

# The Center for Cities & Schools: Connecting Research and Policy Agendas

Deborah L. McKoy and Jeffrey M. Vincent

## Abstract

This article discusses an emerging policy and research agenda; systematically linking quality schools with quality cities. There is an historic disconnect between cities and public education. To dismantle this disconnect, the Center for Cities & Schools was established in 2004, by the Institute of Urban and Regional Development (IURD) at the University of California, Berkeley. The Center holds that high-quality education is a critical component of broader city and metropolitan policy-making and that invigorating public education and revitalizing neighborhoods are goals that can, and should, be accomplished in tandem. To contextualize the issues and the role of the Center, this paper provides a transcript and discussion of the two keynote addresses at the Center's fall 2004 symposium, which featured Bruce Katz, a Vice President at the Brookings Institution and founding Director of the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, and Dr. Arlene Ackerman, Superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District.

## Cities and Schools: A Disconnect

Over the last decade, researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and families have all recognized that there is a massive public school crisis in the United States, especially in the performance of low-income and minority students. There is widespread belief that the American public educational system is failing to meet the needs of all students, especially in urban centers. Facing the poor quality of schools, middle class families quite often choose to live in the suburbs so that they can send their children to public schools or remain in the city and opt for private or alternative schools. In short, as families with resources flee central cities and older suburbs by "voting with their feet," they leave urban schools with few resources, material or intellectual, to serve communities of increasing levels of concentrated poverty. These demographic

shifts across the nation are creating a deep division in student populations, causing unprecedented racial and economic segregation in our public schools (Orfield and Lee 2005). Cities are especially impacted by these trends. Perceptions of low quality schools quite often lead the list of concerns about urban life and fundamentally work against the community and economic development goals of cities. As families have migrated to the suburbs, the perception of school quality has emerged as a highly significant and overlooked aspect of central city flight.

The following paper discusses an emerging policy and research agenda; systematically linking quality schools with quality cities. There is an historic disconnect between cities and public education. This disconnect is prevalent in research, policy, and practice as if the goals of the two sectors were unrelated, when in fact they are intricately intertwined. To dismantle this disconnect, the Center for Cities & Schools was established in 2004, by the Institute of Urban and Regional Development (IURD) at the University of California, Berkeley. Derived from five years of work connecting education and urban revitalization in the San Francisco Bay Area and around the nation, the Center holds that high-quality education is a critical component of broader city and metropolitan policy-making and that invigorating public education and revitalizing neighborhoods are goals that can, and should, be accomplished in tandem. This paper describes the scope of the Center's work and its research and policy mandate.

To contextualize the issues and the role of the Center, this paper provides a transcript and discussion of the two keynote addresses at the Center's fall 2004 symposium. The bi-annual symposium series brings together speakers and participants that reflect the cities and schools disconnect. The Center's opening symposium featuring two speakers in this vein: Bruce Katz, a renowned urban scholar and policymaker; and Dr. Arlene Ackerman, a high profile superintendent of a large urban public school district.

## **The Center for Cities & Schools**

The Center for Cities & Schools is housed in IURD and affiliated with the Graduate School of Education (GSE) and the Department of City and Regional Planning (DCRP). The Center conducts research on the cities and schools disconnect, brings actors together in these disparate fields, and provides an interdisciplinary setting in which learning and training can occur across disciplinary boundaries. The work of the Center is central to California and the nation in providing equitable, high-quality public schools and urban environments that are attractive

to a wide range of residents. Evidence shows that the urban context and built environment have important and under-acknowledged impacts on schools and that school quality, in turn, impacts the local economy (e.g., Baum 2004; Weiss 2004).

These consequences include:

1. Isolation of schools from civic institutions and thus loss and/or duplication of resources;
2. School “depopulation” or “population imbalances” and re-segregation caused by housing policy and residential market trends;
3. Lack of awareness and understanding of community-based context in which the schools exist; and
4. A tax base (in the form of businesses and middle class families) that tends to flee cities in search of good schools.

Issues at the intersection of public education and city planning are increasingly prominent at national and local discussions among education administrators, municipal leaders, urban policy makers, school advocates, and a wide range of community organizations. However, practical answers to these questions are complicated by existing institutional structures that are ill-equipped to foster cross-disciplinary action; one consequence of this structural deficit is a lack of empirical evidence to address these vexing issues and serve as the basis for urban policy. In short, there is little in the way of theoretical frameworks to guide urban planners and public educators in their research, policy-making, or work together.

The Center for Cities & Schools is committed to bridging the fields of education and urban policy to create equitable, diverse, and livable cities and schools. Through education, direct service, and research, the Center aims to make visible the connections between cities and schools and to foster a collaborative environment linking the university, public schools, local governments, community leaders, and neighborhood residents toward achieving goals that embrace public policy, urban planning, and educational practice. The Center works to dismantle institutional barriers that prevent stakeholders in different arenas from combining their energies into efforts that serve all, while serving each. In line with the academic mandate of the University of California, Berkeley, the Center is committed to reframing the relationships between cities and schools, establishing new theoretical foundations for these issues, and conducting empirical research both to understand the disconnect and to recommend how to dismantle it.

The next section of this paper presents information from the Center for Cities & Schools symposium held September 22, 2004. The featured speakers were Bruce Katz, a Vice President at the Brookings Institution and founding Director of the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program in Washington, DC, and Dr. Arlene Ackerman, Superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School System. The transcript of each talk and a summary of the audience discussion serves as both evidence for, and a backdrop against which to concretely situate and discuss, the Center's work in this emerging research area.

## **The Center for Cities & Schools Fall 2004 Symposium: Researchers and Practitioners in Conversation**

Participants in the symposium were brought together to address two broad questions. First, *what is the role of schools in making cities more livable and competitive?* Second, *what is the role of cities in improving school quality?* The two keynote speakers, one an urban policy-maker and the other a public school superintendent, represent the two sectors and that need work together more closely on these questions and thus offer complementary perspectives: urban policy-makers; and public school superintendents.

As Director of the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, Bruce Katz seeks to redefine the challenges facing cities and metropolitan areas by publishing cutting edge research on major demographic, market, development, and governance issues. Mr. Katz regularly advises national, state, regional, and municipal leaders on policy reforms that advance the competitiveness of metropolitan areas. Katz particularly focuses on reforms that promote the revitalization of central cities and older suburbs and enhance the ability of these places to attract, retain, and grow the middle class. Prior to joining Brookings, Mr. Katz served as Chief of Staff to Henry G. Cisneros, former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and served as the staff director of the Senate Subcommittee on Housing and Urban Affairs. Katz's talk focuses on how and why urban and metropolitan communities must recognize the vital role public education plays in creating vibrant, healthy and economically diverse neighborhoods.

Dr. Arlene Ackerman is the Superintendent of the San Francisco Unified School District. Having served in public education for 32 years, Dr. Ackerman has been: a classroom teacher at both the elementary and

middle school levels; a middle school principal; Director of the Upward Bound Program for first generation college-bound students; Director of the Basic Skills Academy for at-risk high school youth; Assistant Superintendent of Special Services; Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Academic Achievement; and Deputy Superintendent/Chief Academic Officer. Before coming to San Francisco, she served as Superintendent of the Washington, DC Public School system. Superintendent Ackerman's talk describes how the City of San Francisco supports District efforts to improve academic achievement for all students as well as comments on Katz's talk in relation to San Francisco.

## **Bruce Katz, Brookings Institution<sup>1</sup>**

It is a pleasure to be here at Berkeley and to help launch the new Center for Cities & Schools. We desperately need to bridge the divide between schools and cities and the task is great. Just to illustrate, I was in Seattle yesterday at a conference for mayors, other elected leaders, nonprofits, and the private sector. They were all there to talk about the cutting edge of housing policy, or the lack thereof, in Washington, DC. Of those 800 people present, there was only one person who identified herself as a school official. We live in a world where issues that are so obviously connected to each other, like housing, schools, and neighborhoods, are kept separate: locked in separate, expert-driven disciplines; separate silos; separate people. Today I want to talk about several things, taken mostly from my recent paper prepared for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Roundtree Foundation to help bridge a divide that I think absolutely must be bridged if we are going to move forward on building healthy, vital cities and metropolitan areas.

1. First, is the empirical evidence of the relationship between neighborhoods, housing and schools, particularly the impact of concentrated poverty on school performance.
2. Second, is what I observe as the general failure of affordable housing policy in the United States to relate to schools and the education realm in any meaningful way.
3. Third, is a new paradigm of "neighborhoods of choice and connection" and what this would mean for neighborhood and

<sup>1</sup> Katz situates his talk in the context of his recent paper: Katz, Bruce. 2004. Neighborhoods of Choice and Connection: The Evolution of American Neighborhood Policy and What it Means for the United Kingdom. Research Brief. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution. Available online: [http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/20040713\\_katz.htm](http://www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/20040713_katz.htm).

housing policy.

4. And finally, some thoughts about how the Center for Cities & Schools could help bridge the divide and illuminate trends, policy, practice, and networks.

I'll do all this in 20 minutes, because I am from New York and can talk a mile a minute.

Point one: on the relationship between quality neighborhoods and good schools, housing decisions are school decisions. This is so obvious to all of us in this room that it's hardly worth discussing. In city after city, families with children who can afford private schools or housing in municipalities with good schools leave the urban public school system. People move to neighborhoods with good schools, they vote with their feet at the first sign of sub-par school performance; they do not play games with their children's future.

The nexus between schools and housing is strongest for low-income families who live in distressed communities. The research shows that children who live in neighborhoods of high poverty are at great risk for school failure, whether you look at test results, grade retention, dropout rates, or other critical indicators. By contrast, the research shows that all children — middle class, low-income, African American, white, Asian, or Latino — perform much better when they attend middle class schools, economically integrated schools, than schools of concentrated poverty. It's not surprising. A recent Task Force report said that schools with middle class children have markedly higher expectations, higher quality teachers, more motivated students, more financial resources, and greater parental involvement. So the bottom line is that starting points matter. Cities and neighborhoods of high concentrations of poor have enormous impacts on school performance particularly when schools are organized around neighborhood catchment areas and choice and mobility between schools is kept to a minimum.

Point number two: Housing policy shapes settlement patterns that undergird and, I think, undermine school performance. As you well know, major federal and state policies — skewed transportation investments, the rules defining governance, taxation and exclusionary zoning — facilitate decentralization on one hand and concentrate poverty on the other. These major policies fundamentally shape the stratified residential patterns — racial, ethnic and class separation — that define metropolitan America. Because of these policies, we end up with urban and older suburban neigh-

borhoods packed to the gills with low rent, subsidized housing, and newer suburban areas where job growth is principally occurring, devoid of any affordable housing. Because of these policies, we create the context for concentrated poverty and school systems that are set up for failure.

Housing and neighborhood policies are a large part of the federal and state framework. Until recently, federal affordable housing and neighborhood policies had been a giant contributing factor to settlement patterns. In my recent paper, I have divided up recent U.S. neighborhood policy into three categories. Let me talk briefly about these categories and their impact on school outcomes.

The first strategy that we have pursued in the United States since the mid 1970s, I call 'improving the neighborhoods.' This is a place based strategy that was mostly a reaction to the excesses of Urban Renewal. This strategy seeks to improve much of the housing stock, thereby expanding economic activity in distressed neighborhoods. It gives community nonprofit institutions a central role in planning and implementation; in fact, the strategy is mostly called "community development." It relies on a broad panoply of policy tools — the Community Reinvestment Act, Community Development Block Grant funding, the HOME housing program, low income housing tax credits — to create community-driven housing. There are clear benefits and accomplishments from this strategy. Since the mid 1980's, for example, a million units of affordable housing have been created through the low income housing tax credit program and a national network of community development corporations has been built.

Yet, this strategy of neighborhood improvement suffers from issues of limited scale and perspective. The focus is on neighborhoods — bounded, fixed, insular places — rather than the metropolitan geography of opportunity. The strategy also takes concentrated poverty as a given and, for the most part, does not try to change the socio-economic composition of neighborhoods. In many places, therefore, the strategy ends up consigning low-income families and their children to neighborhoods with schools that are also concentrated in poverty and do not perform well. Until recently, the strategy essentially led to the production of more affordable housing in already poor neighborhoods without regard to the performance or capacity of schools.

That's strategy number one. My assessment is harsh — a lot of people don't want to hear it — but I think it's an accurate accounting

of the lack of connection between schools and community development.

The second major strategy is called 'expanding opportunity.' This strategy came out of the Civil Rights Movement and was a reaction to deep segregation in residential settlement patterns. It helped spawn the Fair Housing Act. It also helped spawn school busing. On the housing side, it helped spawn a focus on investments in people rather than places and, specifically, on giving low-income families greater access to quality jobs and schools beyond the neighborhood.

Since 1974, we have had a robust housing voucher program. An incredible 2.1 million households in the United States are now served by vouchers. That's more than the number of households who live in public housing and more than the number of households who live in tax credit units. Generally, this is a very successful program. It gives people access to more neighborhoods than public housing projects. A number of demonstrations, particularly the Moving to Opportunity demonstration in the 1990s and the Gautreaux Experiment in Chicago, show that residential mobility can lead to significant improvements in health care and smaller improvements in educational achievement and employment. But the performance of vouchers has been undermined by several factors, including the persistent racism and exclusionary zoning in housing markets as well as the parochial administration of vouchers, even though housing markets are metropolitan. So it's not a perfect policy.

The third and last strategy that is being pursued in the United States right now, I call 'transforming the neighborhood.' This strategy combines people- and place-based components. It aims to create economically integrated neighborhoods, through housing redevelopment, as well as increase opportunities for low-income residents, through vouchers, at the same time. Hope VI is the most advanced programmatic manifestation of this idea of neighborhood transformation: a \$5 billion dollar, ten year effort that has awarded some 165 revitalization grants to public housing developments around the country — including some located in West Oakland that I toured today.

What we know about HOPE VI, particularly in places like St. Louis and Atlanta, is not just that densely developed, spatially isolated projects are being demolished and that economically integrated developments are coming up instead. What we also know is that in a growing number of places developers — for-profits and

nonprofits — are using this large influx of federal funding to create what they call ‘school centered development.’ In Murphy Park in St. Louis, the developer and a consortium of residents in the neighborhood were able to approach the public school system and gain ownership of Jefferson Elementary in the heart of the poorest census tract in the metropolitan area. They also approached corporate and civic philanthropists and obtained \$5 million dollars in additional funding for the school. Jefferson Elementary is now one of the most technologically advanced educational facilities in the St. Louis region. It is also a school that boasts a new empowered principal with wider control over teachers, a host of after school programs for the children and an array of services for welfare recipients in the neighborhood. In a very short period of time, in the poorest census tract in St. Louis, a new development of mixed-income families, with incomes that range from below \$10,000 to over \$50,000 has emerged. The reformed school is the center of the redevelopment, not just because it is the right thing to do, but because the developer understands that unless the school functions, his ability to attract and retain mixed-income residents is impossible.

There are problems with HOPE VI in theory and problems in the implementation of HOPE VI. Many cities, in particular, have failed to carry out a sensitive relocation of residents. (The displacement of residents was avoided in St. Louis, by the way, because residents worked so closely with the developer). But the promise of transforming neighborhood policy and basically linking housing policies with school policies is there.

So, what does all this lead up to: my third point. I think we are slowly recreating the framework — the paradigm — for housing and neighborhood policy in the United States. This is going to take some time. Many advocates and constituencies are not going to want to go there. There is going to be a lot of political opposition, not just within cities but within suburbs.

The new paradigm of neighborhood housing policy in this country is around creating neighborhoods of “choice and connection.” Neighborhoods of choice are ones that are attractive to families with a broad range of incomes, not just the poorest of the poor and not just families that earn and qualify for low income tax credits or vouchers. Neighborhoods of connection are places that link families to opportunity, wherever that opportunity is located, by removing the artificial barriers and borders of neighborhoods and moving to a new commitment to education within the city and a new commitment to suburban opportunity.

To get there, I think we are going to have to fundamentally re-shape housing policy, programs, and practice in this country. I think there are a number of principles, briefly, that I think we are going to have to follow.

First, neighborhood policy has got to be set within the metropolitan context of the region. The fact is, in the United States, housing markets and labor markets are metropolitan, and commuting patterns are metropolitan. To think that we can operate with insular policies is just surreal. Neighborhoods are not islands unto themselves, and they need to be defined in a much broader geography of opportunity.

Second, broader national, state, and local policies need to align with the goals of neighborhood policy. Federal and state governments need to change the rules of the development game so that we can have a greater housing mix in cities as well as a greater mix of families with different incomes — and more affordable housing opportunities — in growing suburbs. The rules of development that now facilitate the concentration of poverty must be fundamentally overhauled. At the local level, we need to focus on school reform efforts that are tailored to the realities of markets.

Third, neighborhood policy needs to integrate economic and neighborhood diversity, in both cities and suburbs. In this area of the country I'm not sure you have a problem with demographic diversity, it's quite diverse. But there are real, serious, intractable, issues of economic diversity. So we see these concentrations of pockets of poverty infecting the schools and lowering the potential for neighborhood markets, job opportunities, and the like.

Fourth, we have got to engage the private sector in the revitalization of inner city America, and we have to engage the nonprofit sector in the remaking of suburban America. We have too many nonprofits, to be frank, in many inner city communities, each one expert at building 15 or 20 units of housing or delivering services. By contrast, there are few nonprofits for the most part in suburban America and few regional housing corporations that compliment and supplement the work of community development corporations. At the same time, we too often reject the market in inner city America and try to keep the private sector out. I don't think from a systemic perspective that inner city American is going to be revitalized without harnessing and channeling the power of the market.

Finally, neighborhood policy needs to be implemented in an integrated, accountable, and sustainable fashion. By integrated, I envision, a strong, sustainable connection between housing policy, neighborhood policy, and school policy.

I would like to conclude by providing some thoughts on interventions that the Center for Cities & Schools could potentially address within these issues, particularly in bridging the divide between schools and urban policy. Let me focus on four areas of intervention: trends, policy, practice, and networks.

1. Trends: First, what is the relationship between the provision of subsidized housing, poverty concentration, and school performance? I don't think we really know that in any systemic way in this country. Second, how does this relationship differ by city given the different ways in which cities organize choice and access? Some organize their elementary schools by catchment areas, some do not, and we need to understand the difference. Third, how does the relationship differ by city given the level of involvement of educational alternatives: parochial; private; charter; inter-district relationships? And, finally, how does all of this take into account changing demographics? This is a central question that I don't think is being answered by education or urban policy-makers. The Center should help in understanding this.

2. Policy: How do we help consumers of subsidized housing, project and tenant-based, better access school information? We have incredible information now about the performance of schools, how do we put that into the hands of housing consumers so they can make better choices? Should HUD favor applications that connect housing to schools through programs like HOPE VI? Should Congress consider special school vouchers? What if school vouchers had a mobility component or a housing component, like the Moving to Opportunity program? How do we link planning efforts? Housing and school planning are fundamentally fragmented and disjointed; should HUD fund joint planning? On the school side, should school districts vary the level of choice and access to the myriad levels of concentrated poverty? Shouldn't a school district maximize choice and access in neighborhoods where poverty is concentrated? Through research, the Center should work to fill these gaps in policy knowledge.

3. Practice: What is the emerging field of school-centered development? What are other connections that housing can make to school reform? How can mayors, school boards, public housing agencies, private developers, community development corpora-

tions, and school superintendents sit together on a regular sustained basis? How do we bridge the cultural divide between these two critical constituencies? Again, the Center should work on these and other practice-related questions.

4. Creating a network: This is really the toughest challenge, I think, and a real challenge for the Center: How do we create the space for people in disparate fields with disparate languages, and disparate experiences, to come together and see what so many of us see as common sense, so that we can make progress in theory, in practice, and ultimately in policy and political change?

I have no misgivings about the complexity of this task. There is real difficulty in bridging the divide of practice, policy, and politics. But I think this is the logical thing to do. I think it is the necessary thing to do, from an intellectual perspective and a policy perspective. And it is definitely the right thing to do from the perspective of millions of low income children who deserve a shot at opportunity in this country. Thank you.

Katz has outlined a framework for categorizing the three distinct sets of neighborhood policies and ways to place high quality public education within current policies. Dr. Ackerman follows Katz's presentation with her perspectives on the city and schools disconnect and outlines the work she has done in San Francisco to address these issues.

## **Dr. Arlene Ackerman, San Francisco Unified School District**

This is a very important topic and I want to thank the Center for inviting me to come and talk on it and to Bruce for encouraging them to invite me. I'm coming from a practitioner's focus; I'm a teacher at heart. I want to talk about what I know and the way I see it. I've been at San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) now for four years. I'm here to talk about serious times in public education, the importance of public education, and the link between schools and communities. It's great to see both students and teachers here from SFUSD; we have three high schools represented. All of these schools are impacted by the things both Bruce and I are talking about today.

I want to start by asking people in the room: How many of you graduated or attended public schools? The response here is typical; the majority of people in this country were educated by the public school system. Regardless of the push we see towards char-

ter schools or vouchers coming from Congress and some major cities, the majority of our children are still going to be educated by our public school system.

I want to talk about how my experiences have led me to lead in a different way than the conventional superintendent manner. One of the things I've learned is that there is an important connection between schools and communities. Cities and communities cannot thrive if the public schools within them are not thriving. This is just a given. If you see a public school that is failing, I will show you a community that is not really thriving. It has taken us a long time to understand this. If you are going to improve a community, you are going to have a strategic transformation plan for the schools and the school system. Since public schools have been and are asked to solve complex problems of the larger community or the larger society, it is critical, I believe, that cities and schools together find ways that they can create partnerships that can address those issues. This is very important.

In San Francisco, one of our core beliefs is that it takes the entire community to ensure the success of our children who attend public schools. I want to talk about that, about its value, and how it is manifested in a variety of successful initiatives and partnerships with the city. There is still a lot of work that we have to do, but I do believe that this is a city that does care about its children. It is a city that has over the years been a trendsetter in terms of support for public schools, but there is still a lot of work to do.

I want to talk about these issues in San Francisco in three broad categories.

1. First, schools as hubs for community learning and what we're doing for community involvement.
2. Second, schools as a locus for providing social services and city-sponsored programs to students and their families. This is an important issue that Bruce mentioned. We often have a lot of social service providers, community-based organizations, and the schools serving the same clients. It is fascinating to me, no matter where I have worked over the last 32 years, this disconnect is always there, especially in schools systems that are in crisis.
3. Third, forging new and different partnerships. Bruce talked about getting everybody involved and I want to talk about some initiatives we have in place in San Francisco.

Finally, I want to touch on schools as a crucible for addressing social tensions and challenges. Again, what happens in the community is reflected and happens in our schools.

Let me start with schools as a hub for community learning and community change. This is not a new concept. Schools in the past have done this. We have been through this before. But this idea is back. I'm not sure why we abandoned it for awhile, especially in distressed communities. In San Francisco we have implemented what we call Dream Schools. The Dream Schools are built on the notion that we need to build the educational and the social capital of the entire community in order to support students.

So what does that mean? In addition to a rigorous day, these young people need more time, not less time in school, so what we do is put together partnerships with the city focused on extending these opportunities for young people to learn. It's not necessarily around the academics, although the academics are crucial. This extended time is meant to offer the things that serve as foundation, enrichment, and acceleration for middle class children: ballet lessons, art lessons, and music lessons. These young people in distressed communities don't have these opportunities because of their economic circumstances.

The Dream Schools idea started from the community. It is about creating schools through a process by which the community tells the school district that they want for their students and their families. It has become very popular. We have opened three. What we hope to do is open another 15 over the next two years. They have a rigorous curriculum. When we look at schools that are underperforming, I can guarantee you, you won't see a rigorous curriculum. You just don't see that. The expectations are low. As much as I don't like to talk about this federal administration's legislation and comments, this issue of the soft bigotry of expectation is found far too many times in underperforming schools. And it's directly related to what Bruce was touching upon: how do you get to the parents, to help them understand what they need for their children, what they want for their children, and how to navigate their way through? Sometimes it's a very bureaucratic system.

The Dream Schools are about helping parents articulate what they want, give them what they want, and help them navigate through a system so they can get for their children what we want for ours. I've never met a parent, regardless of their economic circumstances, regardless of their values, who didn't want for his or her child what I want for mine. So I start with that; that's where we

have a common place with parents. Middle class parents can articulate it. Parents with fewer resources often can't. One of the things we've learned is that if you build a great school, parents will come. Parents who are economically distressed want a good school for their children. If you build it they will come. People said to us, the parents won't come, this is a crazy idea, we fought the [teachers] union...but those schools opened. One of the schools has a long waiting list, and we suspect the others will too as parents believe in what we've done. It's about articulating a pre-K program. We understand now the importance of this phase before kindergarten. It's really important to understand that the children who don't have preschool experience start the grade school behind, so you're always playing catch-up unless there are interventions within the K-12 school program.

To see schools as learning hubs for the community means making learning available to parents throughout the day and in the evening. The Dream Schools have parent rooms and they have educational classes for parents throughout the day. The children go to school from 8:00 to 5:00, the parents can then come to school from 5:00 to 8:00. We're working with the community colleges on this. So it's looking at the community and saying, what do they need, what do they want, and giving it to them, then providing the students and parents with resources. If you want children to go to college, you have to give them experiences. With many young people, you have to give their parents experiences also. We're working on making the link for students and parents to see learning as a life-long process. Doing this in the Dream Schools has been really important. This is not just about social change and social justice; it is about understanding that schools can change a community. This is not just about transforming the lives of these children; it is about transforming the lives of their families and this community. Unless we do that, these Dream Schools won't be successful.

My second point is about schools as a locus for providing services. In San Francisco, we serve as a leader in several city-sponsored services that we provide in our schools. The Beacon Centers are an excellent model of service provision.<sup>2</sup> We've been successful in our middle schools in particular. They are places where community members can come in and learn, but also safe places where students can go. The schools are safer than many of the communities. Wellness Centers and Teen Clinics in our high schools have

<sup>2</sup>The Beacon Schools in New York City operate as "community schools" (sometimes called full-service schools) that bring educational, recreational, and health services together under one roof, particularly in disadvantaged neighborhoods to better meet the wide variety of needs for children and their families.

become important in giving our young people access to information, health, and mental services to help them in their learning. If a child is sick, they can't really learn; it's going to interfere with their learning. So having these services on campus has been critical in terms of our outreach. We have other city-funded after-school programs. This summer we expanded our summer reading programs. It's important that these activities are integrated into a school's academic program. The academic programming at the schools has to identify how these programs are going to fit into their overall academic plan. It's a coherent strategy for raising student achievement in our schools, not isolated events.

Third, in terms of forging partnerships, I see San Francisco as doing things other urban school systems are not. We have come together around safety, creating a multi-stakeholder Safe Schools Task Force. We put together a Stay in School Coalition. Truancy has been an issue in this district for more than three decades. We are bringing all the community-based agencies together to work on this. Truancy is not just a student problem, it's a community problem. Unless we address this as a community problem, there are only short term gains we can make in terms of eradicating this issue. The previous mayor established a city Department of Children, Youth, and Families and we work closely with them. There is a liaison directly from the current mayor's office to my office. There is also an asthma task force. I could go on, but you get the picture. There are numerous integrated partnerships going on to assist our young people and build our schools.

A major accomplishment in San Francisco recently was the passage of two major bond measures addressing the needs of the school system within six months of one another. This is unusual in larger urban school systems, and we passed these measures with over 71 percent public support. The first measure was a \$295 million bond for facilities. The second one was Proposition H, a new city commitment to ultimately provide \$60 million to support universal pre-school and provide more equitable access for all of our students to arts, sports, and music. Again, the things that middle class families provide for their children regardless of whether the schools provide them or not.

What has happened behind the scenes is also very interesting. One of the things that surprised me when I came to San Francisco was the lack of involvement of the business community. I was glad Bruce mentioned this. I'm always hearing this chatter about the fact that businesses are going to come in and take over the schools.

Well, I'd like them to come in. I don't want them taking over, but I do think we have to have them involved. They have a stake in this, in making our communities viable places to live and work, but also our schools are places where young people can get the skills to enter into employment. One of the first things I did was to get the business community involved. If it were not for the business community, I don't think we would have had these two successful bond measures. They paid for nearly all of the advertising and public relations around them. I think it is incredible for the business community to be engaged and involved in making our school system the best that it can be. Although some people regard this involvement as inappropriate, I still think it is crucial.

Lastly, I want to talk about schools as a crucible for social tension and challenges, especially around issues of race. Fifty years after *Brown v. Board*<sup>3</sup>, I've seen a lot of successful things happen, but I certainly still see the issues around social justice. In San Francisco, we are under a Consent Decree — a desegregation court order for another two years. There is a great tension between two goals: the goal of keeping our schools racially and economically diverse; and the goal of creating great schools in every neighborhood to ensure that families have choice. I don't think this is an either/or. I think we have to do both. To argue about one or the other seems futile. I think we're going to have to embrace both of these goals. We'll have to build a school community that really is designed to promote excellence, equity, and access to quality programs. If it requires the Dream Schools, then we have to do that. If it requires that we look at race to keep our schools diverse and give choice to parents — whether it's down the street or across the city — I think we have to do that. It's getting lots of attention this year. We are extremely liberal, but we don't talk about race as a problem. It's there, but we don't like to talk about it. We as a school system are faced with it, and this is a conversation that is going to have to happen not only at the school level, but also at the city level. There's still much work to be done. There was a city that held "kitchen conversations" around critical issues such as race, to engage everyone in the issue, and I'd love to see something like that happen here.

To conclude, I believe looking at the connection between strong cities and strong schools is an integral part of what the Center for Cities & Schools can do. Certainly anything we as a school district can do to help with that, we are happy to do. My firm belief as a

<sup>3</sup>The landmark *Brown v. Board* decision in 1956 set the stage for mandatory public school district racial desegregation policies.

practitioner is that unless we come together and really start addressing these issues, nothing will happen. We have the possibility of truly having a world-class city, but we won't unless our schools are world-class also. Thank you.

## Conclusion: Towards a Center for Cities & Schools Research Agenda

The symposium talks and audience dialogue illuminate and assist in further defining the focus of the Center for Cities & Schools. After these lectures, participants engaged in a critical discussion to identify strategies that are mutually beneficial to cities and their public schools, paying particular attention to educational equity and the creation of meaningful learning environments for students.

Through the discussion, a range of issues and concerns were identified that need to be considered by a very diverse set of stakeholders and participants in our urban areas. For one, the perceived quality of public schools greatly impacts housing markets. That is, school quality has been shown to be a top criterion for home buying and residential choice. Families are not just buying homes; they are buying access to other amenities, including schools. Thus, schools impact home values and residential patterns. Similarly, the quality of public schools affects the ability of cities to retain and/or attract particular residents, especially middle- and upper-middle class families. Decaying neighborhoods and weak schools seem to have a close relationship, with each one working against the improvement of the other. With this in mind, three key themes emerged from the symposium that help inform the research, policy, and educational foci of the Center.

1. *First, it is imperative to find ways to break the institutional silos that exist between school districts and other urban policy actors.* However, this must be done in a way that continues to recognize the unique nature of our public school system as an institution that is at the heart of our democracy and is inherently bound up in very important issues of equity. The city planning and community development research community has largely ignored public schools. As a result the field lacks clear understanding of how to incorporate schools into broader urban theoretical and practice-oriented frameworks. A key example is found in Katz's remarks about how HOPE VI policies were created without any input from public school representatives. As a result, HOPE VI initiatives around the country have inad-

vertently depopulated local schools when dilapidated public housing projects were torn down. In many instances, local school officials were blindsided by this sudden demographic exodus. As Katz notes, this negative result simply was not thought out. Therefore, there is a need to make city and urban policy-makers more accountable to their impacts on schools. In order for this to happen, a better understanding is needed of how different types of urban policies, from housing to transportation to economic development, impact students and their schools.

2. *Second, city and urban policy-makers need to understand the changing nature of schools and the movements in educational reform.* For example, small schools and community schools are popular current educational reforms, both of which alter the nature of schools in relation to local neighborhoods. Both propose more personal learning environments better connected to parents and other service and amenity aspects of communities. As Ackerman notes, there is a great tension between the goal of keeping our schools racially and economically diverse and the goal of creating great schools in every neighborhood to ensure that families have choice. This tension cannot be treated as an either/or; ways must be found to balance both and be sensitive to both choice and connection for families. This theme also stresses the need for public leaders to propose policies and urban development that support quality schools. But, what is needed is a better understanding of what urban factors help make “quality schools.” For example, research shows that students from lower-income families perform better academically when they are in classes with middle-income peers. As public school desegregation policies come to an end across the country, classrooms increasingly reflect the racial and income segregation of neighborhoods, leading to a re-segregation of urban schools. Therefore, economically diverse classrooms may never be realized without mixed-income neighborhoods, which will require an explicit connection between schools and local housing policy.
3. *Third, schools cannot improve themselves or cities alone, and they should not be expected to do so.* Better performing schools are not a panacea for urban problems, they are both a nurturer of, and a result of, healthier cities. As public educational resources and funding continue to decline, this theme becomes ever so important. School districts and cities need to figure out ways to partner, align funding sources, and collaborate

for the shared and mutually reinforcing goals of simultaneously improving cities and public education.

In carving out a research and policy-oriented agenda to better understand the relationship between public schools and urban redevelopment in particular, a host of unanswered questions were identified. Future research and policy-making will need to consider the following:

- Across the country, the recent school facility construction boom is occurring largely in isolation from new housing development and growth. How should joint planning between these sectors be encouraged, incentivized, structured, and institutionalized?
- Similarly, what is the relationship between the provision of subsidized housing, poverty concentration, and public school performance? Is this relationship affected by the way school districts organize school choice and enrollment assignment?
- What is the emerging trend of 'school-centered development'? How is it being done, is it successful, and what are the outcomes both on cities and on schools?
- What are the other policy connections that can be made between housing, schools, and urban redevelopment?

The themes and issues that emerged from the fall 2004 symposium's two keynote speakers and audience dialogue provide evidence of the context in which the Center for Cities & Schools places its work. There is much to be done to address the variety of issues identified and questions posed. Deeper understanding of these, and other, issues is needed to simultaneously improve our public education system and make cities more equitable, diverse, and livable. The Center is committed to addressing these questions through research, education, and direct service and through the creation of spaces for greater understanding and policy-making. The Center for Cities & Schools tasks itself with asking the critical questions that must be addressed in transforming relationships between cities and public education and to do so not in isolation, but in partnership, with policy-makers, think tanks, practitioners, and students.

## References

- Baum, Howell S. 2004. Smart Growth and School Reform: What if we talked about race and took community seriously? *Journal of the American Planning Association* 70(1): 14-26.

- Orfield, Gary and Chungmei Lee. 2005. *Why Segregation Matters: Poverty and Educational Inequality*. Cambridge: The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University.
- Weiss, Jonathan D. 2004. *Public Schools and Economic Development: What the research shows*. Cincinnati: KnowledgeWorks Foundation.

*Deborah L. McKoy is Director of the Center for Cities & Schools in the Institute of Urban and Regional Development at the University of California, Berkeley.*

*Jeffrey M. Vincent is co-founder of the Center for Cities & Schools and is currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of California, Berkeley.*

*For more information on the Center for Cities & Schools, please visit [www.citiesandschools.org](http://www.citiesandschools.org).*