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THE CHILDREN'S SCHOOL: LESSONS FOR INCLUSION, LEADERSHIP, AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

Beth Lief*

In recent years education has evolved into the country's number one public concern.¹ Presidential, gubernatorial, mayoral, and legislative candidates all claim to care about educating our children. Each candidate offers an agenda for ensuring that all children achieve at high levels. On the national level, President Bush's "accountability" package² addresses what kinds of tests and achievement reports schools must administer. No elected politicians have challenged the continued and increased testing of public school children to increase school accountability for student achievement.³ This increased pressure on schools to perform is occurring amidst a critical shortage of qualified teachers and principals. This shortage strains the ability of school districts to meet the challenges imposed by testing. The problem is particularly acute in cities like

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1. Randal C. Archibold, *On the Stump, the Hot Topic Is Education; In the Schools, Deep Skepticism Is Mixed With Cautious Gratitude*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 3, 2000, at 31; Jacques Steinberg, *The 2000 Campaign; Education; From Social Security to Environment, the Candidate's Positions*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 5, 2000, at 44.

2. In December, 2001, President Bush's accountability package was passed by the House and the Senate as the Leave No Child Behind Act. H.R. 1, 107th Cong. (2001). The bill requires all public schools to annually test students in grades three through eight in reading and math. Schools must render accountability reports similar to those already in place in California, Texas, and other states. Each school will be given twelve years to make their students "proficient" in reading and math. The bill does not require all schools to reach a single proficiency standard, but schools must improve results for all groups of students. *Carrot and Stick for Schools*, L.A. TIMES, Dec. 23, 2001, at 4. See also Jodi Wilgoren, *Teachers Union Leaders Oppose Push to Testing at the Expense of Curriculum*, N.Y. TIMES, July 4, 2000, at A11.

3. See William S. Koski, *The State of Native America and its Unfolding Self-Governance: Educational Opportunity and Accountability in an Era of Standards-Based School Reforms*, 12 STAN. L. & POL'Y REV. 301, 302 (2001) (stating that "among policy elites there is a consensus that standards-based reform can improve the educational achievement of America's children").

New York that serve large numbers of disadvantaged students and students with disabilities.

Successful schools should be used by educators and policy-makers as models. In order to reproduce the success of these schools, the reasons for their success must be identified. A school's achievement data gives important indications of why it succeeds. There are also innumerable studies and reports listing factors enabling school success.⁴

Unfortunately, no single factor ensures student success, nor do factors contributing to school success thrive independently of one another. To create policies that invite replication on a large scale, one has to look at both the factors that enable school success, and at the factors that promote or frustrate the replication of successful schools.

The Children's School in Brooklyn, New York is a school worthy of study. The leadership is superb; teachers know their students and fellow educators well; parents genuinely feel part of their children's education. The teachers form a robust professional learning community that thrives throughout the year. At the Children's School, children achieve at high levels and learn to appreciate and respect differences among themselves.⁵ The school is also a model for understanding how to successfully educate children with disabilities. These lessons are important for understanding how to provide a standards-based education to the ten to twelve percent of students in special education nationally.⁶

I. THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

For at least two decades schools have been concerned with increasing student achievement. Beginning with the National Coun-

4. Characteristics such as a shared vision, an effective principal, collaboration among teachers, and a structured standards-based curriculum are typically cited. *See generally* COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCH. OFFICERS ON RESTRUCTURING EDUC., *SUCCESS FOR ALL IN A NEW CENTURY* (1989); Bonnie Benard, *Fostering Resiliency in Urban Schools*, in *CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP: A VISION TO GUIDE CHANGE IN BELIEFS AND PRACTICE* (B. Williams ed., 1995); Judith Warren Little, *Organizing Schools for Teacher Learning*, in *TEACHING AS THE LEARNING PROFESSION: HANDBOOK OF POLICY AND PRACTICE* (Linda Darling-Hammond & Gary Sykes eds., 1999).

5. In 2000, reading scores at the Children's School were among the highest of the sixteen middle schools and academies in its district. Carolina Gonzales, *The Choices May Shrink*, *DAILY NEWS*, Nov. 21, 2000, at 2. In 1998, the Children's School was the only school in New York City where special education and general education children were mixed in every class. Joyce Shelby, *Special Day for Very Special Kids*, *DAILY NEWS*, June 15, 1998, at 3.

6. U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC. 22 ANN. REP. TO CONGRESS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUC. ACT VII (2000).

cil of Teachers of Mathematics ("NCTM") in the late 1980s, professional educator organizations began to promulgate standards for what students should know and be able to do.⁷ Today, thirteen professional disciplines have developed content standards and every state but Iowa has passed content standards for students in specific subjects.⁸

While testing students has long been a hallmark of public education (much more than in private schools), the standards movement has led to an increase in the number and significance of standardized tests. New federal legislation requires that all students in grades three through eight be given annual tests in reading and math.⁹ The intensified pressure to pass the tests and the heightened consequences for students who fail to do so and their schools, have, in the view of many, changed the nature of K-12 schooling.¹⁰ Increased testing has made it much harder for schools to ignore large numbers of failing students or the fact that these failing children are predominantly poor, minority, or disabled.¹¹ Increased accountability demands that schools help as many students as possible—including students with disabilities and limited English proficiency—acquire the skills needed to perform well on standardized tests.

At the same time, even test makers agree that student and school success should not be judged by any one measure.¹² The

7. Edward B. Fiske, *Lessons*, N.Y. TIMES, June 7, 1989, at 6.

8. MARGARET J. MCLAUGHLIN, FED. AND REG'L RES. CTRS. NETWORK, SPECIAL EDUCATION IN AN ERA OF SCHOOL REFORM: AN OVERVIEW 4 (1998).

9. H.R. 1, 107th Cong. (2001); Diane Jean Schemo, *Officials Say School Choice Often Just Isn't an Option*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 22, 2001, at 13. The bill's key provisions require states to identify schools that need more assistance. Schools must submit annual "report cards" comparing their standardized test scores and teacher qualifications with those of other schools, both locally and statewide. Schools that fail to make progress must use their federal funds to offer students transportation to better public schools or provide assistance through outside tutoring agencies. In extreme cases, schools could be ordered to replace their entire staff. Nick Anderson, *Congress O.K.s Overhaul of Public Schools*, L.A. TIMES, Dec. 19, 2001, at A1.

10. See, e.g., RICHARD P. PHELPS, THOMAS B. FORDHAM FOUND., WHY TESTING EXPERTS HATE TESTING (1999) (appraising eight of the most common criticisms of standardized testing).

11. See Scott S. Greenberger, *CEO Finds Fault with Standardized Tests*, BOSTON GLOBE, July 29, 2001, at B7. ("Over the years, the College Board and the Educational Testing Service have claimed that [a standardized test] measures intelligence, that it confirms high school performance, and that it predicts college grades. They've withdrawn the first two claims, and they offer very little support for the third.")

12. For example, in its annual report on the national condition of education, the National Center for Education based its evaluation upon fifty-nine indicators. NAT'L CTR. FOR EDUC. STATISTICS, U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC., Pub. No. NCES 2001-072, THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION iii, vii (2001).

business of nurturing young people is too complicated for such simplistic evaluation. The success of school-sponsored interventions to combat guns, gangs, and prejudice is not measured by standardized tests. Nor can a standardized test gauge a student's aptitude for singing, drawing, or community service. A great school enables its students to achieve on standardized tests while also providing them with a rich arts experience, teaching them how to get along with others, and encouraging them to contribute to their communities.

Although accountability and testing have received much attention, no campaign to raise student achievement will succeed without paying attention to the quality of principals and teachers. It is hard to find a good school that doesn't have a good principal. Recruiting and retaining good teachers is just as important. The increased complexity of a curriculum that meets rigorous standards and the expectation that all children master that curriculum, presumes that teachers know the material, possess teaching strategies to reach the full range of students, and can assess their students' grasp of the material. We should not assume, however, that such educators are readily available. Nationally, the nation's schools will need over two million teachers within the decade.¹³ The crisis in retaining qualified principals is of similar proportion.

More attention is being paid to the recruitment, development, and retention of qualified principals and teachers. Since its inception in 1987, the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards has gained extraordinary support. Thirty-two states now offer salary supplements to teachers who attain National Board certification, and thirty states offer fee support for the certification process.¹⁴ Major national organizations, such as the Education Commission of the States, along with professional organizations of principals and superintendents, are focusing increasing energy on preparing and retaining qualified school leaders.¹⁵

13. WILLIAM J. HUSSAR, U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC., PREDICTING THE NEED FOR NEWLY HIRED TEACHERS IN THE UNITED STATES TO 2008-09, at 9 tbl. (1999) (noting that between 1.7 and 2.7 million new public school teachers will be needed by 2008-09).

14. B.M. STECHER ET. AL., NAT'L CTR. FOR RESEARCH IN VOCATIONAL EDUC., USING ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION 130-31 app. D (1999).

15. See EDUC. COMM'N OF THE STATES, ANNUAL REPORT 1999-2000, at 1 (describing "Quality Teachers for the 21st Century Initiative"). The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium's Standards for School Leaders (ISLIC Standards) are being adopted by a growing number of state education agencies. See STATE EDUC. ASSESSMENT CTR., COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHL. OFFICERS, INTERSTATE SCHOOL LEADERS LICENSURE CONSORTIUM: STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS 4 (1996).

Issues of accountability and student success have special meaning for students with disabilities. Since the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act,¹⁶ federal law has guaranteed an appropriate public education for students with disabilities. This right has been given further meaning with the passage of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 ("IDEA Amendments").¹⁷ Consistent with earlier law, the IDEA Amendments requires that

[t]o the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities . . . [be] educated with children who are not disabled; and . . . children with disabilities [be removed] from the regular educational environment . . . only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.¹⁸

In addition, the IDEA Amendments marked a major shift in the education of children with disabilities, moving from an emphasis on "access to education" to "improving results."¹⁹ Schools, districts, and states now have to report the academic performance of students in special education and are being held much more accountable for the educational outcomes of disabled students.²⁰

Those responsible for educating disabled students, however, have much work to do to comply with the Amendments. According to a policy briefing by the United States Department of Education in 2001, only nine states reported academic achievement separately for students in special education.²¹ More than ever, school districts and individual schools need to understand how to best provide a standards-based education to disabled students and improve their school performance.

The Children's School is a success story in how to provide disabled students with a standards-based education. This essay uses

16. Individuals with Disabilities Act, Pub. L. No. 91-230, 84 Stat. 175 (1970) (amended 1997).

17. Amendments to The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Pub. L. No. 105-17, 111 Stat. 37 (1997) (codified throughout 20 U.S.C.A. § 1400-1487 (West 2000).

18. 20 U.S.C.A. § 1400 (West 2000).

19. U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC., 22 ANN. REP. TO CONGRESS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT 12 (2000).

20. *Id.*

21. ELLEN SCHILLER ET. AL., U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC., DRAFT POLICY BRIEF I: USING IMPLEMENTATION DATA TO STUDY STATE, DISTRICT, AND SCHOOL IMPACTS, STUDY OF STATE AND LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT 10 (2001).

The Children's School as a case study and suggests that its policies be carried out on a larger scale.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE CHILDREN'S SCHOOL

Situated on a tree-lined street in Brooklyn, in the leased brick annex of Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church, The Children's School teaches approximately 450 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade.²² General education students and special education students learn side-by-side in the same classrooms on a full-time basis.²³

Quantitative and qualitative measures of the school's success abound.²⁴ The Children's School has a high attendance rate for both general education and special education students. Only one student was suspended during the 2000-2001 year. Students in both general education and special education outperform their peers on standardized tests.²⁵ When eleven experts in early childhood, special, and bilingual education looked at a sample of student progress from 1994 to 1995, they found that all the students they studied, including an equal proportion of general education and special education students, showed "extraordinary or good progress given [their] strengths and challenges."²⁶ These experts looked at progress not only in math and language arts, but also in early childhood socializing, which is never measured on standardized tests.²⁷

From its inception, The Children's School has worked toward a coherent curriculum across classes and grades. The school's Comprehensive Educational Plan for 2001-2002 centers on a standards-based curriculum with specific outcome goals related to the applicable standards. The Plan is a living document, not just a token response to central headquarters' mandates. The instructional products of a rigorous standards-based education permeates the

22. The Children's School is the main site of P.S. 372K, a multi-site school that serves 550 students under the joint jurisdiction of Community School District 15 in Brooklyn, New York, and District 75, which serves students with severe handicapping conditions. See N.Y. CITY BD. OF EDUC., DISTRICT 75 CITYWIDE PROGRAMS: AT A GLANCE, at <http://www.nycenet.edu>. (noting that District 75 "provides educational vocational, and behavioral support programs for approximately 20,000 students with a broad range of abilities, disabilities, and support needs").

23. Gonzales, *supra* note 5, at 2; Shelby, *supra* note 5, at 3.

24. Gonzales, *supra* note 5, at 2.

25. See *infra* notes 55-56 and accompanying text.

26. NCREL EVALUATION SERVS., THE NEW YORK CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE YEAR II EVALUATION: LEARNING TOGETHER: CHILDREN'S PROGRESS IN INTEGRATIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION 113 (1996).

27. *Id.* at 113-15.

school's hallways, classrooms, and student portfolios. On the second floor, for example, one wall posts a first grade assignment requiring students to read the book *Read For Me, Mama* and answer two questions. One question asks, Why was reading so important to Joseph? The other question, Why is reading important to you? One forward-thinking child wrote, "To have a good future." Another student, more focused on the present, wrote, "To get good grades." A third child's response reflected the school's goal for all children: "I love reading." This phenomena is even evident with younger children. In the pre-kindergarten class last year, a list of similes hung on the blackboard because, as the teacher explained, the four-year olds started talking with similes and she wanted them to learn the language of writers.

Integrating the arts into the curriculum is a major priority. According to the educational plan, "The Children's School community is committed to building a learning environment in which visual, social, kinesthetic, tactile, and musical ways of learning are as fundamental to a child's development as verbal and mathematical learning."²⁸ Art programs are integrated into a sequential curriculum to ensure coherence within a school year and from one year to the next. The art programs include an impressive array of dance, theatre, studio arts, music, and poetry classes.

The Children's School's core values transcend academics. Principal Lorraine Boyhan and her staff believe that a good school must help students develop positive self-images while embracing the individuality of and differences among their peers.²⁹ At The Children's School the differences among the children are wide—not only in terms of academic ability and ethnicity, but also in terms of language, physical ability, and behavioral challenges. Still, the respect and care the children hold for each other is apparent even when a child's outburst disrupts the normal routine. Principal Boyhan firmly believes that the diverse makeup of each classroom is responsible for this remarkable tolerance. Last year the fourth grade class wrote and performed their own opera, "Sticky Friendships." As enthusiastic ten year olds sang their original score, "Friends Stick Together Like Glue" with its seemingly unremarkable refrain "You stick up for me, I stick up for you," a determined little girl came on stage for a solo. This would be unremarkable

28. N. Y. STATE EDUC. DEP'T, COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATIONAL PLAN 2001-2002, at 10 (2001).

29. *Id.* at 4.

except for the fact that this same little girl is autistic,³⁰ and her mother had been told to institutionalize her in a residential school.³¹

The Children's School's rigorous standards based curriculum uses the Balanced Literacy Program³² and Everyday Mathematics³³ throughout the school. Teachers meet regularly to review student progress within the context of these curricula. The principal and faculty believe that the consistency of curriculum is a major reason for the upward trend in test results. Teachers meet regularly throughout the year to look at student work and to identify student progress and areas for improvement. This communal approach results in teachers feeling respected as professionals.

The school is tremendously popular with parents. For many parents of disabled students, the gains they see their children making in areas not measured on academic tests are the most important. As one parent said a number of years ago, "For our son, who has speech and communication delays and falls within the autistic spectrum, [this] inclusion program is a necessity. In the nine months he's been in the program, he's made dramatic progress, better than I thought possible Inclusion is bringing him out."³⁴ Another parent, when asked this year to name the major goal for her disabled child, responded, "To be invited to a birthday party by one of his classmates." Perhaps mundane for most parents, this is a major achievement for a seriously disabled child.

30. Autism is a mental condition characterized by great difficulty in communicating with others, using language, and using abstract concepts. THE CONCISE OXFORD DICTIONARY 89 (10th ed. 1999).

31. During the 1997-1998 school year, less than 20% of autistic students were educated in regular classrooms for more than 80% of the day, and 69% were in segregated classrooms, separate or residential facilities, or at home. U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC., *supra* note 19, at 4.

32. Everyday Mathematics is a K-6 curriculum designed to imbue students with sophisticated mathematical skills. The program directs teachers to move beyond basic arithmetic and nurture higher-order and critical thinking skills in their students by using everyday, real-world problems and situations. EVERYDAY LEARNING CORP., EVERYDAY MATHEMATICS SOURCEBOOK 1 (2000). The Balanced Literacy program is a curriculum designed to give students the ability to read independently and with understanding; to write, revise and polish many kinds of text; to appreciate features of good literature; and to speak and listen responsibly. KATE MALOY, THE HEART OF THE MATTER: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NEW YORK COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT #2, at 10 (1998).

33. *Id.* at 8.

34. ROGER CHESWAS & DEBORAH WINKING, N. CENTRAL REG'L EDUC. LAB., THE NEW YORK CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE: YEAR II EVALUATION, PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF SATISFACTION AND IMPACT 12 (1997).

In the early years of the school, there was some concern that the inclusion of disabled students in all classrooms would lower the level of academic rigor. Smaller class sizes in the beginning overcame hesitation on the part of many parents and, as the reputation of the school grew, so did its popularity. Hundreds of parents of both general and special education children now visit the school each year. More than 300 prospective families attended an Open House in January 2001, and the ratio of applications to available spaces is higher than even the most exclusive private schools. Last year, The Children's School received 167 general education applications for the 19 available pre-kindergarten seats and 143 general education applications for the 10 available kindergarten seats.³⁵ This popularity has become an issue for the school, since, as is often the case with schools of choice, savvy parents are at an unfair advantage. Rather than avoiding the problem, however, The Children's School has placed it as a top concern in its Comprehensive Educational Plan and is searching for a solution.³⁶

The Children's School is a place with high achieving students, as well as a nurturing community. Understanding the reasons for the school's success can benefit all students, but particularly students with disabilities who have received scant attention in the dialogue of standards and accountability. The school's success is largely based on four factors: its small size, the team teaching model, its emphasis on professional development, and the leadership of the school's principal.

A. Small School

The movement in the 1990s to create small schools was driven by the belief that personal relationships among students, teachers, and parents are a prerequisite to learning. The Children's School is a real community, in the sense that its members (students, parents, and teachers) all know each other well.

Small size, in and of itself, does not guarantee this kind of closeness. It does, however, make it easier to achieve. In a school the size of The Children's School, all teachers in a grade can sit around a small table and talk about their students' work as it compares to the school's standards. Parents get to know the needs not only of their child's class, but also of the school as a whole. Additionally, they can see how their involvement contributes to the school's

35. CTR. FOR SCHL. SUCCESS, NEW VISIONS FOR PUB. SUCCESS, THE CHILDREN'S SCHOOL 1 (2001).

36. N. Y. STATE EDUC. DEP'T, *supra* note 28, at app. I.

well-being. Studies have consistently found that smaller school size makes it possible for adults to know children well, recognize students' specific strengths and needs, and learn how to bring student work up to rigorous standards.³⁷

The Children's School, unfortunately, has been under pressure to increase its size. Two years ago, the school opened an annex partially in response to enormous parental demand. The school's Parent Association has worked hard to make parents at both sites feel part of the school community, but it has required significant effort. The notion of creating a second school like The Children's School has been abandoned for the time being.

B. Team Teaching in Inclusionary Classrooms

The 1997 IDEA Amendments contain several provisions to align the education of students with disabilities with general education reform efforts. The law recognizes that high expectations, access to the general curriculum, and accountability are key elements in improving results for disabled children.³⁸ Thus the statute introduced new requirements to complement and develop the already existing right of students with disabilities to education in the "least restrictive environment."³⁹ Notwithstanding the IDEA Amendments, however, the movement of New York City children in special education to the least restrictive environment has been slow. Improving accountability and educational outcomes for special education students falls far behind the progress made with the general education population in New York and most of the country.⁴⁰

While New York City has made gains in placing special education students in general education classrooms, The Children's School's inclusion of all children in the same classrooms is in stark contrast to city wide patterns. In the 2000-2001 school year, more than half (54%) of New York City's special education students spent more than 60% of their time in either a self-contained class in a regular school or a separate facility for children with disabilities.⁴¹ About 9% were in wholly separate facilities, and only 45% spent 20% or less of their time outside of a regular classroom.⁴²

37. See, e.g., PATRICIA WASLEY & MICHELLE FINE, *SMALL SCHOOLS AND THE ISSUE OF SCALE* 13 (2000).

38. 20 U.S.C.A. § 1400 (West 2000).

39. *Id.*

40. LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENV'T COALITION, *THE STATE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN NEW YORK CITY* 1 (2001).

41. *Id.* at 2.

42. *Id.*

In 1997-1998, special education children in New York City were 31% more likely than special education students in New York State to be in a segregated setting for the majority of the school day and 2.4 times more likely than the average special education student in the United States.⁴³ Nationally, only 25% of children with disabilities spent more than 60% of the day in a segregated setting, while 58% of children in New York City did so.⁴⁴

In recent years, the Central Board of Education in New York City has required the Community School Districts and High School Districts to increase the inclusion of special education students in regular classrooms. The inclusionary approach of The Children's School, however, departs in a fundamental way from many inclusion programs, where one or two special education students who might otherwise be educated in a self-contained classroom are taught in the regular education class, often with the assistance of an aide or a consulting teacher. Instead, The Children's School and classes in other schools in District Fifteen have adopted a model that reduces the general education class size to allow for the full integration of special education and general education students. At The Children's School, in kindergarten through third grade, each class has eighteen general education students and six special education students. Classes are team-taught by a regular education teacher, a special education teacher, and a special education aide.⁴⁵ In grades four and five, class size is increased to allow for eight to ten special education students.⁴⁶ For all classes and grades, at least six of the special education students would have otherwise been in segregated classrooms and at least two in every class would otherwise be taught in settings reserved for students with the most severe disabilities.⁴⁷

As an early evaluation report noted, the ratio and team teaching approach were

formed in such a way that neither the special educator nor the student with special needs is a 'guest' within the general education classroom. The special education-general education teaching team allows students with and without identified special needs to benefit from the individualized attention. In addition,

43. *Id.*

44. *Id.* The percentage of pre-school age children in integrated settings in New York State increased substantially in recent years from 32% in 1995-1996 to 56% in 1999-2000. *Id.* at 3.

45. N. Y. STATE EDUC. DEP'T, *supra* note 28, at 5.

46. *Id.*

47. *Id.*

special needs children are full members of general education classrooms where they are subjected to the same high expectations and challenging curricula as are regular education students.⁴⁸

The team teaching approach at the Children's School enables each teaching partner to benefit from the other's distinctive knowledge and training. One teacher remarked that being a "general ed" teacher was an advantage since, in order to modify the curriculum, one must know the curriculum. At the same time, this teacher lacked any special education training beyond one introductory course at college. Thus, the principal offered her professional development, sending her to learn from teachers in exemplary schools for autistic children. The advantages of special education training are equally evident for the borderline general education students—those children who score in the bottom quartile or routinely disrupt their classes. Most general educators have not been given much professional training in how to individualize or adapt content or instruction. As result, these teachers continue to teach to the middle—to the average student of average ability. Adaptations and behavioral modification techniques are second-nature to seasoned special educators. Such techniques are welcomed as strategies that benefit the entire class. Examples abound of how special education techniques benefit an entire class, like the struggling third grader who loved baseball and blossomed after his teachers modified the curriculum to teach everything through baseball.

In an era of increased accountability standards and increased pressure to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, tensions have understandably surfaced. The segregation of special education students in self-contained classrooms has produced pitifully poor academic outcomes.⁴⁹ Special education advocates want to include students with disabilities in the school's standards-based curriculum and the larger school reform agenda. But they also wish to maintain the integrity of special education expertise, resources, and distinct programs. Many special educators fear that inclusion will mean the placement of disabled stu-

48. HEATHER SCHWEIDER, N. CENT. EDUC. LAB., EVALUATION OF THE NEW YORK CITY EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE: ISSUE PAPER ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE ECI 2 (1997).

49. *See* 20 U.S.C.A. § 1409(c) (West 2000) (noting that "[o]ver 20 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by . . . providing appropriate special education and related services and aids and supports in the regular classroom to such children").

dents in regular classrooms without any needed curricular and instructional modifications—either because the class is too large for personalized attention or because the regular education teacher lacks needed expertise and is not receiving enough consultative support. In short, they fear a return to classroom life before federal law guaranteed an appropriate public education for students with disabilities. The inclusion approach of The Children's School appears to have bridged these tensions.

The staff at The Children's School feel that inclusion works because of the overall school culture of sharing and openness. Creating this deep level of collaboration means more than co-planning or occasional chats about students. It starts from a shared purpose, continues with on-going assessment of student progress, and is made possible by robust professional development.

C. Professional Development and a Coherent Curriculum

Research on effective school improvement has demonstrated the importance of maintaining a professional community of teachers in the school. This sort of community is characterized by teachers who share the explicit belief that all students can learn. This is a trait not of any single teacher but of the entire school. It is neither necessary nor realistic for every teacher to assist every student. Still, the school as a whole should be able to accommodate all learners. Without such collective purpose and capacity, schools separate or remove students or otherwise abdicate responsibility for struggling or failing students. State and district content standards have set common content goals for students, but achievement can only come from educators taking collective responsibility for ensuring that students meet these goals.

At the Children's School, teachers engage in ongoing professional development. A staff developer from The Writers' Workshop at Teachers College visits weekly, and three teachers are now part of the workshop's "think tank." Experts from other disciplines and institutions also regularly work with teachers, and teachers attend a number of outside conferences. Unlike many other schools and districts, the majority of the professional development takes place in-house on a daily basis.

In addition to meetings among teachers at the same grade level, teachers meet across grades to fine tune the curriculum from one grade to the next. Teachers ask questions like, What am I teaching in first grade that will promote success in second grade? What am I not teaching in second grade that the children will need to know

when they enter third? Such meetings occur throughout the year. Specific transition planning occurs each June, when teachers meet with the teachers of contiguous grades to discuss each student's strengths and challenges. The same textbook series and literacy approach are used throughout the school, which enables teachers to talk consistently about curriculum and instructional strategies.

The level and quality of professional development bolster the team teaching model, and the teams generate the kind of openness conducive to improved practice. All of this flourishes under the leadership of the school's principal.

D. Leadership

Just beyond the school's entrance, on the door to Lorraine Boyhan's office, a poster with large hand lettering reads as follows:

We love you more
Than a cat loves to scratch
Or cheetahs love to run,
Or chick eggs love to hatch
We love you more
Than kids love to play.
And we love you more
And more each day!
Happy Valentine's Day, Mrs. Boyhan!
2001

Any visitor can immediately see that Lorraine Boyhan is loved and respected by students and teachers alike. Teachers see her as an invaluable resource, feeling free to admit when they don't have the answers themselves. One bright-eyed young teacher gave a low-key but telling example—the ubiquitous bulletin board review. Lorraine does not come in and demand that a teacher “take down that bulletin board,” or “put up more student work.” Instead, she guides the conversation with a yearned-for compliment and a comment such as “Wow, do you think maybe this arrangement could benefit from . . .,” or “Tell me what you intended in that particular corner . . .” Her tone is kind and collaborative; the remarks specific and instructional. The result, as teacher after teacher has repeated, is a school-wide enthusiasm among the faculty for teaching, learning, and continually improving.

Lorraine typically joins her teachers during their Thursday morning professional development sessions. During these sessions, the teachers schedule thematic study, discuss student work, and

brainstorm about how to handle particular children.⁵⁰ Lorraine considers herself a continual student. Professional publications and manuals overflow from the baskets on her office shelves and floor. They are not there for show, either; her talk is peppered with specific references to curriculum, experts, and strategies.

The school system has recognized how important it is to adequately prepare principals as school leaders and has established a "Distinguished Faculty" program to enable new principals to learn from successful school leaders. Lorraine was chosen as one of the "Distinguished Faculty" and mentors twelve principals who lead other schools in the city. The program is a good beginning, but does not provide enough interaction to enable those principals to replicate The Children's School in a meaningful way. Lorraine meets with the principals monthly, but seldom gets the opportunity to engage in deep conversations about teaching, learning, professional development, or student assessment. Instead, the principals spend time on the nuts and bolts of school operations. They are interested in The Children's School's approach to team teaching and inclusion, but they tend to know little about special education beyond the basic legal requirements. Because of the limited time the program provides, the principals want crisp answers, but Lorraine believes that the best professional development is about asking thoughtful questions and having active discussions about possible solutions.

There is a large body of literature and research about what makes for a great principal.⁵¹ National and state standards have been promulgated that describe what a school leader should know and be able to do.⁵² The issue for the system is not merely ensuring that all principals have a body of essential skills (i.e., how to motivate others, manage tasks, communicate ideas, create a vision); rather, the issue is creating ongoing opportunities to see how those skills play out in the messy, day-to-day life of a school, and to en-

50. By doing so she gives meaning to the research that states that the most effective principals are those who are most actively involved with their teachers around the subject of teaching and learning. See, e.g., Larry Lashway, JoAnn Mazzarella & Thomas Grundy, *Portrait of a Leader*, in *SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: HANDBOOK FOR EXCELLENCE* (Stuart C. Smith & Philip K. Piele eds., 3d ed. 1997).

51. See generally ANN W. HART & PAUL V. BREDESON, *THE PRINCIPALSHIP: A THEORY OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND PRACTICE* (1996); DANIEL U. LEVINE AND LAWRENCE W. LEZOTTE, *UNUSUALLY EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS: A REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH AND PRACTICE* (1996); Michael Fullan, *Leadership for the 21st Century: Breaking the Bonds of Dependency*, 55 *EDUC. LEADERSHIP* 6, 6-10 (1998).

52. See STATE EDUC. ASSESSMENT CTR., *supra* note 15.

gage in conversations with peers and great principals about those daily interactions and decisions. Ideally, new and struggling principals would have the opportunity to observe Lorraine (or principals of her caliber) over time in many school contexts. Practical issues, however, stand in the way. These issues include time (how often to allow a principal to leave her school to shadow a mentor), money (the expense of providing a half-year or year-long placement for principals in schools with exemplary leaders) and scale (finding enough exemplary principals with whom to interact and mentor given the critical shortage of principals throughout the country and especially in large urban areas), all of which frustrate the opportunity of principals to observe Lorraine in action in multiple contexts over time. New technologies, such as those developed by Teachscape, that combine quality video, multi-media supporting materials and opportunities for online conversation over the Internet, provide a possible solution for doing so and should be explored. A number of national organizations and universities are in fact considering such a solution.

III. THE BOTTOM LINE: STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Ensuring that every student meets high standards is central to the issue of systemic reform. The issue has particular meaning for students with disabilities. In a 1996 survey conducted by Chief State School Officers, 73% of the responding states indicated that their standards would apply to special education students. Nearly half of those responding, however, permit exceptions to the applicability of all standards for students with "mild disabilities," and even more allow exceptions for students with "severe disabilities."⁵³ With 12% of the country's student population in special education, the extent of these exceptions is critical to the meaning of "systemic" in systemic reform. But without adequately trained teachers who know the content required by state standards and who possess strategies for adapting that content to specific disabilities, the likelihood of disabled students meeting the same standards sharply decreases. Nationally, only about one-half of states responding to the 1996 survey required regular education teachers to take even one course in teaching students with disabilities as part of the state certification requirement.⁵⁴

53. McLAUGHLIN, *supra* note 8, at 9.

54. *Id.*

The Children's School's model of small classes, team teaching, professional development, and superior leadership result in impressive student achievement, which is reported separately for the children labeled as special education students and those in general education. On the state tests for the fourth grade, scoring is done in four levels: Level 1 (indicating minimal achievement of the standards), Level 2 (partial achievement of the standards), Level 3 (meeting all standards) and Level 4 (superior performance). Recent test results for the Children's School were as follows:

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS⁵⁵

	Levels 2, 3, 4	Levels 3, 4
General ed 2000	Children's School: 90.1% District 15: 83.2% Citywide: 82.1%	Children's School: 78.2% District 15: 43.2% Citywide: 42.9%
General ed 1999	Children's School: 88.3% District 15: 81% Citywide: 79.9%	Children's School: 64.9% District 15: 38.9% Citywide: 33.73%
Special ed 2000	Children's School: 58% District 75: 27.1%	Children's School: 13.6% District 75: 4.4%
Special ed 1999	Children's School: 56.5% District 75: 23.6%	Children's School: 19.6% District 75: 3.9%

MATHEMATICS⁵⁶

	Levels 2, 3 & 4	Levels 3 & 4
General ed 2000	Children's School: 97.5% District 15: 73.7% Citywide: 82.8%	Children's School: 73.8% District 15: 38.3% Citywide: 47.5%
General ed 1999	Children's School: 86.8% District 15: 71.6% Citywide: 81.8%	Children's School: 64.5% District 15: 38.5% Citywide: 51.1%
Special ed 2000	Children's School: 46.8% District 75: 15.8%	Children's School: 16.9% District 75: 2.9%
Special ed 1999	Children's School: 52.3% District 75: 17.3%	Children's School: 21.5% District 75: 4.3%

55. N.Y. CITY BD. OF EDUC., EXEMPLARY PRACTICE SCHOOL PROFILE, EXEMPLARY EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN NEW YORK CITY 4 (2001), <http://www.nycenet.edu/daa/ScaleScores/index.html>. The populations represented in the Citywide and District figures may not be exactly comparable to those of The Children's School because of the variability in testing and reporting of children in special education who are not in District 75.

56. *Id.*

The results for the special education children at The Children's School are noteworthy because of their implications for long-term outcomes. Failure in the early grades is the best predictor of whether a student will drop out of school before graduation. The following table displays Class of 2000 Longitudinal Data prepared by the New York City Board of Education.⁵⁷

	General Education	Self Contained Class	District 75
Percent Dropping Out (% of Total Exiting)	19.3 (27.89%)	27.9 (79.04%)	17.5 (91.15%)
Percent Graduating (% of Total Exiting)	49.9 (72.11)	7.4 (20.96%)	1.7 (8.85%)

Although none of the figures is heartening, outcomes for special education students are also worse than for special education students in New York State or the country.⁵⁸

National studies have brought attention to the fact that educational outcomes for special education students are poor. For example, the National Longitudinal Transition Study examined the relationship between specific student and educational program variables and outcomes. More than 90% of the students with disabilities in the study attended regular secondary schools and, of these, most spent the majority of their time in regular education classroom settings. Nevertheless, the majority of these students had "markedly poor school performance" and experienced higher drop-out rates than the general population.⁵⁹

The issue of inclusion for many special education students is "less inclusion as a physical place than inclusion in the curriculum."⁶⁰ That is, students need support to enable them to access and master an increasingly challenging curriculum. Research is mixed with respect to the impact of inclusion on student outcomes, and a review of what makes The Children's School successful indicates why. Consistent findings about inclusion point out the need for structural and organizational changes in schools to promote more collaboration between general and special education. Those

57. LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENV'T COALITION, *supra* note 40, at 5-6.

58. U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC., *supra* note 19, at 221-22 app. A. The United States Department of Education counts as drop-outs students who exit as a result of receiving a GED diploma. New York City figures list the drop-out rate as two percentage points less. LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENV'T COALITION, *supra* note 40, at 6.

59. SRI INTERNATIONAL, THE NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL TRANSITION STUDY: A SUMMARY OF FINDINGS 6-7 (1993), <http://www.sri.com>.

60. McLAUGHLIN, *supra* note 8, at 20.

findings would logically extend to all children, or at least the children in regular education who are consistently at risk of failing to meet standards. The kind of purposeful collaboration that consistently occurs at The Children's School is anything but accidental. The size of the school makes knowing adults and children far easier. The school's leader helps to create a shared vision and purpose and a communal will to achieve goals for children. The school day, week, and year are structured with professional collaboration as a necessity. Most school districts require a few school days of professional development, typically while school is closed for students, despite consistent research that demonstrates the effectiveness of ongoing teacher study and reflection. At the Children's School, all components work together to produce educational success for all students, including those in special education.

IV. SPREADING SUCCESS

As part of the Early Childhood Initiative, New Visions for Public Schools, a non-profit organization that works to improve the city's public schools, established and supported the inclusionary team teaching initiative in four schools, including The Children's School. New Visions then sought out the Professional Development Lab and asked it to set up a site in The Children's School and P.S. 321. P.S. 321 is another school in District 15 that was part of the Initiative, but unlike The Children's School, had both regular classrooms and inclusionary team teaching ones. In these two schools, where the inclusion model had been best implemented, the Professional Development Lab ("PDL") established schedules and routines where teachers from other schools could come, learn, and go back to their own schools to establish similar classrooms.⁶¹ As far as it has been able to operate, it has been enormously successful.

The evaluation of the Early Childhood Initiative had warned of issues relating to replication. The team teaching approach required major adjustments from the placements of most classroom educators. Teachers are, by and large, used to being the primary managers within their own classrooms. "Having to coordinate decisions

61. The Professional Development Lab is a project that started with the support of J.P. Morgan and is now part of New York University's School of Education. The Professional Development Lab selects exemplary classrooms in particular subjects, grades, or approaches and places teachers from other schools in these classrooms in cycles that enable them to watch and model the instructional practice. Alison Gendar, *Teacher's Lab a Peek Experience: They See How Peers Do the Job*, DAILY NEWS, May 11, 1999, at 2.

and upon occasion defer to someone else's opinion was uncomfortable at times and difficult to get used to."⁶² According to the evaluation, some of the inclusion general education teachers admitted to being "uncomfortable with and even frightened a bit [by taking] on the responsibility of teaching children with disabilities, particularly children with serious disabilities."⁶³ Some special education teachers spoke of being nervous about whole group instruction and mastering the teaching of the academic curriculum.⁶⁴ Recent interviews with teachers at the school showed that this discomfort did not last. As pointed out, teachers now comfortably acknowledge their own expertise, the different expertise of their team teaching "partner," and the synergy between the two. Nevertheless, the differences between the "norm" and inclusionary team teaching are significant.

Those differences, while stark, did not prove to be a stumbling block for the teachers that went through the PDL experience. One of the host (or mentor) teachers described the experience as one of contrast—between the culture of The Children's School and the cultures of the visiting schools and the attitude toward teaching and professional growth for teachers in one place versus the other. The isolation and exhaustion of teachers in many of the other schools felt foreign. She wanted to begin by getting teachers to examine their pedagogy and acknowledge the need for some change, but instead focused on setting the stage for change to occur, on helping the teachers "to open up to others," "to allow some self-critique" and "to try something new." Such acclimation was necessary even for those teachers who had applied to go through the PDL experience in order to try team teaching in an inclusionary class setting.

Teachers from visiting schools adjusted and the PDL was hugely popular. One teacher told her mentor that it was the best thing she ever did, "It got me to step outside myself."⁶⁵

Principals began calling the PDL and saying they wanted to get involved. The superintendent convened a meeting of eleven principals in the district and had the principals of the three original sites describe inclusion and the impact it has had on their schools. All

62. JOANNE FARLEY & MERRILL CHANDLER, N. CENT. REG'L EDUC. LAB., MAJOR THEMES EMERGING FROM EVALUATION OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE: YEAR III REPORT 11 (1997).

63. *Id.*

64. *Id.*

65. Interview with Leah Vasquez (August 2, 2001).

principals wanted to have teachers participate in the PDL and inclusionary team teaching classrooms spread to eleven schools in District 15.

On a recent site visit to one of these schools, the director of the PDL spoke with one of the inclusion teachers who had gone through a cycle and been part of the replication process. The teacher admitted that when first asked, she did not want to go but acquiesced at her principal's urging. But she immediately added that within two weeks she learned more about teaching than during all her courses in college. Team teaching—that “other set of eyes”—gave her a totally different way of looking at her students and practice. Moreover, the continuous interchange between general education and special education exponentially expanded her repertoire of teaching strategies.

The PDL has not moved this approach beyond Community District 15 where it began. It is likely that many of the superintendents in other districts do not know that a PDL exists for this kind of teaching and inclusion. Sporadic inquiries to teachers and principals by this author indicate that, while *The Children's School* is rightfully touted as exemplary by the school system and visited regularly, many educators in the city's classrooms do not know it exists. The PDL cycles lasted two weeks on site with follow-up after the teachers returned to their classrooms. With the exception of those who rotated through the PDL, those who visit do not spend nearly the time needed to understand the details enough for replication.

Inclusion can and does work without team teaching or with different models of team teaching, even within some of the schools that have adopted the *Children's School* model. Unfortunately, no study could be found that compared the models of inclusion against educational outcomes.

When district and central leadership are queried about why more is not done to replicate *The Children's School*, the first answer is expense. When the Early Childhood Initiative began, economies and savings were thought to exist in lowered evaluation costs, reduced need for therapies, and fewer numbers of children held back. Without some research to learn whether this occurred and to compare the cost and academic outcomes of *The Children's School* with others, the expense of the school should not be the impenetrable barrier it appears to be. It may be that economies could be found, if more than one school and some classes in a few others adopted the model.

Others have suggested that expense be measured only against success, not failure, and the City and the State have been willing in recent years to spend significant sums to improve the worst performing schools. Disabled students deserve no less. Studies of this kind are needed both for New York City and the country as a whole.

CONCLUSION

So much about The Children's School—its population, classroom structure, teaching model, and governance—is different than the typical way of doing business for schools in New York City and other places. But these characteristics are precisely what makes it successful. Taken together, they result in an enviable success that has spanned a decade. Yet the lack of other New York City schools like The Children's School is not accidental.

When the school first began, state law waivers were necessary to even institute the instructional model. That is no longer true. Yet even after a decade of success, Principal Boyhan feels that the school is fragile and that its continued existence is not ensured precisely because it differs from other schools in the school system. The differences should be cause for reflection and study, not concern.

If the pressure to increase achievement continues, as appears to be the case, and if that pressure is applied on behalf of all children, including ones with disabilities, as it surely must, then The Children's School, and others that show similar success, need to be nurtured, studied, and made available as models. School, district, and state leaders should create opportunities and incentives for such study and ultimately, for replication.

The themes of accountability, inclusion, collaborative teaching, quality professional development and exemplary leadership overlap with those of high standards, equity, and the whole of school reform. Classrooms and schools like The Children's School that successfully include students with disabilities are designed to welcome diversity and to address the individual needs of all students, whether they have disabilities or not.