

Some Good Urban Schools -- July 16, 1997

Central Park East Secondary School, a small school with high expectations for its 450 students drawn mainly from the East Harlem community. Most of the students are from low-income families and many have a history of average or below-average academic achievement, but only 5% drop out during their high school years and more than 90% of graduates go on directly to college.

Fenway Middle College High School, in Boston, has an outstanding school-to-career program emphasizing math and science and works closely with community institutions such as Children's Hospital and the Museum of Science. Over 60% of its students are low income, yet the school has a 95% daily attendance rate and 81% of its graduates go on to postsecondary education--the majority at 4 year colleges.

Hansberry Elementary School in the Bronx, New York had so many problems that the school was shut down by the Board of Education. When it reopened, this school, where virtually all students qualify for free or reduced price luncheons, adopted one of the tested designs of the New American Schools Development Corporation. The percentage of students that passed New York State's essential skills test has risen from 22 to 50 percent in reading, and from 47 to 82 percent in math from 1993 to 1995.

The New Visions Charter School -- known as "the Reading School," was started by parents and teachers in Minneapolis committed to help young children achieve in reading. This public school has helped students that had been averaging 6 months of progress in reading each year make 12 to 18 months of progress in reading each year, and is now training teachers in other public schools in Minnesota and elsewhere learn from their success.

Turnaround Stories

- In Alexandria, Virginia, a father of a Mount Vernon High School (MVHS) student took action to improve the school's quality by increasing parent participation and community involvement. Distressed by his child's lack of enthusiasm about learning, Coleman Harris ran, and was elected, President of the MVHS Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) in 1994 and subsequently began an intensive effort to increase PTSA membership and the participation of all the members of the community in school activities, whether they had school-aged children or not. As a result, PTSA membership rose from 124 to over 600, various parent councils and community resource teams have been created, enrollment in advanced courses has increased sharply and MVHS 1995 SAT scores gained 15 points over 1994. His school improvement achievements were recognized by the Vice President at the "Strengthening the Role of Fathers in Families" conference earlier this year. "We convinced the community that better education is everybody's business," Harris noted "as much the business of fathers as of mothers, who are traditionally closer to their children's school experiences."
Source: *Inside ED* June 1, 1996 pp. 1 & *Inside ED* June 15, 1996 pp. 15.
- In an effort to revitalize Drummond Elementary school in Chicago, a new principal, with the support of teachers and parents, initiated a school-wide restructuring plan, which include a switch to a year-round schedule as the centerpiece. All Drummond students attend school for 60-day periods followed by 20-day "intersessions"; the intersessions are technically vacations, but between 80-90 percent of the students attend additional classes during these periods to strengthen their skills. The new principal also instituted a teacher-selected, literature-based reading curriculum for all grades, in addition to forging a partnership with a local steel manufacturer to help introduce technology into the classroom. As a result, students' scores on the Illinois Goals Assessment Program tests have improved dramatically in both reading and math and every classroom is equipped with five computers.
Source: information provided by Elois Scott
- Despite its location in an area fraught with substance abuse, gangs, violence and high rates of poverty and unemployment, Zavala Elementary School in Austin, Texas has instituted innovative improvements at all levels. Among the school's reforms are the restructuring of their special education program and the institution of an accelerated science and math-focused sixth grade academy. In addition, although barely one-quarter of the adults in the area served by Zavala are high school graduates, the school has cultivated an impressively high level of parent and community participation in school governance and advocacy. On a regular basis, parents help staff interview and select new teachers, as well as develop the school budget and curriculum. Historically, Zavala has been one of the lowest performing schools in the district, but since reforms were implemented in 1992, student achievement on the state assessment has increased dramatically in reading, math and writing at all grade levels. The most notable increase of student scores on the state assessment was in grade 5, where 71% of students passed all sections of the exam in 1994, compared to only 12% in 1992.
Source: information provided by Elois Scott

- In an effort to keep children off the streets and focused on learning this summer, the Chicago public schools enrolled nearly one-quarter of the district's students -- over 101,000 -- in summer school programs. With the intent of bolstering its overall reforms and increasing expectations, opportunities and achievement throughout the district, schools offered a range of options including purely academic courses, recreational and arts activities, and job programs. Special prominence was given to the 6,700 students who participated in the mandatory seven-week "Summer Bridge" program for 8th graders with poor standardized test scores. These students received intensive instruction in reading and math in preparation for the Iowa test, which would determine whether they would advance to high school. School administrators have stated that, in addition to educational improvement reforms implemented during the school year, the renewed focus on ending social promotions and the prospect of attending summer classes may have prompted students to take the Iowa test more seriously in the spring and may spur students in every grade level to improve their performance. Next year, mandatory bridge courses in third and sixth grades are planned.

Source: *Education Week* August 7, 1996 pp. 12

- In 1990-91, the new principal at White Oak Middle School in Silver Spring, Maryland was charged with the task of converting White Oak from an intermediate school to a middle school. With extensive staff turnover and a sudden increase in the racial and ethnic diversity of the school population, the principal catalyzed changes in virtually every aspect of the school program. Some of the changes included extensive staff development, the formulation of teacher teams and the establishment of a student reading-writing workshop. Constituting a major revision of the school's language arts program, the reading-writing workshop is flexible enough to accommodate each child's skill level and allows for both individual instruction and small group work. The program is particularly intensive for sixth graders, who spend two-fifths of their class day in the workshop. As a result, student performance on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test has improved considerably with White Oak students performing at levels comparable to or above the population in Montgomery County, as well as the state as a whole. For example, between fall 1991 and February 1992, 72 percent of sixth graders classified as "average" readers improved by one or more years and 19 percent improved but by less than one year.

Source: Elois Scott, PES

Baltimore Academy of Finance - Baltimore, Maryland

Operating as a "school-within-a-school," the Baltimore Academy of Finance is located at Lake Clifton-Eastern High School in Baltimore. Established in 1987, the Academy is a citywide college preparatory program jointly funded by the Baltimore Public Schools and the Baltimore financial services community.

Overview

The Academy of Finance model is a two-year program that gives high school students an opportunity to learn about and prepare for careers in financial services. The Academy of Finance was started as pilot project between the American Express Company, Shearson Lehman Hutton, and the New York City school system in 1983, today the program has expanded to more than 20 cities in 61 schools. In addition to the required academic high school courses, students take two or three specialized courses per semester developed by educators and industry experts.

Baltimore's Academy of Finance currently enrolls 165 students in grades 9 - 12, of which 98 percent are minority. Generally, students are recruited from middle schools across the city on a competitive basis. The entrance criteria is that each student have a 75 percent or better grade average and a 85 percent attendance rate. This program makes an effort to reach students who have the potential to succeed, but could without encouragement, fall through the cracks.

Program of Study

There are two major components of the Academy: the Pre-Academy for students in grades 9 and/or 10; and the two-year Academy for students in grades 11 through 12:

- **Pre-Academy students** in grades 9 and/or 10 take academic courses required for graduation, a maximum of 2 designated elective courses in finance, economics or business, and other extra-curricular activities associated with the program.
- **Academy of Finance students** in grades 11 through 12 are academically prepared for careers in the financial services industry. Preparation includes classroom experiences, field trips, on-the-job-training, internships, lectures, personal development seminars, computer training, and college level credit which culminates in receiving the certificate of Financial Studies. Academy students attend personal development seminars and are given the opportunity to meet industry leaders. In addition, those students who have successfully completed the 11th grade are eligible to take a summer internship, which consists of a 9 week paid summer job. Students in can take courses at nearby Morgan State College for college credit.
- **The Academy's Shadowing program** is open to both 10th and 11th grade students. This program was developed in 1991-92 to allow students to be part of a professional environment. The program pairs students in a mentoring relationship with professionals from the Baltimore financial community. The students accompany their mentors to the

workplace. By introducing the students to various careers in the financial world, the Shadowing program helps the students decide what type of internship they would like. The program also points out the need for a college education to move into entry level job positions within the business world.

Evidence of Success

Since 1989, a total of 95 students have graduated. Of that number 65 graduates have attended four-year college; 27 attended a community college; 2 students went into the military, and one student went directly into the workforce in the finance field. Another measure of success for the Academy of Finance is their attendance record: a 90 percent average for the 1992-93 school year, compared to a schoolwide average of 78 percent. In addition, in 1993 some 46 students were placed in paid summer internship programs by participating financial services institutions. The Academy has received commitments to employ approximately 60 students for this summer's internship program.

The Baltimore Academy of Finance is one of eight Academy sites currently being evaluated by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC). MDRC is conducting a three-part evaluation that includes an impact study, implementation analyses, and a cost effectiveness study. Evaluation information on the Academy should be available in June of 1999.

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