CORPORATE LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

HAROLD McGraw III
Analysis of High School Minority Enrollments

By DEAN ALFRED S. POSAMENTER, PH.D. & EDMUND W. GORDON

A recent report in The New York Times, which the deputy chancellor found “extraordinarily surprising,” indicated a precipitous drop in the percent of black and Hispanic students enrolled in New York City’s six specialized high schools—those requiring a written test for admission. For example, the City’s public schools currently have 34.7 percent black students and at Stuyvesant High School there are only 2.2 percent black students, down from 4.4 percent ten years ago. At Bronx Science over this period the percent of black students dropped from 11.8 percent to 4.8 percent, while at Brooklyn Tech the percent of black students dropped 22.4 percent to 14.9 percent. All the while the Asian population increased dramatically. Moreover, this comes after the chancellor expanded the Specialized High School Institute—a program to increase minority enrollment in these schools—from one location with 419 students to 17 locations serving 3,781 students.

The immediate reaction from most was that the admission process or the test must be flawed. While this is always a possibility, it is not something that will change in the near future. We believe that the concept of an institute could be a positive form of intervention to augment accountability for high expectations—even for a subject like mathematics that most people take pride in admitting having been bad in during their school days and thereby excusing or accepting mediocre performance from their children. Regular meetings should be held for parents and interested adults to show them ways that they can help their children maintain good academic habits, and to familiarize them with the demands of serious academic work and the material that the children are being taught in school. In short, the home support and environment—stressing the singular importance of education—is one of the key factors affecting the dismal under-representation of black students at the City’s specialized high schools.

We cannot leave teachers out of this issue. They, quite obviously, play a critical role beyond their teaching skills. Several years ago the Teaneck school district wanted to know why the honor classes in the high school were largely white and the remedial classes were largely minority. A thorough investigation concluded that the one contributing factor was teacher expectation—regardless if the teacher was minority or not. If Johnny was black and didn’t do well on a test, the teacher would generally console him and tell him “it’s all right; you’ll do better next time.” Whereas, if Johnny was white and performed poorly on a test, the teacher would simply tell him that this was completely unacceptable and would not be tolerated next time. This difference of expectation had a dramatic effect on student performance. Teachers must take a mentoring approach to assure that students stay on track.

Naturally there are other factors that contribute to this enrollment dilemma. There may be parents who choose not to send their children to a school with such a low black enrollment. The Department of Education must make every effort to stress and infuse through all schools the importance of a good education, with a culture of high academic aspirations and effort.

Notwithstanding the problems that have plagued many schools, such as the teacher shortage in critical areas that has left the system with a relatively inexperienced teacher force, we believe that one of the root problems—one that is often not properly addressed—is the need to support families so that they can properly reinforce academically positive environments and high expectations for their children. The Department of Education must stop being shocked by statistics and perform an in-depth analysis to determine why its program to prepare racial and language minorities has not been successful. Only after these findings are implemented—with proper support is given to the instructional staff—and when both the schools and the home address this problem simultaneously, will we have a chance to reverse this unfortunate trend.

Alfred S. Posamentier, Dean. The School of Education, The City College of New York, CUNY; Joyce R. Coppin, Distinguished Lecturer, The City College of New York, CUNY; Edmund W. Gordon, Richard March Hoe Professor of Psychology and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.

LETTERS

RE: The Bard College Prison Initiative

To the Editor:

I have a 22-year-old daughter in a detention center in Fort Collins, Co. She is scheduled to be released next semester and will be returning to MA at that time. We are looking for programs to get her started on. If you have any comments or links I would appreciate it. I’m touched by your article and appreciate that you have provided us with this opportunity.

Frank Ordway
Sharon, MA

RE: An Interview with President Ruth Simmons, Brown University

To the Editor:

The article was most appreciated. She is a remarkable woman, a breath of fresh air and realizes what a public privilege it is to have a great University. I hope Ms. Simmons makes Brown her last stop.

Tom Bracon
Bayonne, NJ

RE: Prison Teachers

To the Editor:

This is a great article. I teach in a juvenile secure care facility. Unfortunately, most of these teenagers have or do not see the importance of education until six or seven months in secure care.

Gregory E. Williams
New Orleans, LA

RE: A Glimpse into the Imprisonment of Jean Harris

To the Editor:

It is amazing how a white woman can commit murder and it is sensationalized. Jean Harris committed 1st degree murder and was charged with 2nd degree murder. If an African American male would have killed someone with the exact same motive in Scarsdale, New York that black male would have received a charge of 1st degree murder and a life sentence or death penalty. Only in America can a white woman be redeemed for murder and any male that is not white is automatically a murderer.

George E. Wilson
Memphis, TN
Jeffrey Wiesenfeld Speaks Out: Former CUNY Trustee Shares his Views on Public Education

By EMILY SHERWOOD, Ph.D.

Jeffrey Wiesenfeld is not afraid to speak his mind. The former CUNY trustee, who is credited with backing Chancellor Matthew Goldstein’s sweeping reforms to raise academic standards at the nation’s largest urban public university during a seven-year term that just ended in June, spoke to Education Update about his views on public education and his own background as the product of New York City public schools.

One might think that Wiesenfeld, currently a principal at Bernstein Investment Research and Management and arbiter of multi-million dollar transactions, always had it easy. Not so. The child of a Polish Holocaust survivor, he was raised in the South Bronx and attended P.S. 28 on Anthony Avenue, followed by Wade Junior High School. “I was beaten constantly,” recalls Wiesenfeld matter-of-factly. “If I didn’t fight, I wouldn’t have survived.” Fortunately, he was admitted to Bronx High School of Science in 1975, which “literally saved my life.” It was at Queens College that Wiesenfeld developed an interest in political science and public administration, but after graduating, he met an FBI recruiter and took a test “on a lark,” working briefly as a counter-intelligence agent. “The FBI gave me an opportunity to start a life,” he reflects. What followed next was an amazing 21-year stint in New York’s political arena, during which he served under NYC Mayor Ed Koch, U.S. Senator Alfonse D’Amato, and NY Governor George Pataki.

In 1999, Governor Pataki appointed Wiesenfeld to the CUNY Board of Trustees, declaring, “As we begin the process of restoring CUNY to the great university system it once was, I know that Jeff Wiesenfeld will fight to improve accountability and standards at CUNY.” Pataki’s prophecy was indeed upheld, as Wiesenfeld dug in to uphold stringent admissions standards. “Before, the view was that everyone should get in regardless of their ability. It’s nonsensical to continue to page 24
Lighthouse International: Educating Preschool Students for the 21st Century

By EMILY SHERWOOD, Ph.D.

Lighthouse International, the hundred-year-old organization that is widely regarded as the gold standard in low vision care, held its annual graduation for forty preschool children last June. Dressed in a miniature blue cap and gown, five-year-old Manny was the last to be called forward. Totally blind and walking with a small white cane, Manny received his certificate from Lighthouse CEO Dr. Tara Cortes (one of which is self-contained for multiply impaired students), Lighthouse International offers the only program of its kind where children with visual impairments work and play alongside sighted children. By mainstreaming visually impaired children with sighted children, “we basically are bringing everyone into the world as one,” explains Cortes, who holds both an M.N. and Ph.D. and was hired as CEO in 2005 after an intensive yearlong search. “When they leave our school, the children who are sighted recognize that everybody’s not just like them,” adds principal Gregory Santamur, who came to Lighthouse in July after spending six years as principal of the Helen Keller Services for the Blind’s Children’s Learning Center. “The children are cognitively the same. Some just have a vision impairment… It doesn’t mean they are less smart or they’re not on the same developmental level.”

For those youngsters with visual impairments in the five regular preschool classes, teachers are able to impart skill development through alternative methods using touch, sound and other senses. A Braille calendar has numbers that can be removed and touched. A weather chart has clouds made out of cotton balls. Alphabetical letters are outlined with pasta, paper clips, and pennies depending on the students’ (and teachers’) ingenuity, and large plastic shapes with Braille lettering can be affixed to felt boards. Like most preschool programs, music is an integral part of the school day, with class songs and listening center tapes woven into the daily curriculum.

In the self-contained classroom, the children, who are two to three years delayed in their development, are beginning the school year by getting to know their school and neighborhood. Each child is making a book, with buttons and alternative methods using touch, sound and other senses. A Braille calendar has numbers that can be removed and touched. A weather chart has clouds made out of cotton balls. Alphabetical letters are outlined with pasta, paper clips, and pennies depending on the students’ (and teachers’) ingenuity, and large plastic shapes with Braille lettering can be affixed to felt boards. Like most preschool programs, music is an integral part of the school day, with class songs and listening center tapes woven into the daily curriculum.

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The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History announces one-week seminars in summer 2007 for high school and middle school teachers, National Park Service rangers, and college level faculty. Seminars provide a $400 stipend, books, room and board.

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CUNY Vice-Chancellor Botman Tackles the Future of Math & Science Ed at CEI-PEA

By LIZA YOUNG

President of The Center for Educational Innovation-Public Education Association (CEI-PEA), Seymour Fliegel’s, notation of research from Arizona regarding the strong correlation between student achievement and the grades of teachers as undergraduates sparked the recent creation of the City University of New York (CUNY) Teachers Academy.

Dr. Selma Botman, Vice Chancellor of the City University New York (CUNY), recently addressed a group of educators, college presidents, and deans, hosted by President Fliegel at the Harvard Club, describing the program at Teacher’s Academy as one that “imagines how to educate teachers in middle and high schools.”

Botman highlighted the power of education from her personal background recalling “teachers who instilled the possibility of dreaming of making something of ourselves,” and the growing need today for skilled math and science teachers to address a crisis of poor performance of high school students in comparison to other countries. Concomitantly, she noted a drop in the number of students majoring in math and science, a crisis underscored by US Department of Education senior research analyst Dr. Clifford Adelman’s book, The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School Through College, demonstrating performance in math in high school as predictive of achievement in college.

CUNY Teachers Academy, a product of the collaboration between three institutions, CUNY, New York University (NYU), and the Department of Education (DOE) as part of the NYC Partnership for Teacher Excellence, (supported by a grant from The Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation) is designed to meet the growing demand for effective math, science, special education, and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and has recruited exceptional math and science students, with diverse backgrounds, who can major in biology, chemistry, earth science, and math.

The Teacher Academy program will be housed on the CUNY campuses of Brooklyn College, City College, College of Staten Island, Hunter College, Lehman College, Queens College, and in the Fall of 2007, York College. Enrollment in Teachers Academy includes full tuition reimbursement and paid internships at host schools chosen based on successful leadership, and located within the vicinity of CUNY campuses. The collaboration with the DOE allows students to become familiarized with the public school system from year one, with 1000 hours of total internship at host schools by the end of the four-year program.

State of the art features of the program include the use of University of California at Santa Cruz’s Professional Teaching Standards and the Continuum of Teacher Education and Development. Upon graduation Teacher Academy students will have completed coursework for initial NYS certification.

Theory, research and practice will go hand in hand as students are embraced by professors across CUNY campus departments, and by teachers and principals of host schools.

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National Yiddish Theatre-Folksbiene: 92 & Going Strong

By LIZA YOUNG

At 92 years old, the National Yiddish Theatre-Folksbiene is brimming with activity on a grand scale. At a recent, vibrant meeting, launching the new season Chairman of the Board, Jeffrey Weisenfeld, unveiled exciting developments of this perpetually young-at-heart organization, including a partnership with City University of New York (CUNY), allowing the production of Yiddish theatre, on the campuses of Brooklyn College, Hunter College, Lehman College, and Queens College. The initiative is an expansion of cultural studies of CUNY—such as the center for Puerto Rican studies at Hunter and Dominican studies at City College—allowing students to be immersed in the rich Yiddish culture.

Dr. Selma Botman, Vice Chancellor, of the City university of New York (CuNY) in describing the endeavor, quoted Israel Berkovici: “Yiddish culture is the point at which Jewish culture enters a dialogue with the outside world by both enacting its concerns onstage and by introducing people to the cultural expression of Jewish life and of Yiddish life.” Also representing CuNY was Rita Rodin, director of the Office of Public Relations. The performances of staged readings from the modern collection of plays at CUNY are free, but tickets are required.

Reflecting its campaign for national membership to meet a growing interest in Yiddish theatre across the country, Weisenfeld proudly announced—with a drum roll—the coining of the organization from Folksbiene theatre to “National Yiddish Theatre-Folksbiene.” President of the Board, Felix Frankel, who has Russian roots, described Folksbiene as having the “power to heal the soul” and ensuring that future generations are not deprived of the treasure of the Yiddish legacy.

To meet the broad interests of an audience which has grown by over 60 percent in the past four years Zalman Mlotek, Executive Director of the organization and renowned performer of Yiddish theatre indicated that Folksbiene will run more, but shorter shows which will include classics and some innovative performances such as the unique, Pirates of Penzance, translated to Yiddish by al grand—who was present at the meeting. Other venerable members of the Yiddish theatre included Bel Kaufman the granddaughter of the beloved Shalom Aleichem and veteran actor, Fyvush Finkel—star in the coming Yiddish translation of Neil Simon’s The Sunshine Boys—who exclaimed in his classically upbeat style that “Yiddish theatre is in my heart.”

The recent Folksbiene meeting also included a treat of a selection from A Night in the Old Marketplace with singer Joanne Borts, Zalman Mlotek at the piano, and director of the performance Alex Aron, just a preview of the marvels the National Yiddish Theatre-Folksbiene has to offer.

Rita Rodin

Fyvush Finkel

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USABILITY IN EDUCATION
by Julie Strothman

On November 14th, World Usability Day will raise awareness about the consequences of design: things that are easier to use are more effective, more efficient, and more satisfying for the people who use them. However, usability applies as much to teaching and learning as it does to the design of buildings and software.

At Landmark College, a college for students with learning disabilities and AD/HD, we have found that when students participate in learning experiences designed to be effective across diverse learning abilities, the need for individual accommodations is significantly diminished. Accommodations, while an essential self-advocacy tool, will not suffice for all who need them: learning disabilities are often undiagnosed or undisclosed.

In their 1999–2005 DOE demonstration project at the University of Connecticut, Dr. Sally Scott, Dr. Joan McGuane, and Dr. Stan Shaw identified Nine Principles of Universal Design for Instruction (UDI). By following these principles, instructors can proactively plan inclusive learning experiences which benefit all learners.

I recently spoke with a highly motivated student with dyslexia whose goal is to work in medicine. He described the bitterly frustrating experience of a lecture-style anatomy and physiology class he had failed at a previous school. The lectures were audio only; the instructor never made use of outlines, never provided notes, and rarely used the white board. The student’s cognitive effort was devoted entirely to unsuccessful note-taking—he often missed much of the lecture content, and was unable to place his attention on learning. Assessments were always the same format: tests with multiple choice questions and diagrams to be drawn from memory.

This instructor would have done well to apply the UDI principle of “flexibility in use,” which encourages varied methods of instruction. The student might have been able to develop understanding through hands-on group activities. He might have been better able to take notes or focus on content, if given a concept map or an outline of the content to be covered. Varied assessment methods provide the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge without relying on note memory. The UDI principles of “tolerance for error” and “perceptible information” encourage access to electronic versions of the lecture content. In his current class, the student is able to correct his own notes while listening with a screen reader to the instructor’s notes, provided on his class website. Through connecting his own notes, he has another opportunity to learn the content.

At World Usability Day New England, sponsored by Landmark College and Dartmouth College, educators will come together to discuss implementation of universal usability to enhance learning, effectiveness, and understanding for people of all abilities. The program includes a UDI Lab where participants will bring a syllabus, lesson plan, handout or class website for evaluation by our students and our experts.

We encourage educators everywhere to devote time to considering how they might make their instruction straight-forward, predictable, yet varied in methods of delivery and assessment, and more collegial in climate. We encourage educators everywhere to seek out universal design resources, and to speak with colleagues and students about successful strategies, and endeavor to make learning a usable—and pleasing—experience for all.

Julie Strothman is a Project Manager at Landmark College and the Coordinator of World Usability Day New England 2006, being hosted by Landmark College on November 14th. For more information, please visit www.landmark.edu/wud.

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Celebrating 13 Years
Yale Senior Carolyn Sussman ‘Gives Back’ in the Family Tradition

By EMILY SHERWOOD, Ph.D.

Yale senior Carolyn Sussman is living proof of John F. Kennedy’s famous saying, “Of those to whom much is given, much is required.” Her grandfather, the late Preston Robert Tisch—formerly U.S. Postmaster General, Loews Corporation Chairman, NY Giants’ Chairman, and noted philanthropist (he most recently restored over 40 athletic fields in NYC’s public high schools in a $135 million public/private venture known as “Take the Field”)—Sussman grew up with the understanding that she should always find time to give back, and she’s done it in spades.

Last year, Sussman co-chaired Yale’s spring “Relay for Life” event, the American Cancer Society’s biggest fundraiser, an 18-hour, overnight walkathon in hundreds of venues nationwide that requires one member of each relay team to be walking at all times.

Under Carolyn’s leadership, Yale fielded 60 teams of 15 students and organized free musical entertainment and restaurant-donated food to fuel the energy of the 900 participating students, who camped out in tents at the Yale track. “It was a huge organizational feat,” said Sussman simply.

Yale’s contribution to the American Cancer Society was a lofty $200,000, fifth overall among universities, and—not surprisingly—Carolyn was recognized as the number one individual fundraiser in the country. “It really gives me a perspective on my life,” says Sussman. “One of my kindergarten students wasn’t there one day because his brother was in jail. Another child’s brother was shot. I can walk three blocks from campus and be in a completely different world.” Sussman’s interest in education was fostered by both her parents: her mother, Laurie Tisch Sussman, founded and chairs the German American School: Teaching German for 113 Years, and noted philanthropist (he most recently restored over 40 athletic fields in NYC’s public high schools in a $135 million public/private venture known as “Take the Field”)—Sussman grew up with the understanding that she should always find time to give back, and she’s done it in spades.

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