

Foreword

A Word to Those Who Did Not Graduate, Class of 2010

As the days grow longer, as tree buds burst into bloom, and as swimming pools hear their first splashes, high schools gear up to hold splendid graduation ceremonies. Valedictorians draft their speeches, orchestras practice stanzas from Pomp and Circumstance, fancy programs are printed, and lavish decorations are pulled out. It's an important occasion. The final send-off of students schools cared for during their precious late teen years.

But so many of our young people won't have the chance to cross that stage. For them, there won't be invitations, parties or graduation gifts. They won't be throwing their caps in the air. They will never hear *te aventaste, mi'jo*.

They will not hear a commencement speech that celebrates their accomplishments and points them to their exciting future. For them, graduation day will be just another day.

So as we commit to changing education for all students and for our children's children, I would like to offer a few final thoughts, some words of commencement, to them.

To those who did not graduate, Class of 2010:

It is usual in a commencement address to congratulate you on your graduation, but I cannot do that. I can only say that I am sorry.

I want to speak volumes of your accomplishments, but I feel as if I hardly know you. I saw you falling, but somehow didn't catch you.

I want to talk about work with you, what interests you, what speaks to you. I want to listen to your dreams with you. But I know some doors will not be open.

Many will tell you that you have failed and weren't persistent enough. Only you know whether or not that is true.

What I know is that we are all held up by many people.

At our best we are like birds flying in a formation. You may have heard about how geese migrate in a "V" pattern. Birds use that formation because it conserves energy. Each one flies slightly above the bird in front of him,

cutting into the wind and making it easier for those who follow. And flying in formation makes it easy to keep track of every bird in the group.

But there is something that you may not know about geese. When one bird weakens, is wounded and falls from the formation, two others will follow and tend to him, bringing him back to the group.

When you started slipping, the school might have followed you. Teachers or counselors might have reached out to you. If they had, you would have known, without doubt, that they valued you, that they were not going to leave you behind.

If you had slipped from the school, your parents or friends, might have reached for you. They would have held you up and mended your wings. They would have flown beside you.

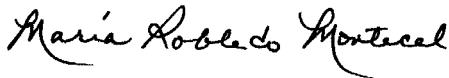
If you felt yourself drop and start to free fall, you would have remembered that there was someone to hang on to. You would have reached out to get the support you needed from family, friends or faculty. You would find help and take the risk to accept it. You also might have reached back to help others from falling out of formation.

For you to have left school, all of this failed.

As a scientist, Albert Einstein, helped us see the universe and ourselves in completely new ways.

He once said: "The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing."

We all will miss your graduation. That unique stride, all yours, crossing the stage. But today we commit never again to look away, never again to look on and do nothing. Today and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow and for the long haul, we promise to transform our caring and our willingness to serve into action.



María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.



Christie L. Goodman, APR

The Framework



Prologue

Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

*We are people of faith, I tell you,
But no religious sect predominates:
We share, beyond being primates,
Stubborn belief in children's value.*

*When teachers think the worst of kids,
Method's checked by point of view.
It's ancient bias, nothing new --
Yet children's learning hits the skids:*

*When we expect them geniuses to be
Expression, tone and looks do beam:
A teacher's glance emits a gleam,
As student's thoughts and words float free.*

*None is expendable, we vouch this true.
We advocate for all, not a select few.*



Holding On to the Goal of Quality Education for Every Child

by María “Cuca” Robledo Montecel, Ph.D.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arnie Duncan calls education “the civil rights issue of our generation” and notes that “if we are to emerge from this global recession and ensure the future prosperity of our nation, every school must provide every child with a quality education that offers the path out of poverty and toward equal opportunity” (July 2, 2009).

We have a choice. Equal educational opportunity can remain a well-intended but unfulfilled promise or move to becoming the engine of shared prosperity for generations of Americans. Much depends on the clarity and the urgency with which we approach the challenge.

If the past decade is prologue to the next, it is difficult to know if we will have both the clarity and urgency that is needed to do the hard work of sustainable change. On the one hand, the last decade has seen a shift toward an expectation that schools “bring all students to high standards of academic proficiency” (Mosher & Smith, 2009). Also, more Americans now believe that education beyond high school is a necessity, with a large shift toward that belief occurring since the year 2000 (Lumina, 2009).

On the other hand, there is much evidence that the last decade has seen a widening of the economic and education gaps and that the “pressure for reform has increased but is not yet the reality” (Fullan, 2007).

Today and over the next several years, the grip of the economic crisis and the din of competing priorities may put education in a holding pattern that is interrupted only to wish for a return to the good ole days, that in reality weren’t so good for much of the population; to bemoan the next school, district, state or national report card; or to pine for the next magic silver bullet.

Thankfully, there is another option. We can pursue shared prosperity by keeping our eyes on the goal of quality education for *every* child in *every* school, understanding that education matters, community voices matter in education and much is known about what to do.

Education Matters to Shared Prosperity

Robust research evidence indicates that the quality of education affects economic opportunity for individuals and outcomes for society across generations. Data from the Economic Mobility Project (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2009) underscore the connection between education and economic opportunity and the key role that educational opportunity plays in getting a fair chance at the American Dream.

There is also strong evidence that education matters to individuals and to society in other critical areas, including health, longevity and the vitality of civic life. *Goals for the Common Good: Exploring the Impact of Education* identifies critical areas linked to educational attainment, synthesizes research findings, and provides links to an online Common Good Forecaster (American Human Development Project, 2009).

However, disparities and gaps in educational opportunity and outcomes continue to divide Americans based on class and color. The average low-income high school senior has the same reading level as the average middle-class eighth grader, and the percentage of high-poverty schools that are high-performing is 1.1 percent compared to 24.2 percent of low-poverty schools that are high-performing (Kahlenberg, 2008). If you are Black or Latino, you are more likely to attend a high-poverty, segregated, under-funded school that is unable to graduate students and is unable to prepare students for college or today's competitive job market (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009; Alliance for Excellent Education and the College Board, 2009).

We can pursue shared prosperity by keeping our eyes on the goal of quality education for *every* child in *every* school, understanding that education matters, community voices matter in education and much is known about what to do.

Community Voices Matter in Education

Education matters to the individual and to society. But the quality of education provided in a *local school system* affects the *local community* in important ways. To examine the impact of educational quality on the local community, RAND researchers focused on a substantial body of literature and found strong evidence of: (1) effects on housing values in the school attendance area with an increase of 1 percent in reading or math scores associated with a 0.5 percent to 1 percent increase in property values; (2) effects on crime rates with a one-year higher educational level in a community associated with a 13 percent to 27 percent lower incidence of murders, assaults, car thefts and arson; and (3) effects on tax revenues with increased earnings and sales, and higher property tax revenues from residences and businesses. There also was evidence that educational quality in the community is associated with greater civic participation in that community, including more voter participation, more tolerance and acceptance of free speech, more involvement in community arts and culture, and higher newspaper readership. (Carroll & Scherer, 2008)

Maintaining urgency and clarity in sustainable education reform depends in large measure on community will and informed engagement at the local

community level. Schools, after all, belong to the community, and change is too important to be left to schools alone. Community engagement that is based on active participation by both the school and the community produces results for students (Petrovich, 2008; Mediratta, et al., 2008; Levin, 2008). IDRA work in building and informing school-community teams demonstrates success in these partnerships and coalitions (Rodríguez & Scott, 2007; Montemayor, 2008; IDRA, 2008).

The Harlem Children's Zone has established a cluster of community programs to serve neighborhood families and their children from birth to college graduation (Shulman, 2009). This "unique, holistic approach to rebuilding a community" is generating dramatically improved student achievement and parent engagement as well as positive financial impact to the neighborhood (HCZ web site).

Community buy-in and oversight stemming from shared understandings and data about the why, the how and the results of school change is a critical but largely untapped change strategy in school reform efforts. For example, community teams can use data about their local dropout and graduation rates, disaggregated by subgroups, and data on the related school factors of parent involvement, student engagement, curriculum access and teaching quality in order to develop comprehensive plans of action to graduate all students (Robledo Montecel, 2007).

Much Is Known About What to Do

There is a growing sense around the country that real, long-lasting change is urgent, indispensable and possible. The U.S. Department of Education is working with others to frame and fund an agenda that includes setting benchmarked standards, developing data systems to track growth and tailor instruction, boosting the quality of teachers and principals, and turning around the lowest-performing schools. Forty-six states have signed on to create benchmarked K-12 standards that prepare students for the 21st Century global knowledge-based economy.

Foundations also are focusing their strategies and leveraging their investments in education reform by setting goals and funding the detailed work that will achieve those goals. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation will invest \$500 million over the next five years in learning how to improve and measure teacher quality. The Lumina Foundation is focused on assuring that, by 2025, the proportion of Americans with higher education credentials increases to 60 percent from the current 39 percent.

Unprecedented successes in unexpected places are defying the perception that achievement gaps are inevitable (Chenoweth, 2007). For example, IDRA led a group of middle school teachers, a principal, counselor and social worker to create a small professional learning community, in conjunction with IDRA's Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, focused on the academic success of students who were considered at risk of dropping out of school. Both teaching quality and student engagement improved, transforming student results (Montemayor & Cortez, 2007).

High-poverty urban schools are improving demonstrably by using additional monies coming to them by court order to good effect. In New Jersey, poor schools that received an infusion of funds as a result of the *Abbott vs. Burke* case are demonstrating improved student achievement (Anrig, 2009). In Texas, student achievement on national tests improved in 2008 due in part to a decade of improved and equitable funding that had been provided to Texas schools (Cortez, 2009).

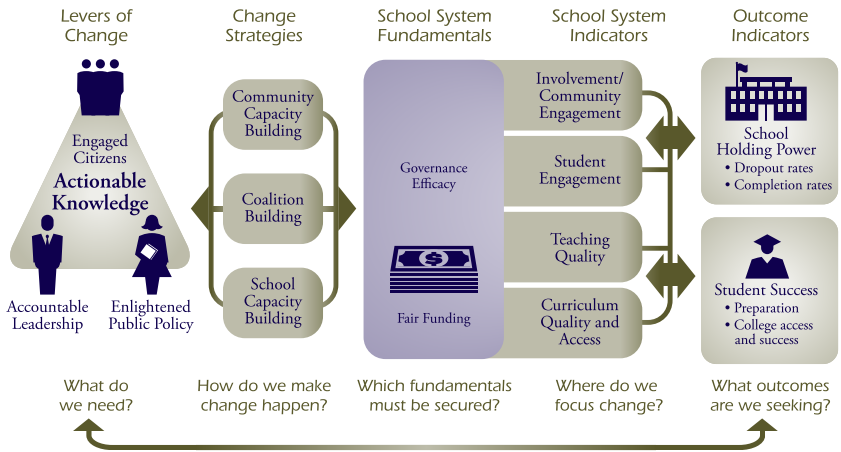
For the last four years, IDRA has utilized the Quality Schools Action Framework (Robledo Montecel, 2005) as a frame for our work in education reform (see graphic on next page). The Quality Schools Action Framework brings together what we know about educational change efforts. The framework:

1. is empirical, experiential and practical.
2. is results oriented and tracks expected outcomes both on (a) *student* metrics of success at many levels including college, and (b) *school* metrics of success focused on the school's ability to keep students in school and learning through to graduation.
3. focuses attention and action, singularly and in tandem, on the four system indicators that are key to success: parent and community engagement, student engagement, teaching quality, and curriculum quality and access.
4. points to governance efficacy and fair funding as crucial fundamentals that interact with indicators and outcomes.
5. highlights change strategies that build individual and collective capacity within and across school and community.
6. couples capacity-building with active coalitions that have an urgent agenda to produce results for students.
7. positions knowledge-building and utilization as a core feature of accountable leadership, enlightened policy and engaged citizens.
8. uses knowledge, information, evidence and outcome data not only as "rear mirror" assessments but also as integral to informing present and future strategy.

A number of our partner schools and coalition organizations have used the framework and the companion online portal to assess baselines, plan and implement strategies, and monitor progress in educating all students to high quality (Posner, 2009; Posner & Bojorquez, 2008).

Our experience with the framework so far is that it is a useful tool in many ways: to conceive, design and manage change at the school or district level; to encourage thoughtful and coherent selection of best practices that are grounded in the reality of the schools and their communities; to focus on particular strategies and/or instructional approaches (e.g., bilingual

Quality Schools Action Framework™



education) without losing track of the contexts that matter (e.g., teaching quality, school/district leadership, funding); to inform evidence-based community collaboration and oversight in productive ways; and to inform meaningful comparisons across campuses and districts.

As a “change model,” the Quality Schools Action Framework also may prove useful in making the link between benchmarked standards and sustainable school reform that ties desired outcomes to indicators of quality at the local level.

Lisbeth Schorr (2009) has eloquently stated that the “search for silver bullets is giving way to an understanding that, to make inroads on big social problems, reformers must mobilize multiple, interacting strategies that take account not only individual needs but also the power of context.” It is at the local level, with schools and communities working together, that the power of context can be a source of genuine and long-lasting change that benefits every student in every school with a quality education.

Resources

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