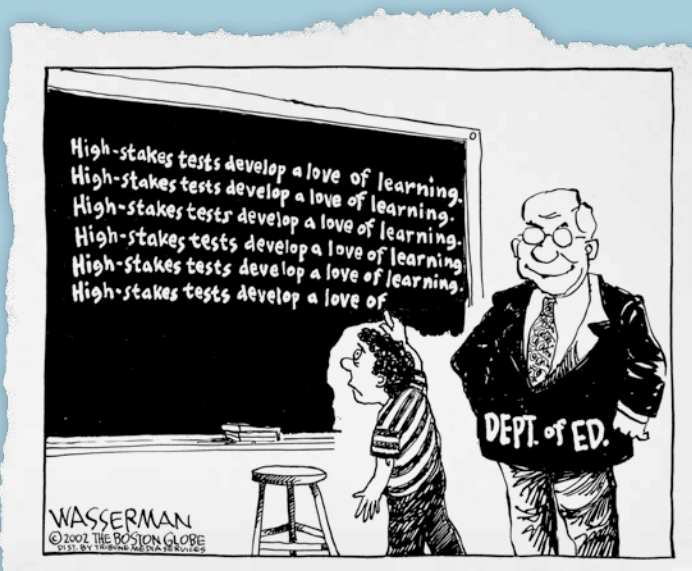
# SIDE NOTES

“[Barbara Jordan’s] community nurtured her and told her to dream big: ‘Go to college, Barbara. Go to law school, Barbara. Go to Congress, Barbara.’ And she did. She is a case-in-point that though poverty is cruel and stern, nothing is stronger than a community’s wish to unleash a child’s God-given potential.”

*U.S. Deputy Education Secretary Tony Miller while speaking at the Church of God in Christ’s International AIM Convention in Houston, Texas, July 7, 2011*

“We need to work with these kids and their families and their communities, enveloping them in healthy and encouraging environments at every stage of life, from birth all the way up until they graduate from college.”

*Geoffrey Canada, president and CEO of Harlem Children’s Zone, in testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions, April 22, 2010*



## TEACHER SURVEY:

# MIXED REPORT CARD

Since 2010, the New Teacher Center, a national nonprofit with headquarters in Santa Cruz, Calif., has collaborated with the Pittsburgh Public Schools and the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers to administer the annual PPS Positive Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey to district staff. The center examines ways to increase the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders in order to improve student learning. As the following examples show, the majority of the responses from Pittsburgh teachers have been favorable or indicate improvement since the survey began, though scores dropped in several areas last year. Results reflect the percent of survey participants who agree with the statements provided.

	2010	2011	2012
<b>Professional Evaluation and Support</b>			
Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instructions.	92.0	93.4	93.7
Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve teaching.	76.1	83.4	82.9
Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	74.3	80.1	76.6
Procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	69.5	78.4	72.7
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in the school.	59.9	63.4	61.9
<b>Professional Development</b>			
An appropriate amount of time is provided for professional development.	77.7	81.8	80.0
Professional development enhances teachers' abilities to improve student learning.	77.1	80.6	79.3
Professional development is differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers.	47.6	55.0	54.6
<b>Instructional Support</b>			
Local assessment data are available in time to affect instructional practices.	85.3	82.8	74.0
Teachers are assigned to classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students.	49.5	61.1	59.1
State assessment data are available in time to affect instructional practices.	65.4	63.4	57.6
Teachers have authority to make decisions about instructional delivery (e.g., pacing, materials, pedagogy).	38.1	48.5	53.2
<b>Time Management Support</b>			
Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of students.	58.6	67.2	70.1
Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.	59.7	69.5	69.9
Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions.	51.5	59.5	60.5
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do.	41.6	55.2	57.4
<b>Parent and Community Support</b>			
This school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement.	82.2	86.6	87.9
Community members support teachers, contributing to their success with students.	65.7	74.1	74.5
Parents/guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students.	57.4	63.2	63.9
<b>Student Conduct</b>			
Teachers consistently enforce the rules for student conduct.	69.7	69.5	70.1
School administrators support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom.	68.9	68.8	68.9
School administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct.	54.2	54.7	52.9
Students treat peers with respect in this school.	49.8	53.2	50.6
Students at this school follow rules of conduct.	44.8	46.0	45.9

For several years, the Pittsburgh Public Schools has been surveying parents, teachers and students about their experiences within individual schools and the district overall. Results are provided to district staff and school officials as part of the system-wide school improvement process.



3



## INVESTMENT

# MODELS OF SUCCESS

OPENING ESSAY | **DOUGLAS ROOT**  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARTHA RIAL

When a mentoring rescue team of young, black, college-educated men was unleashed to connect with students in one of Pittsburgh's most troubled schools, some dust was kicked up...

...And some big dreams were sparked, and some futures look brighter.

The problem is  $6 \div 2$ .

Actually, that is the small problem that has led Sean Means to understand the magnitude of the Big Problem. Its scope is revealed in a study session with a soon-to-be 10th-grader in one of Pittsburgh's most academically troubled public high schools. The student is puzzled—his face scrunched as he blurts out a series of answers, each of them a guess, and each guess wrong.

"How about  $9 \times 8$ ?" Doesn't know.

"How about  $5 \times 3$ ?" Silence.

A week later, 30-year-old Means is sitting in a Starbucks in Shadyside. It is a two-mile drive and a 1,000-light-year cultural shift from the struggling teen in the summer program at Pittsburgh Westinghouse. The mammoth Classical Revival building that once served thousands of students now draws about 530 sixth-to-12th graders from some of the poorest neighborhoods. The racial breakdown: 99 percent African American, 1 percent other.

That statistic helps explain why Means, African American and a college graduate from Atlanta whose career path has taken him from Washington, D.C. to New Zealand, now is sitting in a Pittsburgh coffee bar fretting over one lost student.

"Look—he's a good kid, but he just doesn't know it," Means says, thumping long fingers on the table for emphasis. "The foundation is not there, so how are we going to put him into algebra and expect anything close to success?" The discussion flows from one struggling student and then to another, and eventually it turns to the struggling system. Thousands of city students are deep into their high school years and also are deeply deficient in mastering basic math and reading comprehension.

Coffee drinkers nearby might assume Means to be a passionate teacher or guidance counselor. Neither of these titles is on his resumé, and yet in the span of a year and a few months he has done parts of these jobs and many more.

In the fall of 2011, Means and nine other African American men, all with college degrees and heading into professional careers, were embedded at Westinghouse in an unprecedented foundation-city school district program that was developed, its architects say, as a classroom-level rescue of students entangled in the Big Problem.

In the more precise language of education policymakers, the Big Problem is the achievement gap. Students on the wrong side of it largely come from neighborhoods mired in multi-generational poverty. Black males, even those not part of low-income households, have historically dominated the achievement gap group.

In Pittsburgh, testing data last year showed a widening of the black/white learning divide after several years of progress in closing it. Results also showed an increase in the socio-economic gap. Education, business and foundation leaders have reacted to the mind-numbing complexity of the problem with an array of preventive strategies designed to catch vulnerable students in their early school years. There are few lifelines for those in higher grades who are drowning academically.

In February 2010, as severe budget cuts were taking hold in the district, staff at The Heinz Endowments asked Dr. Linda Lane, superintendent of the 25,000-student district, to identify a critical need that was not being addressed. She pointed to the achievement gap and the dearth of black male role models.

The response was the Heinz Fellows, a two-year program in which the 10 were identified through a cross-country network of educators, counselors and experts in development programs for young black men. The Fellows were envisioned to be real-time models of success: the mentor-guides working exclusively with black males in and out of the classroom each day. In return, they would receive a salary, benefits and enrollment in a master's degree program in education at Duquesne University.

After a school-year-and-a-half of operating in Westinghouse and in projects attached to the school, the Fellows Program has been given soaring marks for making inroads with individual students. Each Fellow has a mentoring caseload of 25–30. “Imagine what this means to a mom in one of these struggling neighborhoods, knowing what passes for male role models in her son's world,” says Stanley Thompson, director of the Endowments' Education Program.

The rippling effects from the program on administrators, teachers and other professionals in the district are only beginning to be assessed, but many of those have led to positive changes.

“We worked carefully to ensure that these young men would not be add-ons to the system but part of the regular daily routine,” says Endowments President Robert Vagt. “This is the first time that people who do not report through the system have been allowed to work in classrooms and become stakeholders in what happens each day. I give the district a lot of credit.”

That is not to suggest that there hasn't been some turbulence. At the beginning, a single-gender academy plan for Westinghouse unraveled over a threatened American Civil Liberties Union lawsuit, and the Fellows mission expanded to cover young women. “Time management is the big issue,” says Philadelphia

THE FELLOWS WERE ENVISIONED TO BE REAL-TIME MODELS OF SUCCESS: THE MENTOR-GUIDES WORKING EXCLUSIVELY WITH BLACK MALES IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM EACH DAY.

native Matt Tansey, a Pennsylvania State University graduate. “There are all types of meetings, and the master's program is so absorbing, but we are all pulled toward the students.”

In fact, the constant juggling of responsibilities and the inevitable limitations on student time led one from the group to resign at the end of the first year. Reacting to that months later, several Fellows say the experience gave them a keener understanding of how important resiliency is in the position.

While he's not the oldest, James Sudduth, 36, is known as the “senior Fellow,” a largely self-appointed title that others in the group enjoy over-emphasizing when they address him, observes that the Fellows are most effective with students when they share personal stories of resiliency. “When you make that connection, you want to do everything you can to strengthen it,” he says.

Sudduth remembers having had life-changing mentoring from a University of Pittsburgh professor. Others in the group refer to one great teacher, one coach, one pastor. Some have shared how they developed resiliency through experiences with poverty, teenage fatherhood and stints in the criminal justice system.

While the Endowments will be doing a detailed evaluation of how well the program is addressing students who are making up learning deficits at the level of  $6 \div 2$ , a larger piece will look at how the system-wide solution to the achievement gap is helped by factoring in the number 10. Meanwhile, a second class of Fellows is being recruited.

“These students know that no other school has this situation—and they look at the Fellows as special—a very rare resource,” says Vagt. “They also should know that, in placing the Fellows in their school, all of us are saying, ‘You are worth every bit of this huge effort, and you are capable of achieving what these Fellows have achieved.’” *h*





## EMMANUEL KWAME AFRIFA

AGE 23

HOMETOWN  
THE BRONX, NEW YORK CITY

EDUCATION  
SWARTHMORE COLLEGE,  
B.A., RELIGION WITH BLACK  
STUDIES MINOR, 2011

**Where you were and where you are:**

Born and raised in New York City — the Bronx. My parents emigrated from Ghana; I am named for a Ghanaian ancestor. Now living in Wilkinsburg.

**Who/what helped you get to where you are now:** Growing up, my family and cultural orientation was truly African — very different from African American kids and Latinos who were the majority in my school system. I had trouble adjusting. In the third grade, I was way behind in every subject, and when the school officials told my mother that they were going to hold me back, it was the first time I had ever seen her cry. I was determined not to hurt her, so I went to summer school and worked extremely hard. I did so well they gave me a shot at fourth grade. So my mother is first in the big influences that have shaped my life. Another was a college prep program, Liberty League, which involved visits to college campuses. That's when I saw Swarthmore for the first time and realized what that type of education could do for me. I had something to go after.

**One big thing that prepared you for the**

**Fellowship:** It was a shock on that campus with the minority student population at just 10 percent. Another black student introduced me to the community of black students that supported one another. From that point on, I felt welcome and I believed I could make it. I became very involved with the Achieving Black and Latino Leaders of Excellence group at Swarthmore — eventually was elected president. One of the projects was mentoring African American males in Chester, Pa., near the campus. The percentage of black male students graduating from high school was very low, and college attendance was minimal. That was when I first started realizing that the mentoring we were doing — it wasn't just about helping them stay on track with their education; it was about helping them manage life in general.

**Fellowship — Concept vs. Reality:** The idea for this program is wonderful. As Fellows, we have the ability to grow professionally,

and the students have an opportunity to get on a better educational track and grow from the personal attention. But I was a little unprepared for this challenge because although I had experience mentoring and tutoring, it is very different from being in a classroom and having to engage a whole class continuously. I wish we had more time to develop some relationships so that these students are ready to hear what we have to say. In the orientation, there were high expectations that we were going to change the whole face of Westinghouse, almost as if we were superhumans. And we, as Fellows, put those expectations on ourselves, too. In the second year, it's all about being just human and recognizing what is possible right now.

**One thing I've learned:** I see the difference between teachers who get involved in the communities that the students are part of — and those who don't. When the kids are comfortable with you in that regard, that's when you are a true role model. I watch workers at Westinghouse — not teachers — who take the same buses as the students, and they talk to them. They have relationships, and it makes a huge difference.

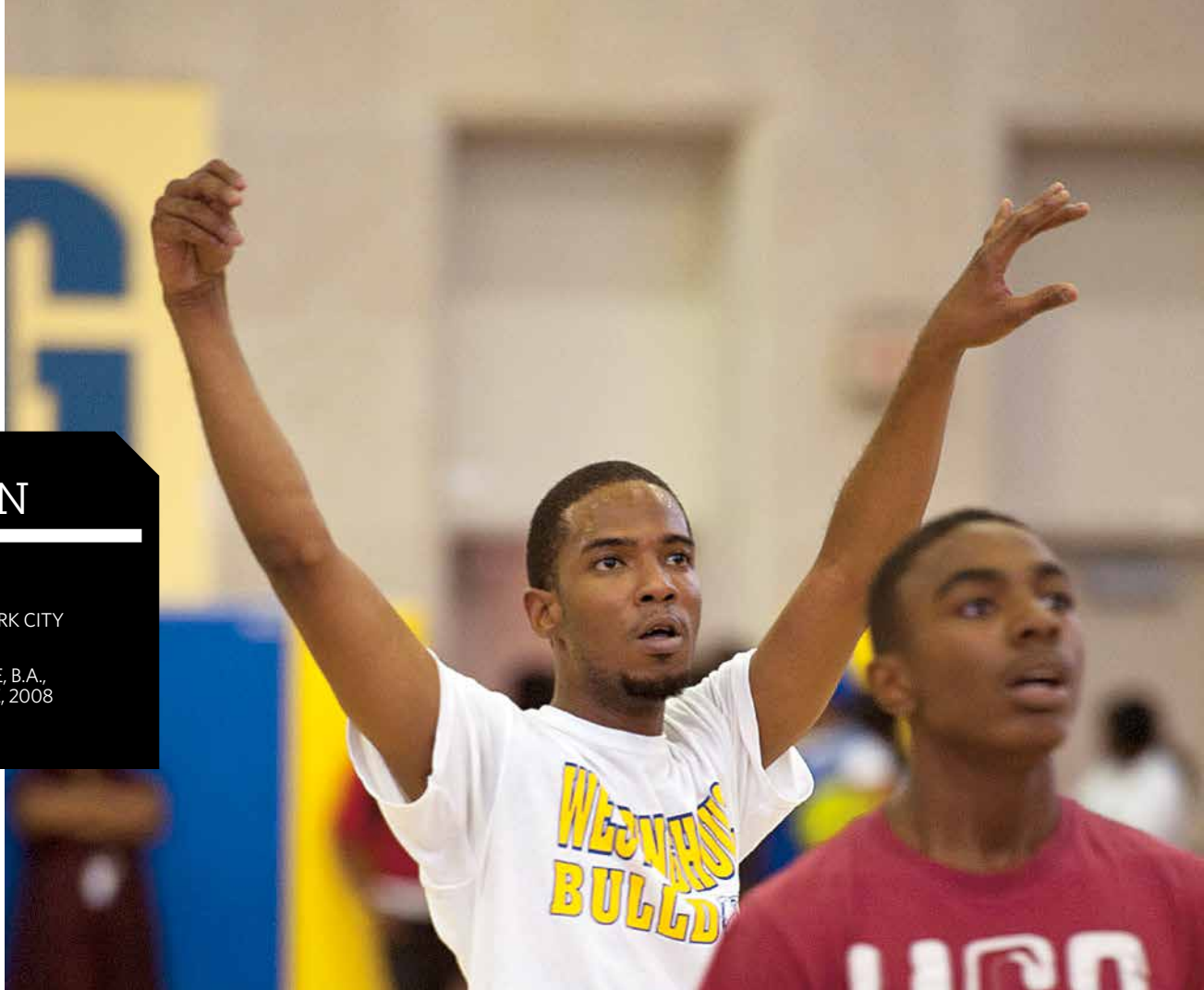
## SHAWN BOLDEN

AGE 26

HOMETOWN  
HARLEM, NEW YORK CITY

EDUCATION  
MONROE COLLEGE, B.A.,  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE, 2008

*Shawn shown on left.*



### Where you were and where you are:

Born in Harlem and raised there by my grandparents. There were addiction issues in my family, and I was considered an at-risk teen in high school, but I made it to college. I share my personal story with students who have had similar challenges to show them they can make it. Now living in Wilkinsburg.

### Who/what helped you get to where

**you are now:** My grandparents were into their church, and they were all about being responsible in the community. I was caught between two worlds — the home life where I was experiencing all of these high moral principles, and the street life where bad activities bring fast money. So in my teenage years, I got arrested. I was literally at that fork in the road. I saw how dehumanized I was in the criminal justice system. It was at that point that I got introduced to Brotherhood/Sister Sol [a Harlem-based nonprofit dedicated to 8- to 22-year-old youth development], and mentors there helped me realize that going to college could be more than just an idea.

### One big thing that prepared you for the

**Fellowship:** One of them would be my experience as a parent. I have a 3-year-old daughter who is very playful and active. There is a lot of trial and error in figuring out the best way to connect with her. She is trying to be her own person, and there is testing of limits. When she does something wrong, I notice that if I am firm but the delivery is calming and respectful, she listens better. I get the same reaction from Westinghouse students. Being a parent, you understand the parents of the students, and — this is a tough one — the students who have to play the role of a parent at home.

**Fellowship — Concept vs. Reality:** This job isn't a Kool-Aid drinking contest — it's not all that sweet. But the experience here has helped me grow professionally and personally in ways I never thought possible. I spend most of my time as a mentor. I do a lot of tough love because these kids are a real hard sell — more than in New York. The level of apathy and low self-respect is very high, and I think it's tied to a lot of personal history where people have not cared about them.

You have that attitude coming at you long enough, and eventually you make it part of who you are. And I am referring to the whole community being responsible for this. Some of the parents are very apathetic.

**One thing I've learned:** We have to change the rites-of-passage culture with young black men. One thing that really made me sit back and think, "Wow, this is what we're up against? This is what these students think is cool?" On my first day with the 12th-grade boys, I could tell the trust wasn't there. But what got their attention ... solidified their trust instantly ... was when I read them one of my poems that had a reference to my experience being locked up. I consider it one of the worst periods of my life, and they think being incarcerated is this tremendous rite of passage. The next step is that getting shot and surviving is an even higher rite of passage. Not a good situation.



OMAR ABDUL  
LAWRENCE

AGE 37

**HOMETOWN**  
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

**EDUCATION**  
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH,  
B.A., AFRICANA STUDIES AND  
MUSIC, 2001

**Where you were and where you are:**

Grew up on Pittsburgh's North Side. Graduated from Allderdice High School, so I'm a product of the city's public school system. From my younger years through college, I was always involved with community programs. And my career has followed that track — community programming and outreach development. Now living in Franklin Park.

**Who/what helped you get to where you are now:**

My mom has a strong background as an artist and has been very involved in the cultural aspects of the African American community. She instilled a love for these art forms in me, and they have been big factors in my development. As early as middle school, I was in the Kuntu Writers Workshop at

the University of Pittsburgh. Another big influence was a rites-of-passage program I went through later. And hip-hop had a major effect. Part of my experience is as a hip-hop artist.

**One big thing that prepared you for the Fellowship:**

Professionally, it would have to be the Children's Window to Africa, which was a program founded and managed by my mother, Valerie Lawrence. It was a very exciting cultural activities program directed to the public housing areas around Pittsburgh. That was my life for about seven years — moving from facilitator to program development to project director and program director. My focus was on using the cultural pieces in the program to guide individual and community development.

**Fellowship — Concept vs. Reality:**

When I first read about the program, my immediate reaction was that this type of opportunity is so rare, and it has the qualities of a dream job. I am constantly studying and so excited about what I've been able to learn. My idea of a dream job is not one that requires little effort;

it should mean that you are working really hard at exactly what you want to do. Oh, and for sure we are working hard — 40-plus hours in the school and then our own graduate work. Hundreds of hours later, here we are, and it has been very tough, but it has really helped to be in a group of really sharp, impressive guys. It's a big benefit to the students and to Pittsburgh that we have out-of-town guys in the mix.

**One thing I've learned:**

The best relationships to help students learn happen organically. They can't be hurried. They are about getting to a place where you can communicate what they have done well and what areas you have concerns about. Students are in the process of learning how they learn best, and they are looking for guidance, but it has to be at their pace.



DEWAYNE  
POWELL

AGE 40

HOMETOWN  
EAST DETROIT, MICHIGAN

EDUCATION  
MOREHOUSE COLLEGE,  
B.A., SOCIOLOGY, 2008

**Where you were and where you are:**

Born and raised in East Detroit. My father died when I was 18 months. Have two younger sisters whom I helped raise when my mother became ill. Now living in East Liberty.

**Who/what helped you get to where you are now:**

My faith is woven into my DNA. Each of my grandparents was a pastor, and my parents and aunts were in ministry. The other influence would be Morehouse College. I opened the acceptance letter on the very first day of a new job that I had started in Detroit. Keeping that job or going to Morehouse, it wasn't even a question. Every day I am reminded of some part of my educational experience that confirms I made the right decision.

**One big thing that prepared you for the Fellowship:**

I think it would be tenacity. No matter what happens, I keep moving and don't stop. I don't mean that I'm trying to act like some kind of superhero. I am hardly that, but at the end of the day,

if I am doing what I believe God expects, it's going to be OK and I just move forward with confidence. I've dealt with some tough transitions. I was 8 when my mother suffered a nervous breakdown, and I had to take over caring for my two younger sisters. I was the adult at home, and it didn't match up with school, so I dropped out. But I went back to school and got my GED ... and I pushed myself toward college. I've dealt with sexual abuse and a lot of other issues. You just keep moving.

**Fellowship — Concept vs. Reality:**

The Endowments has developed a program that could be on the cusp of dramatically changing the way city students react to public education. It is such an excellent thing even to have tried this. What drew me was the opportunity to combine mental health with life skills and daily education. I discovered 90 days into the program that there was a lack of professional courtesy and communication to the Fellows on the part of some in the district, and it made me angry. I think that there are a lot of big chief wannabes [in the school system] and very few dedicated Indians. Frankly, we Fellows are

going to walk away from this with degrees, professional experience, job offers. Clearly, professionals in the system — they're not suffering. The children and their parents ... they're the ones who will be terribly affected if we don't get this right — if people don't start communication from a "we're all on the same level" mentality, versus an "I want to be the head" mentality.

**One thing I've learned:**

There has to be a holistic approach to urban public education, or we're not going to be successful. When our children walk into their classrooms each day, they are not coming in as blank slates. Some are stressed because their parents are arguing all evening about lack of money. Others have the burden of babysitting younger siblings because the parent or grandma is out working a second job. Some haven't eaten since lunch the day before. If part of the money that is going toward alternative programs could be re-directed back into the public system to do a holistic approach, I'm convinced we would see a great turnaround.



## SEAN MEANS

AGE 30

HOMETOWN  
PORTLAND, OREGON

EDUCATION  
MOREHOUSE COLLEGE,  
B.A., ENGLISH, 2007

### **Where you were and where you are:**

Born in Portland, Ore. Family moved to Atlanta suburbs where sister and I went through school. My father is an engineer; my mother is an accountant. Began college career at American University, then transferred to Morehouse. Spent summers working for Walt Disney Corp. and studying abroad. After graduation, traveled to New Zealand where I helped with their Beijing Olympic bid. Upon returning to the U.S., I joined Obama for America. Now I live in Shadyside.

### **Who/what helped you get to where you are now:**

Growing up, I played several sports in grade school and golf in college. Through athletic competition, I learned the value of self-discipline, practice through repetition, and showing solidarity. My mother was always there for us, a typical soccer mom. It is because of her that I recognize the importance of commitment to quality time. As far as employment, working for Disney taught me the significance of a smile and the importance of showing both guests and co-workers that they are appreciated. These intangibles still guide my daily practice and approach to life.

### **One big thing that prepared you for the**

**Fellowship:** Obama for America, 2008, serving in Field Operations and on the

transition team staff in foreign aid. I was just an assistant — the coffee guy. But who cares when you are a couple of doors down from Vice President [Joe] Biden's office! I had never been part of such a politically enlightened talent pool. We all were eager to work into the dead of night for a cause that was bigger than ourselves; it was incredibly stressful but also exhilarating.

**Fellowship — Concept vs. Reality:** No question, the program is a rare opportunity. Anytime you better yourself through education, it's a blessing. And then there is the experience we are getting in a city school district and in a classroom. And I believe we have made some solid contributions to the district — administrators, teachers and most importantly the students. And I had an idea what the challenges would be. I sat with my sister and reviewed test scores and other problems in the school situation. Yet I remained optimistic.

One issue that I have is that on an average day there are so many things that need attention, and while some may seem insignificant, these small things play a large part in the bigger picture. Furthermore, in order to transform a school's culture, there must be a long-term investment in the community that surrounds it.

As a building, we worked for weeks to prepare for the PSSA; everyone from our faculty to our students were on board. Unfortunately, the scores were not great — we fell short of our goals. This was a humbling experience; I learned that great change cannot come from a single cram session with overly ambitious goals. Closing the achievement gap takes time and buy-in by all parties involved.

**One thing I've learned:** It's a top-down approach; every person from the central office to the cafeteria staff plays an important role in creating a safe and welcoming environment where students are eager to learn. Around the world, in places ravaged by war and poverty, children walk miles to go to school because they understand that through education comes opportunity. Our students must have such an approach to school. Once we can change the mentality of those we serve, anything is possible.

**Where you were and where you are:**

Born in Atlanta but raised in Baltimore. Attended a middle school in the public system that had so many problems, it was taken over by the state. But I was very fortunate to get a scholarship to one of the top private high schools. I knew early on that college was the goal, and I wanted to do something with history. Now living in Monroeville.

**Who/what helped you get to where you are now:**

I was very involved in sports. I played football, ran track, played basketball and baseball. My mom made sure that education came first. I had to keep a progress report just for her. She went back to get a nursing degree as I was starting school. She tells the story about the time when I was in kindergarten and she was trying to study and couldn't remember the material and she started crying. I patted her on the back and told her we'd get through it together. She chased her dream. I watched her become a nurse while raising three kids. I knew the sky was the limit.

**One big thing that prepared you for the Fellowship:**

I definitely had a support system in my parents, my brothers, coaches. If something didn't go the way I'd planned or there was some big disappointment, they would say, "Well, you have five minutes to feel bad for yourself. Then you need to pick yourself up and do something about it." I still hold on to that, and it's something that I've taken with me into this program and that I've tried to instill in the kids at Westinghouse.



TRAVIS ROBINSON

AGE 23

HOMETOWN  
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

EDUCATION  
MOREHOUSE COLLEGE,  
B.A., HISTORY, 2011

**Fellowship — Concept vs. Reality:** I knew that it was going to be a lot to take on, but the benefits are so great. Westinghouse was a lot like the middle school I attended and the high school my friends went to. My stepfather said that if you work your hardest in a program like this at the beginning of your career, you will work smarter, not harder later on. The biggest challenge, though, has been time management. There is the 50-55 hours each week at Westinghouse, and then the graduate courses. Each of us has had to figure out our own ways to balance the student work and our own studying, and now it's doable. All the theories that we learn at Duquesne, we can immediately put into practice with our students. There's an incredible amount of learning going on here.

**One thing I've learned:** It's easy to underestimate the impact we have. I was in the back of a classroom one day getting a feel for the class. Afterward, I decided to have a conversation with this one kid. He told me a lot about his life and what he was going through. Something must have

happened in that moment for him. After that, he would come and ask for advice, and I did some tutoring. He later told me that he had come to look at me as a father figure. I don't know what I did to make him see me that way. It's shocking sometimes how much these students are taking in; how much they cling to us for attention and direction, even when they might not show it.

# OLAVÉ SEBASTIAN

AGE 27

HOMETOWN  
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK CITY

EDUCATION  
HAMPTON UNIVERSITY,  
B.S., ACCOUNTING, 2007

**Where you were and where you are:**

Raised in Brooklyn and graduated from the public school system. My dad has been an elementary school teacher for nearly 30 years. My mother is a social worker but used to be a substitute teacher. My two older sisters are involved in nonprofit management and after-school programs. Living now in Wilkesburg.

**Who/what helped you get to where you are now:**

I am fortunate to have my family, and my father has been a strong influence as a parent and a teacher. I was a tyrant in middle school, and one day he told me he would have no more of it. He made sure I wore clothes a certain way, asked about my friends and did not condone me being disrespectful. I began to focus on school-work and matured. I was my middle school valedictorian and, in high school, the only male student in the top 10 of my

senior class. I graduated college in four years. None of this would have been possible without the guidance of my father.

**One big thing that prepared you for the Fellowship:**

My work as a tutor and mentor for a group of young men in the rites-of-passage program at The Brotherhood/Sister Sol program in New York. And connected to that is my experience in the Bro/Sol writers' collective, The Lyrical Circle. I was able to lead workshops that engaged students at the Harlem Center for Education where I was an after-school English instructor. One of my greatest moments was when a student I had worked with for months to address language and character issues stopped telling other people to "shut up," and began talking in a more respectful tone. It might seem like a small thing, but it meant that a lesson was learned about character and conflict resolution.

**Fellowship — Concept vs. Reality:** The Fellowship opportunity came through my mentor [at Brotherhood/Sister Sol]. I was between jobs at the time and knew by then that I didn't want to continue in accounting as a career. The tutoring-mentoring volunteer work was more fulfilling, and I started thinking that the

black male achievement work at the center of the Fellowship really seemed to fit where I wanted to go. I had no idea what Pittsburgh was like. There were no expectations, and I just assumed it would be great. When I got here, it was clear that plans had changed. The program wasn't thought through as well as it could have been, and we've had to make a lot of adjustments, but now there is progress.

**One thing I've learned:** Culture and history are important. Without these things, you won't have a strong sense of community, and to be successful, a school has to have a functioning community. I think it's starting to happen in the building [Westinghouse]. When we Fellows had our first tour, one of the first things pointed out to us was the wall of photographs of prominent Westinghouse graduates. It's an amazing display. Students walk by it every day, but I don't think they have absorbed what it means—really understanding what the culture of this school has produced—because of conditions that have persisted for a few years. Baby steps, right? But we're leaning more toward that appreciation. It's on its way.





## JAMES SUDDUTH

AGE 36

HOMETOWN  
WILKINSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH,  
B.S., COMPUTER SCIENCE, 2000

### **Where you were and where you are:**

Raised in Wilksburg. Graduated from Wilksburg High School. I'm the first in my immediate family to get a bachelor's degree. Run my own IT consulting business.

### **Who/what helped you get to where you are now:**

Every opportunity I've had has been through the grace of God, and that has come from strong family support, some good teachers and a special mentor in high school, Dr. William Thomas, who was a professor in the University of Pittsburgh's School of Education. One day, when I was in high school, he came up to me in front of the building when a disagreement I was having with another student was escalating. He started talking to me about making wise decisions. That started a relationship and a whole new world opened up. I always wanted to go to college, but he helped make it a reality. He and his colleague prepared me for the SAT, introduced me to different types of music, took me out for great discussions and connected me to influential people. He could have taken an interest in anyone, but he said, "There's something in you and I don't want to see it go by the

wayside." That's why I believe so much in the Fellows Program because I know firsthand that it works.

### **One big thing that prepared you for the Fellowship:**

A few years ago, I helped produce a documentary film aimed at reducing gun violence in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. As part of the program, we met with some of the stakeholders: an assistant district attorney, medical examiners, police officers and many African American young people. I know it helped to deepen my understanding about issues that only urban teens deal with on a regular basis.

### **Fellowship — Concept vs. Reality:**

I remember when we first started with the program, we would have strategizing sessions at The Heinz Endowments in what we called the War Room. We were making these big plans and challenging one another about who was going to have the most students qualify for The Pittsburgh Promise [scholarship program]. Then we went to [Westinghouse] for the first time and started looking through the transcripts. Seeing the grade point averages, so many of them significantly below the necessary threshold for eligibility ... it was rough. We all realized it was going to take significantly more than an arm around the shoulder and a pep talk.

**One thing I've learned:** These students need to see real-life examples of people just like themselves who have used education as the bridge to a better life. The only successful people many of my students see are on TV in sports or entertainment. You can tell them that success is achievable and even back it up, but they aren't internalizing it unless they see someone who has actually lived it. I was at a football game with two of my mentees — one graduated last year and had made it to college. The other is one of my seniors, and he was having this attitude: "I'm from Homewood, and I'm not going anywhere past Homewood." And before I could say anything, my college mentee said, "I'm from Homewood, too, but watch what I do. I'm going to get through college and start my own business." How powerful was that — right? He said it, not me. A future Fellow in the making!





**MATTHEW  
TANSEY**

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AGE 24

HOMETOWN  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

EDUCATION  
PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY,  
B.A., RECREATION, PARK & TOURISM  
MANAGEMENT, 2011

**Where you were and where you are:** Raised in North Philadelphia. My mother is an educator, and my stepfather, when I was growing up, was an educator. My twin brother and I are the oldest of six. Now living in Wilkinsburg.

**Who/what helped you get to where you are now:** In high school — it's called Mastery Charter now — it was the principal who made a difference. He is from Africa. I was in trouble a lot and would end up in his office. Instead of ripping me a new one, he talked to me as if I were an interesting person. He would change the subject to reading — offer me a book he thought I would be tuned into. "Who is this guy?" But I read those books. At Penn State, I had a multi-cultural adviser who coached me through a lot of the culture shock. I wouldn't have made it out of college without her, and she was the one who convinced me I could do this Fellowship.

**One big thing that prepared you for the Fellowship:** Whatever passion I have for this ... comes from high school experience. I had been assigned to my neighborhood high school — one of the worst. My mom came home with a notice about an open house ... It was advertised as a college preparatory charter school. There were lots of activities you could do after school — physical activities to computer science to nutrition and life skills — and every teacher headed up a club. The most powerful thing was the culture. From day one, we were treated as the best students in Philadelphia. We felt part of something that was bigger than any of us, and its future depended on what we did every day.

**Fellowship — Concept vs. Reality:** When my Penn State adviser described the Fellowship and said she was going to recommend me, I was intimidated. So much was expected in that job description. But it is an awesome opportunity. The hard part is time management. I have this passion in me, and it is doing as much as possible with the kids. But the master's program is so absorbing, and then there are administrative responsibilities and so many meetings. I feel, sometimes, that the deeper I get into the work, the further away I get from the kids.

**One thing I've learned:** It's October, and I have 40 kids in a classroom. It's a period when they are just supposed to catch their breath and ask questions or talk to me about personal issues. This new student introduces himself and asks if I am the teacher. I shake his hand, tell him my name and explain that I am a Heinz Fellow. Then he asks, "What are we learning here?" I'm startled by the question, but I try to explain that this is advising time. He asks again, "But what are we learning? Is there something I can learn?" I don't have an answer. He and I ended up bonding ... but it was a lesson for me that this work has to be more than just providing guidance and resources. We have to pass on knowledge. Many of these students are showing up every day, and they desperately want to learn and get on to the next thing.



# FROM THE MOUTHS OF TEENS

OPENING ESSAY | **CHRISTINE H. O'TOOLE**

Student opinions show more than their state of mind in the classroom. When asked, students show an understanding of their families' motivations in choosing their schools and the challenges teachers face in holding students' attention. They're also willing to talk candidly about how their own dreams and interests affect the way they see their education.

But while students have always found a way to share their opinions about schools, adults, especially teachers, have rarely invited—and studied—those responses. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has endorsed the process, however, through its Measures of Effective Teaching project, which has provided an opportunity for students at all grade levels to rate their teachers. By asking students to confidentially rank their agreement with statements like “Our class stays busy and doesn't waste time,” the surveys provide insight into what goes on in the classroom from the perspective of those who sit in the seats.

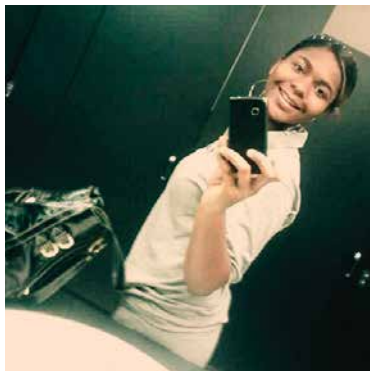
The Pittsburgh school district has begun to use the data from the Tripod surveys developed by Cambridge Education to enhance its teacher development efforts. It is one of the first districts in the state to do so. Last school year, students in more than 1,300 classrooms completed 50,000 surveys. Teachers welcomed a chance to see their report cards.

“I don't think there is a single teacher . . . who doesn't leap at the information that is in the reports that come back from these surveys,” Bill Hileman, vice president of the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers, told U.S. News & World Report last year. “If doctors don't listen to what patients say, shame on them. If teachers don't listen to what students say, shame on us.”

When the program is fully implemented, in 2013–14, the twice-yearly results will become part of teachers' end-of-year performance ratings. Students' voices—honest, hopeful, irreverent and funny—are an important part of the community dialogue on public education. *h*

Eight current and former Pittsburgh Public Schools students can offer only brief glimpses of what some youth experience in the city district. Their stories differ, but together they reflect the potential within the schools—and what could be missing.

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY CHRISTINE H. O'TOOLE



## Mar'zhanæ Blackwell

Age 17, 12th grade, University Prep

This is my first year in Pittsburgh. Before this, I lived in Farrell, Pa. I went to a more diverse school. I used to get in fights, but I now want to graduate. I'm willing to put the drama aside. I'm living with my aunt. I walk to school. It's good. It clears my mind.

At University Prep, you have to be willing to work to succeed. It's very strict. You have to wear a uniform and be on time. They push you.

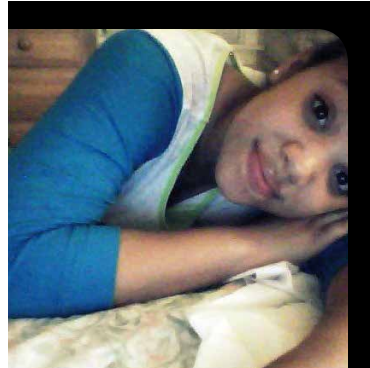
The teachers are respectful, to an extent. If they are disrespected, they disrespect you back. If I could make school better, I would want fewer people in class. One teacher cannot control 30 kids. The kids get distracted and bored.

## Mara Greenberg

Age 18, 12th grade, Pittsburgh Allderdice High School

I went to private school before ninth grade. I didn't fit in terribly well at the elementary school. But I found a good group of friends at Allderdice and a different dynamic: They are more academic. I participate in the Science Olympiad, a team event. My topics are anatomy and physiology, genetics, circuits and chemistry. I enjoy it because the moderator is my chemistry teacher, Sally Martin. She is a fabulous teacher. She explains things well. It's a very involved class, very hands-on, with lots of discussion and lab activities. I also swim and row on the school teams. I will attend the University of Pennsylvania for chemistry next year.

All my classes are in the Center for Advanced Studies accelerated program for gifted students. I have no friends in other academic tracks. I can see the difference in classes that aren't gifted-track, like health. The teacher did not know what he was talking about. It opened my eyes to the disparity between groups. The Pittsburgh Scholars program [an enriched curriculum for academically talented students] has been merged with the regular mainstream classes because of budget cuts this year. It's very stratified. The school should address the huge achievement gap.



## Christopher Hall

Age 18, The Bridge of Pittsburgh program, Hill District

I left Allderdice High School two and a half years ago, midway through my sophomore year. After I was suspended from another school, I was assigned to Clayton Academy on the North Side [an alternative school for sixth- to 12th-graders]. Behind the doors, it was complete chaos. The 90-minute classes were too long, but they don't let you leave. It seemed like incarceration.

I didn't know that shoving [a staff member] could be a felony. Someone has to know that that environment is a trap. Kids need encouragement. I got in trouble and spent some time in Shuman [Juvenile Detention] Center. When I was allowed to go back to Allderdice, I had more freedom. Classes like world culture were OK, but I want to learn African American culture. Schools don't teach that.

But my problems were bigger than school. I needed someone to talk to. I just met my dad for the first time in 2011. I'm in the Bridge program [for young adults leaving the foster care system]. I'm getting my GED and getting employment certifications through YouthWorks and Urban Youth Action, and I've had a few temporary jobs.

## Marina Hawkins

Age 15, 10th grade, Perry Traditional Academy

I went to sixth grade and eighth grade in Virginia, seventh grade at Rooney Middle School in Pittsburgh, and half of ninth grade at Allegheny Middle School in Pittsburgh. I thought the learning curriculum in Virginia was way ahead of Pittsburgh. I'm relearning things now that I learned before. At Perry, teachers will listen. But not all students listen to the teachers, unfortunately.

I am a cheerleader, and I am in the choir and the musicals. I am also on a crew team called First Row for girls in city high schools. Along with rowing, medical class is my favorite thing about my school. That's a special class offered only at Perry for people who want medical careers. They tell us about medical equipment and procedures and how to conduct ourselves around patients. It's the best thing about Perry, I think. It's helping me get set for college. I am planning to stay in state, mostly for the Pittsburgh Promise scholarship.



## Alan Hord

Age 16, 11th grade, Pittsburgh Science & Technology Academy

My attending SciTech was my parents' decision. I went to middle school at Schiller [Classical] Academy, but the behavior of students wasn't good. I wasn't learning.

I love all types of math. Of my math courses here, calculus was my favorite. I'm in the Advanced Placement statistics class now, where we learn how to analyze data. Last year, I was one of three people in the advanced accelerated program for students who want to finish in three years. But I wanted a four-year program. I play AAU [Amateur Athletic Union] basketball—I'm a point guard—so I want to play as many seasons as possible. At school, I am a member of the National Honor Society and the student council committee.

I would say SciTech is not the best school. The curriculum is not strong. If it were up to me, I would have chosen a private school with good academics.

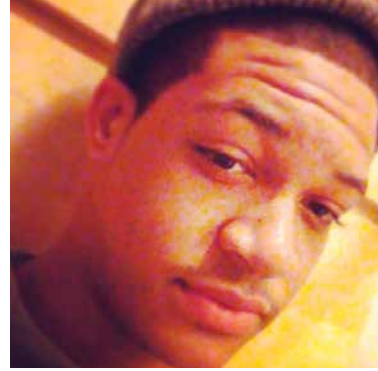
## Anthony Lewis

Age 16, 10th grade, Pittsburgh Science & Technology Academy

I wanted to come to SciTech because we all get a laptop. I could have gone to Langley High School, but it wasn't a good environment. My dad is an electrical engineer, and I would like to be an engineer, too. I am taking an introduction to engineering course, and in 11th grade, I'll learn more about mechanical engineering.

Right now, I'm trying to reach the 2.5 grade-point average for the Pittsburgh Promise scholarship. I know I have to apply myself. I'm smart enough. My academic goal is to earn a 3.5 or 4.0. I have to do more homework, but I think homework is a waste of time.

Last year, I had to go to the district Student Achievement Center for 45 days. I forgot and came to school with a Swiss army knife in my pocket. So, I missed some Algebra II, and I'm back in Algebra I. But that made me a little more cautious about how I act.



## Jonah Raether

Age 18, 12th grade, Pittsburgh Obama High School

I was one of five students from Obama who were chosen to travel to Nepal and Sri Lanka last summer for a State Department exchange program in environmental stewardship and youth leadership. I also spent my sophomore year studying in Berlin. My mother is German, so I had an international awareness at an early age. I went to East Hills for elementary school and then to Frick International Studies School, the magnet middle school for the International Baccalaureate track.

The IB program at Schenley High School was transferred as that school was closing, so in my freshman year, I went to the IB program at the Reizenstein building. The school didn't even have a real name. At the end of that year, though, the students chose Barack Obama Academy of International Studies as the new name. Then my senior year, the school was moved again.

I feel that I've been with the 98 best friends in the city schools. Because we know each other, we don't have issues. Our classes aren't huge. I am class vice president, and I'm on the swim team. Next year, I'm doing a City Year [volunteer service program] in Milwaukee. Going through Pittsburgh public schools has prepared me. My experiences have helped me adapt to anything.

## William Taylor

Age 15, 10th grade, Pittsburgh Science & Technology Academy

I have been at SciTech since seventh grade. It gives me better opportunities. You can earn more credits here, so more colleges will take a look at you. We have better classes, like AP classes. My concentration through the end of junior year is Body & Behavior. We have lab experiments about what different substances and experiences do to your body. My mom is a registered nurse, so I'm interested in medicine. But I want to take it even further.

The work here is not easy. It challenges me, though it's not a massive amount of work. Now I have a C average. I know I can bring it up. If I need help, we have a support period at mid-day, and you can ask teachers for help in all the subjects.

I play club football. If there was something I could do to change things at SciTech, I would say add sports teams, so our school would be noticed, and have a music program.

**K**ofi Annan advised: “Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society’s margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies.”

In [the 2011] Pennsylvania budget, education funding was cut by almost \$900 million. I also learned that there was a plan to spend millions to construct new prisons and expand others. No one asked students if they would rather money be spent on prisons than our education. Politicians thought school funding was over our heads. They didn’t listen to Kofi Annan and left us on the margins.

But, I am a challenger. And like many other underestimated students, I can tackle complex systems. When I learned that money that could’ve bought books for me and my classmates or paid for Head Start for my siblings would be used to build cell blocks instead, I couldn’t sit idly by.

I am a member of Teen Bloc in Pittsburgh, and our purpose is to be a coalition of student leaders and organizers who use our voice and talents to create change in public education. We work with adults to facilitate community meetings, educate our peers and organize students to address issues. We work to build the power of students to be at decision-making tables with adults. Because you know the first rule of negotiations, right? If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu!

Students weren’t at the table for this round of budget cuts, yet we knew we had to be. We decided that we needed to let the decision makers know that we would not let them compromise our education.

We brainstormed how to tackle this issue. We did a ton of research and partnered with the Philadelphia Student Union, who was organizing student groups on the eastern side of the state. We decided that a rally in the Capitol rotunda as well as legislative visits would be the most effective way to accomplish our goal of getting our voices heard. We formed a statewide committee, and we planned the event to happen on Valentine’s

## our turn at the **TABLE**

BY DYNÆ SHAW

Day, with different students assigned to conduct legislative visits, speak at the rally and serve as media contacts.

My role was to meet with a state senator who is a member of the education committee. I asked him point-blank, “Why are prisons being chosen to fund over public education?” He said prison

costs are getting really expensive and other things that did not answer my question. I responded, “What does the state need to pay for in prisons that it won’t pay for in schools?” He was silent and tried to change the subject. I learned the importance of all that research because it enabled me to move the conversation away from rhetoric and focus on the action we wanted for our schools.

More than 400 students from across the state attended the rally. We passed out Valentines with our talking points on them. We filled the steps of the rotunda wearing pink and red shirts that said, “Show the love for public education,” and we carried signs that said, “Put your money where our minds are.” Students gave speeches demanding equity, and our voices chanting “more classmates, less inmates” echoed in the halls of the capitol building. TV, newspaper and radio reporters were there. The results of our efforts were an immediate response from the governor’s office that day, and no additional money was cut from education in the next budget.

We were at the table that day and took ourselves off the menu, even though many government officials didn’t think students understood systems as complex as public education funding. But we understand more than adults realize. Young people like me are inheriting an incredibly complex world—and it’s not getting any simpler. We have the most to gain when the system works and the most to lose when it doesn’t. We have the passion and will to face it, but the fact is we can’t do it alone. We need adult allies to provide tools, listen and include us in decisions about the society we are inheriting.

Nothing about us without us!

*Dynæ Shaw is a senior at Barack Obama Academy of International Studies, a public school in Pittsburgh’s East Liberty neighborhood. She also is a member of Teen Bloc, a youth organizing initiative of A+ Schools, the Marilyn G Rabb Foundation and the Coro Center for Civic Leadership. This is an excerpt from a speech she gave last fall at a Clinton Global Initiative dinner that focused on youth empowerment.*





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OUR EDUCATION.**

”

Dynae Shaw



Charlotte Murphy, age 12, sixth-grader, Sterrett Classical Academy with Pittsburgh School Superintendent Linda Lane

Women's Law Project

**W**hen I was in fourth grade at Linden Elementary School, I joined the girls' basketball team. There were only two other girls' teams in the district. We played three games. The boys' team played 12. The girls' practices were canceled and not rescheduled. I didn't think that was fair. I wrote a letter to [school superintendent] Dr. Linda Lane.

About a month later, she wrote back and said, "It's good to know you're stepping up and taking charge." Then I was invited to a meeting with her. She is a big supporter of Title IX [which forbids discrimination in federally funded education programs on the basis of sex], and she said, "We're going to fix that." I believed her.

When I was in fifth grade, they fixed it. Now, instead of three girls' teams and 12 boys' teams, there are 14 schools with both teams. We got 11 more. So, it became a news story. And what was really cool was being interviewed on National Public Radio. My grandmas sent the link to every single person they knew; it was embarrassing. I was in Ms. Magazine and got to meet actress Kathy Najimy at the Women's Law Project dinner in Pittsburgh.

What I learned was to do what's right. If someone is doing something wrong, you should speak out.

*Charlotte Murphy is a sixth-grader at Sterrett Classical Academy, a public school in Pittsburgh's Point Breeze neighborhood. She was interviewed by Christine H. O'Toole.*

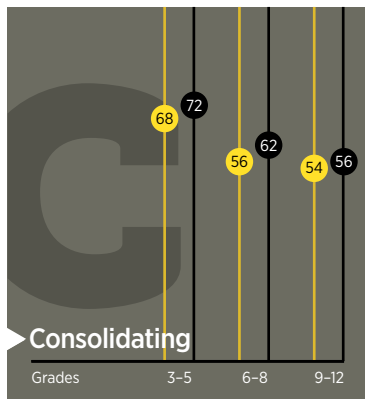
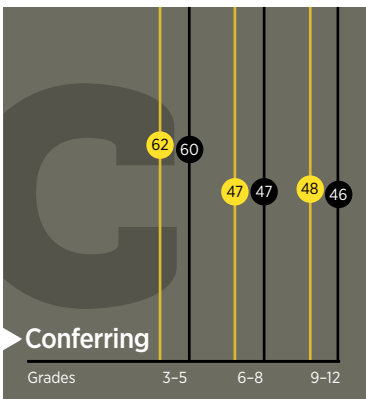
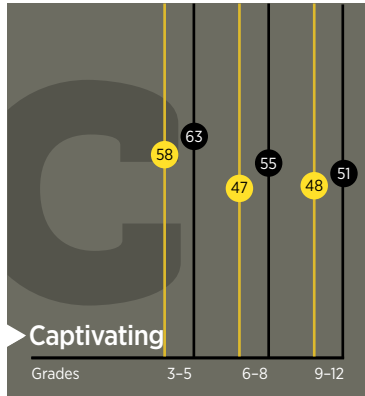
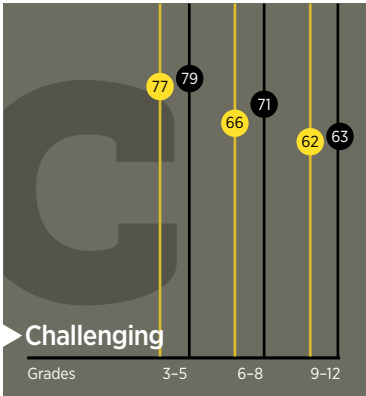
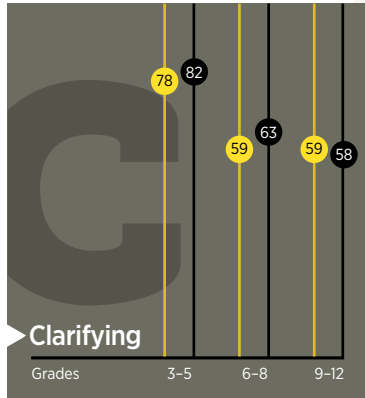
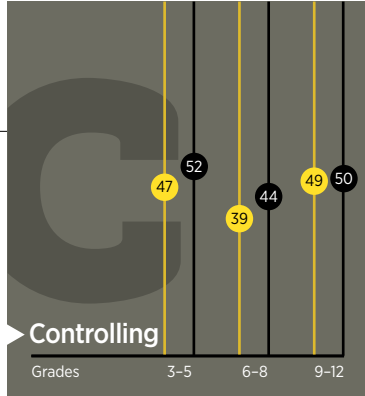
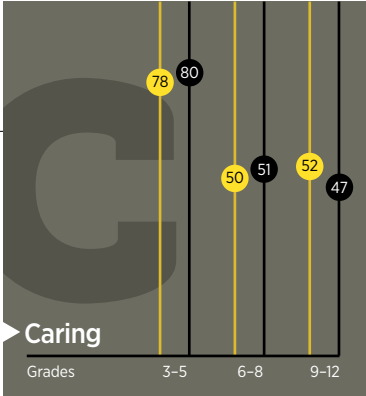
**STUDENT SURVEY:**

# THE 7Cs

One way public school officials in Pittsburgh and elsewhere are trying to give students a voice in their education is through the use of surveys. The Tripod system includes a student survey of teaching quality and classroom engagement along with two assessments in which teachers evaluate themselves and their schools. The survey that provides student perspectives uses seven measures of teacher effectiveness known as the 7Cs.

## GOING THROUGH

# HOOOPS



Statements to which students respond use words and terms that are easy for them understand. For example:

*Controlling behavior:* Our class stays busy and doesn't waste time.

*Challenging students:* My teacher wants me to explain my answers—why I think what I think.

*Consolidating knowledge:* My teacher takes the time to summarize what we learn each day.

The 2012 responses from Pittsburgh Public Schools students were compared with national findings. Both results reflect percentage averages for students who responded favorably to survey statements. PPS results are shown in yellow; national ones are in black.

**Caring about students.**

Teacher encourages and supports.

**Controlling behavior.**

Teacher creates culture of cooperation and peer support.

**Clarifying lessons.**

Teacher makes success seem feasible.

**Challenging students.**

Teacher presses for effort, perseverance and rigor.

**Captivating students.**

Teacher makes learning seem interesting and relevant.

**Conferring with students.**

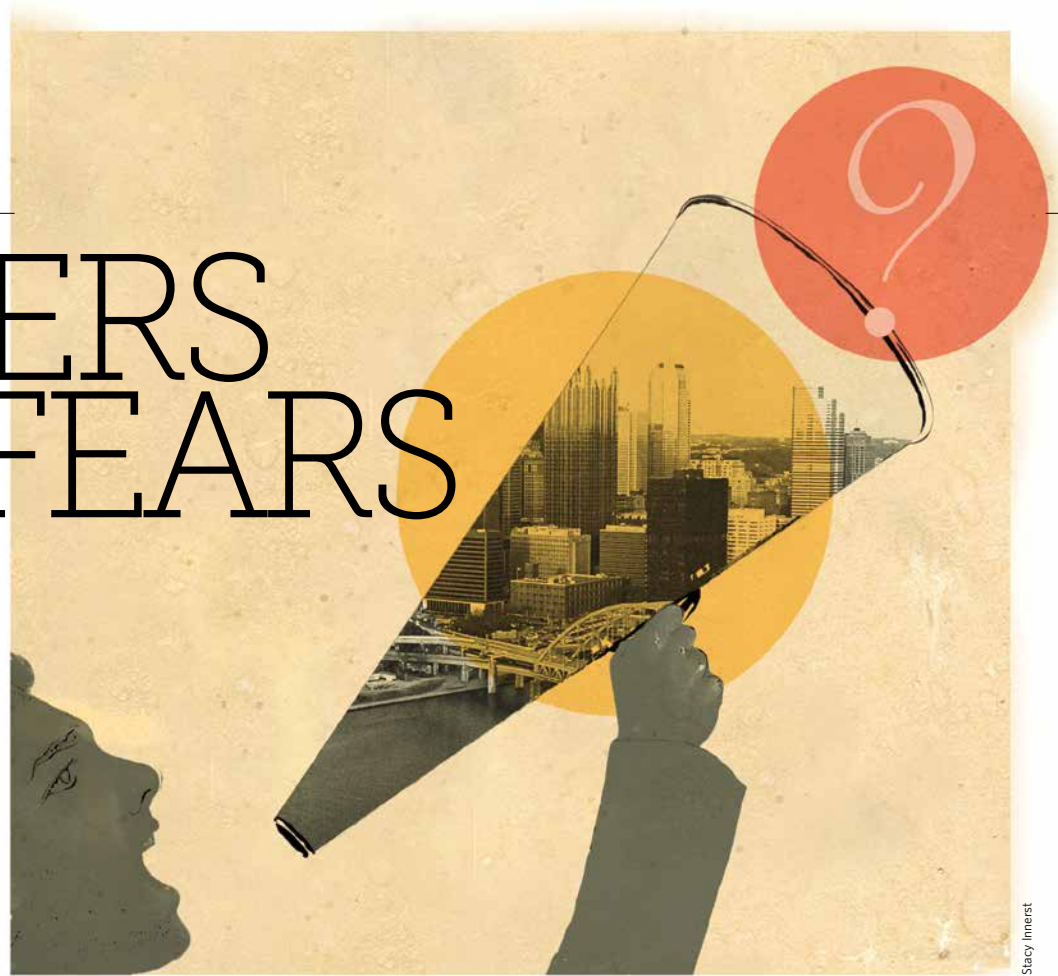
Teacher gives students the sense that their ideas are respected.

**Consolidating knowledge.**

Teacher connects and integrates ideas.

# CHEERS & FEARS

by Christine H. O'Toole



Stacy Innerst

# H

igh school graduation rates are rising. Standardized test scores are climbing, and the Pittsburgh school district met federal standards for adequate yearly progress in two of the past three years. After hemorrhaging more than a third of its enrollment over the previous two decades, the district seemed to stabilize, settling at around 25,000 students in September 2012.

Three cheers for urban public education?

The applause for the district's demonstrable achievements has been faint at best, muffled by wailing over budget battles, standardized testing and equal opportunity. It also has been virtually ignored by the 85 percent of city households that don't have a child in the system.

In fact, Pittsburgh's not much different from most other American big-city school districts. And fights over schooling have been an American tradition since 1642, when the Massachusetts Bay colony made "proper" education compulsory. Since Pittsburgh opened its first public elementary school in 1834, the city has subscribed to the vision of educator Horace Mann, who proposed that all students are entitled to the same academic content.

Mann might not recognize his common school model today. The little red schoolhouse has been supersized to include services from school lunches to summer camps to immunizations, and the U.S. definition of a good education never stopped evolving. By 1918, states required children to complete elementary school. In 1954, desegregation opened the doors of white-only schools, leading to other civil rights victories. The No Child Left Behind Act signed in 2002 prompted communities to measure and improve school results. Seven years later, federal officials used the Race to the Top contest to spur education innovation and reform as states competed for additional funding. Over nearly two centuries, patient, consistent investment in universal education has made the United States a place where talent can rise. In the words of authors Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz, it became "the poor man's best country."

Economic opportunity may have been the force that drove immigrants to a new country and, indeed, to Pittsburgh itself. But once they arrived, public education was the force that helped them thrive. Schools introduced their children to American values and culture. They still do: Pittsburgh students today come from 57 nations and speak 46 languages. The public school system continues to be the great shared experience that unites communities, a bedrock that endures even as other affiliations like churches and military service dwindle.

"If you are interested in strengthening the region, the Pittsburgh Public Schools is a big part of [doing that],"

says Jerry Longo, director of the Western Pennsylvania Forum for School Superintendents at the University of Pittsburgh. The Forum has convened discussions among superintendents and members of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, a nonprofit leadership organization that promotes economic development in the region. "It's easy to talk about science and math. But when you dig deeper, it's more than that. It's about developing good citizens."

In their 2007 book, "The Race Between Education and Technology," Goldin and Katz argue that that from the 1850s to the 1970s, public education—essentially, investment in human capital—improved this country's economic might. It also made the United States the world's strongest democracy, withstanding civil and world wars and major depressions in the 19th and 20th centuries. The authors point out, however, that progress has

**The public school system continues to be the great shared experience that unites communities, a bedrock that endures even as other affiliations like churches and military service dwindle.**

slowed. The number of students who graduate from U.S. high schools has peaked near 70 percent. In study after study, subject after subject, other nations' academic results are ahead—though there is debate about how to interpret the numbers.

In their January report, "What Do International Tests Really Show About U.S. Student Performance?," Richard Rothstein of the Economic Policy Institute and Martin Carnoy of EPI and Stanford University's Graduate School of Education noted differences among countries in testing procedures. If one recent exam's rankings had taken into account the larger number of students from low-income families that are tested in this country compared to other nations, they contended, the United States would be sixth in reading and 13th in math rather than 14th in reading and 25th in math as reported. Other experts dispute the EPI findings, though all sides believe that student performance in this country needs to improve.

And, some 90 percent of U.S. children still attend public schools. As the gulf between the American rich and poor grows greater, public education may be one of the few institutions able to offer common ground.

If schools are to bridge the gap, however, they must be strong enough to bear the weight. Taxpayer investment and demand for quality must be a shared priority. That means making the case for good schools to everyone—any individual who’s ever gone to school — as well as welcoming their contributions to the effort. Widespread advocacy may be the most important innovation in 21st-century education.

The Pennsylvania Interfaith Impact Network is working to build neighborhood coalitions that encourage all residents to support city schools. Last year, the group identified a goal of educational equity, including eight specific services that every child and school should have access to — a 21st-century effort that Horace Mann would have championed. Cities like Memphis have galvanized a business consensus on the importance of effective teaching.

And students in Philadelphia, San Jose and Denver are successfully pushing for curricular reforms. Pittsburgh is poised to follow suit through local youth organizing efforts, with help from the Endowments. “We heard overwhelming support in Pittsburgh. People say, ‘The time is right. Let’s make this happen,’” observes Melanie Brown, the foundation’s Education Program officer.

In describing the symbiotic relationship between education and America, scholar John Dewey proposed a variation of the Golden Rule: “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children,” he wrote in 1907. “Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.”

Big thinkers and small families would agree that the common school was never meant to be average. As Pittsburgh continues its impassioned argument on how to make its public schools outstanding, Pitt’s Longo uses one of the region’s three signature rivers to illustrate both the challenge and the hope for a brighter education future.

“The hurdle is not as high as it is in cities with far greater obstacles,” he says cheerfully. “It’s not like swimming the Atlantic — just the Mon. It’s not easy, but it’s doable.” *h*

*Chris O’Toole is a Pittsburgh-based freelance writer. Her last story for h looked at how Pittsburgh foundations are supporting media initiatives that provide in-depth local news coverage for the region.*

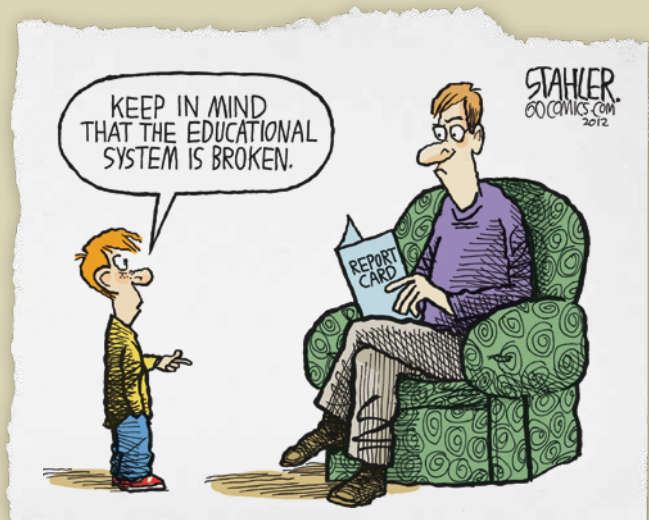
## SIDE NOTES

“Students most need a voice because we’ve been shunned out of the debate. We’ve been left on the sidelines. I like to say in education reform, there’s two different tables: the kids’ table and the adults’ table, and we need to combine those two together to really have a rich conversation with all the stakeholders present.”

*Nikhil Goyal, senior at Syosset High School, Long Island, N.Y., from NPR interview with Michel Martin, Oct. 10, 2012*

“... In the developing world, people who are born poor will die poor, and that is because of the lack of opportunities—opportunities that come from education. So, education can actually save lives.”

*Shakira, Colombian pop star, from NPR interview with Robert Siegel on April 22, 2008*



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# here & there



**LET'S PLAY!** KaBOOM!, a national nonprofit committed to giving children a safe place to play, will build 10 playgrounds in the Pittsburgh area by the end of next year with the support of an \$800,000 grant from The Heinz Endowments. The playgrounds will be constructed by KaBOOM! organizers and local volunteers as part of a community-directed process that includes design ideas provided by the main users — children. The Endowments also is challenging Pittsburgh's corporate community to participate in the initiative by building 10 additional playgrounds in 20 neighborhoods in two years.

The first of the playgrounds opened in Homewood in April. More than 200 volunteers picked up power tools, paintbrushes and shovels to complete the project, shown left, in just one day. In May, 100-plus volunteers pitched in to give Clairton a play space close to their homes. Only one in five children nationally lives within walking distance of a park or playground, a problem that has contributed to today's youth spending less time playing outside than any previous generation. The Pittsburgh playground projects further KaBOOM!'s goal of improving children's physical, social and cognitive well-being by providing play areas within walking distance of every child's home in America.

Keith Taylor

## A COURAGEOUS STAND

Heinz Endowments Chairman Teresa Heinz received the National Courage of Belief Award this winter in recognition of her support for Jews who lived under persecution in the former Soviet Union. The American Jewish Committee Philadelphia/Southern New Jersey Chapter honored her during a dinner commemorating the 25th anniversary of the March on Washington to free Soviet Jewry, which was held on the eve of a summit between President Ronald Reagan and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. Mrs. Heinz was a founding member of the Congressional Wives for Soviet Jewry and later its co-chairman. She lobbied Russian officials and Raisa Gorbachev for the freedom of Soviet Jews. She also regularly traveled to Russia to meet with "refuseniks," individuals denied permission to emigrate from the Soviet Union.



American Jewish Committee



Suellen Fitzsimmons

## Stanley M. Pittman Scholarship Fund

The Heinz Endowments has established the Stanley M. Pittman Scholarship Fund to honor Pittman's 27-year tenure as executive director of Sarah Heinz House and his commitment to expanding educational and recreational opportunities for Pittsburgh's youth. Known as "Mr. P." to students, Pittman, shown left with 2011 National Youth of the Year Nick Foley, center, and Heinz Endowments Chairman Teresa Heinz, retired in May. The \$50,000 grant will enable Sarah Heinz House to connect with more children

and teens, providing them with positive role models and a path for personal growth and success. The organization will seek to attract matching funds for the scholarships from alumni and other donors.

The Endowments provides annual support for Sarah Heinz House, which was created by Howard Heinz in 1901 as a place to "build good citizens." The organization served 1,148 youth last year, 40 percent of whom live in single-parent households. Over the past decade, it has produced a national champion and four state-level winners in the Boys & Girls Clubs Youth of the Year program, which recognizes members exemplifying strong moral character and a commitment to community, family and academics.

Pittman's accomplishments as executive director included overseeing a \$12 million, Gold LEED-certified building expansion in 2007 that added a swimming pool, gym, dance studio and café. In 2011, he won the Executive of the Year award from the Boys & Girls Clubs Professional Association.

## Honors

The University of Pittsburgh was among 10 colleges recognized this year by the Institute for International Education for having innovative and successful models for internationalizing campuses, managing study abroad programs or promoting international partnerships. Pitt received an honorable mention in the study abroad category for its administration of the Vira I. Heinz Program for Women in Global Leadership.

The Carol R. Brown Creative Achievement Awards were launched this winter to recognize and support the work of individual artists. They were named in honor of Endowments board member **Carol Brown** to pay tribute to her many accomplishments, which include leading the transformation of Pittsburgh's Cultural District while serving as president of the Cultural Trust from 1986 to 2001. Jointly sponsored by the Endowments and The Pittsburgh Foundation, the \$15,000 gifts are part of the Investing in Professional Artists: The Pittsburgh Regional Artists Program. **Dr. Judith Davenport**, an Endowments board member, and her husband, Ronald Davenport Sr., chairman of Sheridan Broadcasting Corp., have been honored with the Outstanding Philanthropists Award by the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Western Pennsylvania chapter, for their many contributions to the Pittsburgh region.



Andy Starnes

### FINAL CURTAIN

Kuntu Repertory Theatre closed its doors in May after operating in Pittsburgh for nearly 40 years. The region's oldest African American theater company was founded by Vernell Lillie in 1974 after she was hired as an associate professor at the University of Pittsburgh. Lillie, shown far left in 1975, started Kuntu to showcase the work of Pitt Africana Studies professor Rob Perry, right. The company also produced plays by other emerging

and established playwrights, including Pulitzer Prize-winner August Wilson, who was mentored by Penny. Its productions also included a mix of student, amateur and professional actors. The university provided campus venues for Kuntu performances until Lillie retired two years ago from her position as an associate professor in Pitt's Africana Studies Department. After that, plays were staged at the Carnegie Library's Homewood branch. The Endowments awarded Kuntu nearly \$175,000 over the span of its operation in the region.



## Arts Connection

Endowments grantee City of Asylum/Pittsburgh has been awarded a \$300,000 grant from ArtPlace America for the Pittsburgh Central North Side Artway Connector. The project involves linking two new City of Asylum/Pittsburgh ventures and enticing residents to visit the newly renovated business district in the North Side's Garden Theater Block. The "Garden-to-Garden" Artway will provide a culturally rich path between Alphabet City, a literacy center housing a restaurant, bookstore and space for performances, and the Alphabet Reading Garden, a 4,000-square-foot outdoor community space featuring international handwriting samples, a world map and artist-designed seating. The Artway will display works created by visual artists in collaboration with writers as well as community-based performance pieces. Alphabet City and Alphabet Garden will both open next year.

ArtPlace America, a collection of national and local foundations, banks and federal agencies, funds creative place-making projects that use art to revitalize communities. City of Asylum/Pittsburgh is an arts-based community development organization committed to global literature and cultural exchange and has received grants totaling nearly \$500,000 from the Endowments since 2007.





## Promising Conversation



American Promise

The Endowments and its African American Men and Boys Advisory Board are sponsoring a “Community Conversation” June 20 with the two families featured in the award-winning documentary “American Promise.” Filmmakers Joe Brewster and Michèle Stephenson, their son Idris, and their friends Stacey and Tony Summers will screen a preview of the film and talk about its subject: educating boys. Joining them in the discussion will be Richard Gray, director of community organizing and engagement at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, and a panel of community leaders. The event will begin with a 4:45 p.m. reception at the August Wilson Center for African American Culture, Downtown, followed by the screening and a town hall discussion.

A documentary 13 years in the making, “American Promise” provides a rare look into the lives of two middle-class black families as they navigate the ups and downs of parenting and educating their sons, Idris Brewster, above, and Seun Summers, left. The film won this year’s documentary special jury prize at the Sundance Film Festival and will air on PBS this winter as part of the network’s award-winning POV series. For more information on the film and filmmakers, visit [www.americanpromise.org](http://www.americanpromise.org).

## GRANTS TO SAVE LIVES

The Endowments’ administrative staff ventured into grant making this year by selecting 11 organizations to receive funding to cover the cost of an automatic external defibrillator and training on how to use it. Each nonprofit received \$2,500 as part of the project, which was designed to provide life-saving technology to groups that serve communities in need. Recipients ranged from churches to organizations such as the Hill House Association and The Pittsburgh Project. Below with an AED are staff members, front row left to right, Linda Jones, Cindi Stueber and Joann Clark; back row left to right, Linda Bannon, Denise Ficorilli, Mary M., Nancy Glover, Vicki Beattie, and Bonnie Gazda. Not pictured are Kim Gillespie and Jenny Cline.



## Staff News



The Endowments’ recent staff addition is **Megan Andros**, left, who joins the foundation as a Community & Economic Development program officer focused initially on veterans issues. Andros, 29, grew up in Charlotte, N.C. She graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 2006 with a bachelor of science degree in international law and systems engineering. After graduating from West Point, Andros served for five years as an ordinance officer in the Army’s Cavalry Division, reaching the rank of captain. She is a veteran of the Iraq War, having served in northwest Baghdad from January 2009 to January 2010.

Andros first collaborated with the Endowments last year through Coro Pittsburgh, a nine-month fellowship program that trains leaders in private, nonprofit and government sectors. As a Coro fellow, Andros developed a survey to gauge veterans’ knowledge of organizations that serve them and to identify their individual needs, including employment opportunities and social support networks. Starting in August, Andros will pursue a master’s degree in public management at Carnegie Mellon University.

In other staff news, **Wayne Jones** has been promoted to senior officer with the Endowments’ Children, Youth & Families Program, where he focuses on improving the quality and quantity of after-school and youth development programs and coordinates the foundation’s annual internship program. Prior to joining the Endowments in 2002, Jones worked as a consultant for Allegheny County’s Department of Human Services and as an analyst for Virginia’s Joint Legislative and Audit Review Commission.

THE HEINZ ENDOWMENTS

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# Role call. PAGE 28



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