



NEWSLETTER

Education in the Urban Context

IN EDUCATION, ENVIRONMENT CAN MAKE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE. YET, VERY OFTEN WE NEGLECT TO FULLY ACKNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTAND EXACTLY HOW DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS INFLUENCE OUTCOMES. EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS CAN BE DEFINED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS. THIS PARTICULAR ISSUE OF THE NATIONAL DROPOUT PREVENTION CENTER (NDPC) QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER TAKES A LOOK AT THE URBAN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON DROPOUT PREVENTION EFFORTS IN URBAN SCHOOL SYSTEMS.



Urban Issues

An array of research exists establishing the fact that students in urban schools often face significantly greater challenges than others in pursuit of their high school diploma. Very often, these challenges are defined by family factors and the conditions within the neighborhoods in which these urban students live. In other instances, the obstacles to high school graduation are manifested in school-level factors.

The word “urban” often conjures up a litany of negative associations. Public schools located in urban communities often carry the same baggage and are known to have among the highest rates of dropout in the nation. It is estimated that more than 50% of students in our nation’s urban schools fail to graduate within four years of entering high school—a sobering and unacceptable statistic considering that more than 33 million of the nation’s 46 million PK-12 students live in urban areas as defined by the U.S. Department of Education.

Urban school systems are often characterized by their large size and the complex organizational structures developed to manage the large quantity of school buildings; the considerable number of teachers, administrators, and support staff; and the substantial number of students they must educate. They are portrayed as having overcrowded classrooms;

decaying school buildings; and a lack of up-to-date technology, books, and supplies. Urban school systems are perceived to have greater difficulties in recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers while spending a considerable amount of time and resources dealing with truancy and absenteeism, teen pregnancy, student discipline, and addressing the significant challenge of educating a sizeable number of students with disabilities and special needs.

Furthermore, the conditions within the communities that urban public schools are located in also have an impact—high levels of family mobility, poverty, homelessness, and single-parent households; disproportionate amounts of minority residents and families that are limited in their English proficiency; as well as excessive levels of violence, substance abuse, gang activity, and other forms of crime. All of these factors create significant challenges for urban schools and educators, and they hinder a student’s achievement and progress toward graduation.

While the challenges facing urban students appear daunting, there are programs and strategies that offer hope in helping urban school systems adapt to the changing nature and increasing number of challenges they face in graduating students within four years. In its set of 15 Effective

Strategies, the NDPC speaks to the diverse needs and risk factors that urban students often confront.

This issue of the *Newsletter* is focused on drawing attention to some of the unique challenges facing students in urban schools and some of the policies and programs that can be implemented to make a difference and improve graduation rates. While the challenges inherent in these schools and communities can seem intractable, there is evidence of success. As such, this issue explores research and provides firsthand testimony from individuals engaged in projects aimed at dropout prevention in our nation’s urban areas. We also learn directly from Paul Reville, Massachusetts’ new Secretary of Education, about the difficulty in developing statewide policies that account for the learning gap that exists for many students in urban settings and brings all students to high achievement and graduation without leaving any of them behind. By examining ways to succeed in preventing dropouts in urban areas, we hope there are lessons that can be applied in all settings, including the message that regardless of where a student lives, we all share some responsibility for advancing the aim of higher educational attainment.

—Ed Lambert, Guest Editor
Executive Director of the Urban Initiative
at the Univ. of Massachusetts Dartmouth

An Interview with Paul Reville, Massachusetts Secretary of Education



Paul Reville is Massachusetts Secretary of Education, serving in that role since July, 2008. Prior to serving as secretary, he was President of the Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy and Director of the Education Policy and Management Program/senior lecturer on educational policy and politics at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He currently has three children in the Worcester Public Schools.

Q. You have publicly stated that in past education reform efforts, there has been an underestimation of what it would take to move at-risk students to high achievement. Have student gains been equal across boundaries, geographic and otherwise?

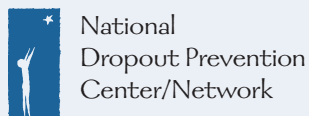
A. Our greatest success in passing the Education Reform Act of 1993 was in setting the right goal: all students to proficiency. However, we underestimated the effect that poverty and students' lives outside of school would have on their ability to reach that goal. Over the past 16 years of education reform, we have learned that schooling alone is not a sufficient intervention to help all students. Simply stating that you want all students to reach educational proficiency without changing the way education is delivered is not enough. Overall, our students have demonstrated the ability to meet higher standards, and outpace their peers on many national exams. In fact, our students are keeping pace with those in other countries. Our 8th graders recently tied for first in the world on the *Trends in Mathematics and Science Survey*, an international test given to over 425,000 students in 59 countries. This is great news and further proof that we have done well. But doing well is no longer good enough. Contrast that performance with the 2008 MCAS exams where only 11 % of African-Americans scored proficient on the 10th grade science exam compared to 47 % of white students. We clearly have a lot more work to do.

Q. What are some of the particular challenges facing urban schools?

A. I think the main challenge is the amount of time spent on learning in school compared to outside of school where students are not involved in organized, educational activities. Over the course of the average K – 12 careers, students only spend 15 % of their waking hours in school, and the time many spend outside of school is often counterproductive. We seek to build a more comprehensive approach to education starting at early childhood and reaching into higher education. We seek to expand the school day so students can have additional time in the core subjects as well as enrichment activities. We seek to build a system where students have access to high quality after-school and summer school programming, access to arts and physical education, access to technology, and access to health and human services so that every student arrives at the schoolhouse door ready to take advantage of improved teaching and learning.

Q. Massachusetts has formed a statewide task force to address dropout prevention. What do you see as the three most important outcomes from such an effort? Do you expect a focus on urban areas?

A. The Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Commission includes leaders from education, labor and workforce, health and human services, the legislature, and representatives from school districts. Our main goals are to identify best policies and practices for preventing dropouts and retrieving them once they have left school. We aim to implement a comprehensive plan to broadly replicate those best practices while learning more about early indicators of students who are at risk of dropping out and to build a statewide data system to better assist schools in assessing and servicing each of their students.



National
Dropout Prevention
Center/Network

NEWSLETTER

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Network Notes

Our Guest Editor

■ Ed Lambert is the Executive Director of the Urban Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. In addition to serving 12 years as Mayor of Fall River, MA, where he worked on urban redevelopment, economic development, improving and building schools, providing effective municipal services, and a range of public policy issues, he also served four terms in the Massachusetts House of Representatives and more than 20 years on the Fall River School Committee. Joining Mr. Lambert in his work as guest editor of this edition of the *NDPC/N Newsletter* is Jason Silva, Research Associate at the UMass Dartmouth Urban Initiative.



Radio Webcast Conference Workshops

■ The radio webcasts found in the archives of the *Solutions to the Dropout Crisis* Web site, www.dropoutprevention.org/webcast, provide a means for improving workshop opportunities. The Iowa Association of Alternative Education (IAAE) utilized three archived radio webcasts in their recent spring conference held in Des Moines. The use of the webcasts expanded the number of presenters from outside the state at virtually no cost. Collectively, the visuals and radio webcasts made excellent workshop experiences.

The workshops were 50 minutes in length and managed by a coordinator. Participants were able to discuss questions and review resources available that go beyond the webcast content, and all left with a handout of information detailing the webcast, resources, and web address for the NDPC. Other webcasts will be used in a fall conference in Iowa because of the response in the spring conference. You may want to consider a like approach to expand conference content at minimal cost.

*Submitted by Network member,
Dr. Ray Morley of IAAE*

Joining Forces



Jay Smink shakes hands with Ed Lambert to commemorate the new partnership with the Urban Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Pictured from left to right are Stephen Canessa, NDPC/N Board member; Jay Smink, Executive Director of the NDPC/N; Ed Lambert, Executive Director of the Urban Initiative; and Stuart Udell, Chair, NDPC/N Board.

■ In February 2009, Dr. Jay Smink, Executive Director of the NDPC/N, Dr. Jean MacCormack, Chancellor of the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, Stuart Udell, Chair of the NDPC/N Board of Directors, and Ed Lambert, Executive Director of the UMass Dartmouth Urban Initiative signed a memorandum making the Urban Initiative the first national satellite affiliate of the NDPC/N. As a part of the affiliation, the Urban Initiative will become engaged in the work and projects of the NDPC/N and serve as a collaborator in its national efforts to reduce dropout rates. The NDPC/N will likewise become involved in the work of the Urban Initiative as it relates to urban education and dropout prevention by providing tools and support that will allow the University and the Urban Initiative to bring the NDPC/N's resources and expertise to bear for the benefit of their region. A special thanks goes to Massachusetts State Representative Stephen Canessa, who also serves on the NDPC/N Board of Directors, for his efforts in promoting and advocating for this significant partnership.

About the NDPC/N's New Partner

■ In recognizing UMass Dartmouth's potential to pursue and promote constructive statewide growth, its Chancellor, Dr. Jean F. MacCormack, commissioned the establishment of the Urban Initiative in

November 2007, specifically to act on behalf of the many older urban communities throughout the Commonwealth that continue to struggle with the transition from manufacturing to today's knowledge-based economy. Considering that the University serves a region that contains several such cities, the existence of the Urban Initiative makes regional as well as statewide sense. The presence of various policy challenges that have hindered progress in these urban areas represent an opportunity to further embed the University in these and other communities in order to promote and affect the necessary policy changes that can lead to their revitalization.

The Urban Initiative's mission encompasses a fusion of research, project development and implementation, technical assistance, and policy analysis that supports the work of municipalities, state and local agencies, private/nonprofit entities, and other organizations. To learn more about the Urban Initiative and its work, visit www.umassd.edu/urbaninitiative.



Program Profile

Communities In Schools of Chicago

by Jane Mentzinger

Sometimes it is obvious. If a student has undiagnosed and untreated asthma, he will inevitably miss school and fall behind. Sometimes it is less obvious. If students are dealing with anger issues, they may not only distract themselves from learning but may also impact the rest of the class and cause others to fall behind. Addressing the whole spectrum of children's barriers to learning is essential to help students be successful and stay in school. Making connections between schools and community organizations is an important strategy in this work.

At Communities In Schools of Chicago (CIS Chicago), we connect social, emotional, health, and enrichment services to more than 60,000 Chicago Public School students every year. Many of these services are basic but essential—from health services to arts enrichment to violence prevention—and all are delivered at no cost to students or schools. According to Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education and former Chief Executive Officer of Chicago Public Schools, "There is no one better in the city than Communities In Schools of Chicago in linking our schools with great partners in the community who can come in and provide desperately needed services."

Through CIS Chicago, more than 10,000 students each year access vision, oral health, and asthma care. More than 20,000 students participate in a music, theater, or visual arts program. More than 30,000 students receive health education—learning everything from hygiene to disease prevention to healthy decision making. The students who most need it are getting mental health support, anger management programs, and academic enrichment.

The services we connect are impacting students' lives. During the last three years, CIS Chicago has increased the number of our partner schools receiving direct health services by 25%. Ninety-five percent of surveyed

school staff report that, thanks to our partnership, their students' knowledge about health issues improved and 83% see improvements in students' physical health. According to Zelma Woodson, principal of Jenner Academy of the Arts, "We are located in a community that is wrought with factors which negatively impact the physical health of our student population. CIS Chicago has been instrumental in helping the school provide services in this area that have led to improvements in the school's learning environment as well as the academic performance of students."

The secret to our model is strong partnerships—with schools and service providers and with CIS Chicago. And the key to strong partnerships is building organizational capacity to create and sustain strong relationships that address real priorities.

In 162 schools across the city, we work with designated school staff to assess student priorities in order to best target programs and services. We also work with school staff to develop skills including: identifying and updating school priorities; accessing and implementing services; building awareness of school-based community organizations; maintaining open communication with community partners; evaluating the effectiveness of services; and cultivating and acknowledging community partners.

During our decade-long partnership, Kinzie Elementary School has accessed an average of eight different programs each year. For the last five years, Kinzie has sustained partnerships with many agencies that we introduced to them. According to Principal Sean Egan, "These agencies have become integral parts of our school community. Communities In Schools of Chicago helped us initially access their services years ago, and each year our staff makes sure they continue to serve our students and families. Our partnerships continue to deepen with these agencies, as they

learn more about our school community and its dynamic set of needs."

For our network of more than 130 community partners—including hospitals, universities, government agencies, theaters, government agencies and local nonprofits—Communities In Schools of Chicago helps connect these service providers to specific schools. We introduce them to the appropriate contact people and help them navigate the unique school structure. We offer networking and training opportunities that focus on content and curriculum, quality of presentation, internal evaluation of programs, partnership building, student impact, professional conduct, and coordination and integration beyond the classroom.

Bringing communities into schools is essential to student success. One hundred percent of surveyed principals at our partner schools report that their schools have access to more services than they did before partnering with CIS Chicago, that they have received services they would not have received without us, and that we connect high-quality services. Strengthening schools and community organizations and the bonds between them pays dividends for students.

—Jane Mentzinger, Executive Director
Communities In Schools of Chicago
For more information visit
www.chicagocis.org



Program Profile

In Their Own Words: The Impact of Mentoring

Mentoring/Tutoring has been shown to be a particularly effective dropout prevention strategy with students in urban areas. The following two pieces were written by a mentor and his mentee. Both are currently involved in the SMILES Mentoring Program at the Matthew J. Kuss Middle School in Fall River, Massachusetts.

Tony Pires, SMILES Mentor: President of Professional Business Printing in Fall River, MA

I am a mentor in the SMILES Mentoring and Big Friends/Little Friends programs. I have listened to Mr. Jim Mathes, the Executive Director of SMILES, speak at different times about the importance of mentoring and the impact it has on our community. I have heard him talk about the statistics in regards to high school dropout rates and the negative effects that it has on our work force. He has talked about the long-term regional impact and the ability to attract new businesses and provide skilled employees for these new companies.

I thought about all of this and was overwhelmed with what these leaders are trying to accomplish and thought to myself ... thank God ... all I have to do is be a friend to one kid.

About two years ago, I heard about the SMILES Mentoring Program and thought, *here's an organization that will give me that chance—a chance to be a friend and a chance to be there for a child.* I went through the orientation and without knowing for sure what I was getting into, off I went to Kuss Middle School to meet the mentees. Within five minutes my mentee, Dominic and I, hit it off talking and laughing, and within 10 minutes he was asking me to be his mentor. Talk about a great feeling—this young man wants me to be HIS mentor. I have to admit it was pretty cool.

Over the next year and a half we did a lot of activities together with SMILES. We learned more about each other and learned to trust each other.



Tony Pires and Dominic Jackson

We went to a Boston Red Sox game and announced the starting lineup on TV from the Fenway dugout. What a great experience for both of us. After a while, we realized that we wanted to spend more time hanging out, but the SMILES policy only allowed us to meet during school hours. This led Dominic and I to become involved in the Big Friends/Little Friends program—here was our opportunity to hang out more.

It's been about eight months now and it's been great. We have gone to the movies, gone to a Christmas party with Big Friends/Little Friends, been to the zoo, hung out at my house with my family, gone apple picking and just had a lot of laughs. Dominic is a great kid. We laugh a lot and learn a lot when we are together.

One thing I have always remembered from a conversation with Jim Mathes is that these kids are being told what to do all day long. They have adults telling them to stop doing things, to be polite, to be quiet, how to act and how not to act. Jim said mentoring isn't about that. It's about being a friend, being someone who doesn't

judge but instead listens. Someone who isn't telling them what they are doing wrong but reminds them of what they are doing right.

Dominic Jackson, SMILES Mentee Student at the Kuss Middle School in Fall River, MA

Hi everyone. I'm Dominic and I've been in SMILES at the Matthew J. Kuss Middle School. I've had a great experience because that's how Tony and I met. Marie, our SMILES facilitator, asked the mentors and mentees to walk around and see if we had an idea of who we wanted our mentor to be. The first person I talked to was Tony. We just talked about our favorite TV shows and favorite ice cream. Finally, Tony and I just hit it off, and I asked him to be my mentor.

Tony has been my mentor since then. And when we heard of Big Friends/Little Friends, we thought that would be a great opportunity for us. So, we signed up for that program, too. Big Friends/Little Friends is a great program because of the activities we get to do and because we are able to meet out of school. It's a great time for me and Tony to talk about life. The advice he gives is really handy for the future because Tony was a kid once so he can relate to me. The experience of both programs is great because of the great opportunities like going to the Red Sox game. That was my first professional baseball game, and I'm glad I witnessed it with Tony.

I couldn't ask for a better mentor!

Book Review

Partnering to Prepare Urban Teachers: A Call to Activism.
Francine P. Peterman, Ed. 2008. Peter Lang Publishing,
Inc.: New York [ISBN No. 978-1-4331-0116-8]

In today's age of *No Child Left Behind* and its demand for a highly qualified teacher in every classroom across America, we are often left wondering what this "highly qualified" teacher looks like and if that teacher—who appears "highly qualified" on records and resumes - is truly prepared to teach in the multitude of educational contexts that exist across the diverse cities and towns of our nation. *Partnering to Prepare Urban Teachers*, a collection of essays by a variety of contributors and edited by Francine P. Peterman, a professor in the Department of Curriculum and Foundations at Cleveland State University, emphasizes the implications of the current disconnect between what institutions of teacher education consider "highly qualified" and what urban schools require of these so-called "highly qualified" teachers.

The book begins by calling attention to the fact that teacher preparation can no longer ignore the demographic changes that our country is experiencing and will continue to experience well into the future. Fifty-seven percent of our population is located in urban areas and we are rapidly becoming a multiracial, multiethnic, and multilingual society with 45% of our children under the age of five being members of minority groups. As such, Peterman and her colleagues sound a compelling wake-up call to teacher education programs to focus on addressing what one contributor to this work calls the "messy realities" of preparing urban teachers.

According to *Partnering to Prepare Urban Teachers*, the way to do so is for institutions that prepare teachers to continue the recent trend of creating partnerships with local PK-12 schools and their surrounding communities. The difference between these current efforts and the model prescribed in the book is that these partnerships must focus on fostering the teacher candidate's understanding of the role of social justice in teaching so that they can begin to develop an interpretation of their career choice as one of being a social activist on behalf of the students, schools, families, and communities they serve. By doing so, Peterman and her colleagues assert that new teachers will have the necessary skills to navigate the cultural complexities of educating students in urban settings.

In fact, the book claims that the expansion and popularity of alternative teacher certification programs is largely due to a failure on the part of traditional teacher education programs to effectively prepare teachers who are willing and able to teach in the nation's highest-need urban schools. The reason for this is that alternative programs exist and form strong partnerships with local school systems in order to meet the needs of the school district and not just the needs of the teacher candidate. Meeting this challenge will require a fundamental shift in thinking on the part of teacher educators across the country toward an understanding that the "client" to be served through teacher preparation is truly the school district and its students.

Partnering to Prepare Urban Teachers can be a useful book for all teacher candidates and teacher educators as it opens the door into a realm of modern education (the urban context) that is often forgotten or misinterpreted in traditional teacher preparation programs. It warns us all that if we are to expect "highly qualified" teachers in every classroom, we must be willing to understand what this implies within the urban context

—Jason Silva
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Resources

National Institute for Urban School Improvement (NIUSI)

The NIUSI is an advocate for inclusive urban education which engages families, students, practitioners and school leaders in constructive and transformative partnerships. They also work to educate others on the complex issues that urban families and their children face in accessing high quality education.
www.urbanschools.org

Urban Institute Education Policy Center

The Education Policy Center conducts research on education reforms involving accountability, school vouchers, standards, after-school programs, technology, teacher quality, and the new increased flexibility in using federal funds.
www.urban.org/center/epc

Council of the Great City Schools

The Council of the Great City Schools is the only national organization exclusively representing the needs of urban public schools.
www.cgcs.org/

The New York University Institute for Education and Social Policy

The Institute for Education and Social Policy conducts non-partisan scientific research about U.S. education and provides research, policy studies, evaluations, seminars, and technical assistance inform policymakers, educators, parents, and others.
www.steinhardt.nyu.edu/iesp

Events

June 16, 2009 **Worldwide Web
Solutions to the Dropout Crisis-
Mentoring—With Kate Schineller**
www.dropoutprevention.org/webcast

Aug. 5-7, 2009 **Philadelphia, PA
Sixth Annual National Urban
Service-Learning Institute**
www.nylc.org

Oct. 24-28, 2009 **San Antonio, TX
21st Annual National Dropout
Prevention Network Conference—
Illuminating the Path to the Future**
www.dropoutprevention.org

Motivating Students to Learn Math Through Classroom Connectivity

by Stephen J. Hegedus

The James J. Kaput Center for Research and Innovation in Mathematics Education was established at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth in 2007. It is an interdisciplinary Center focused on studying issues in the realm of mathematics education. At the core of the Center is a research group founded by Jim Kaput. The group has conducted funded research and development since 1993 and has received over \$14 million in grants from a number of federal sources. The Center's main focus is improving access to mathematics for all students, or "democratizing access." The Center is focused on improving learning and motivation in all groups and at all levels of achievement, particularly those in urban school systems.

At the core of the Center's work is the "Algebra Problem." Many school districts are unwilling or unable to find creative ways to integrate algebra into the curriculum at earlier grade levels, especially in urban districts. As a result, urban students tend to have low achievement in math, low motivation, and an inability to see the relevance of mathematics to their everyday life. These all combine to increase the likelihood of urban students dropping out of high school.

This notion of "relevance" is particularly important, and a substantial portion of the Center's work is focused on finding innovative ways to link algebra and other mathemat-

ics lessons to "real life." The Center is constantly seeking new motivational strategies in the hope of convincing students that learning mathematics is "fun" or "applicable" to their life, frequently utilizing contexts such as sports or vocations.

In order to fulfill its goal of solving the Algebra Problem, the Center has dedicated a significant amount of time toward the research and development of SimCalc systems. The SimCalc Project, an initiative created by SRI International in conjunction with a number of national academic partners, seeks to make mathematics accessible to ordinary middle school students, teaching core concepts that lead to algebra and eventually calculus, using a combination of innovative curriculum and graphing technologies.

A pilot program of SimCalc, entitled *Scaling up SimCalc-Phase I*, was conducted with 7th grade teachers in Texas during the 2003-04 school year. Analysis of the program's effects found significant learning gains for teachers who received training through the program's intervention, as well as significant learning gains for their students. Another pilot program, *NetCalc*, explored the potential of using wireless handheld devices when implementing a SimCalc curriculum. Analysis of this program's results saw improvements in student achievement, attention, and engagement.

Both of these programs sought to improve student motivation and show the relevance of mathematics to life. They found that students can become motivated by a desire to participate more fully in what their classroom is doing, thereby creating a link between mathematics and motivation through *participation*. In order to do so, the Center is pursuing two paths. The first is "Mathematical Performances," activities that emphasize individual student creations, small group constructions, or coordinated interactions across groups. Using wireless handheld devices tested in the *NetCalc* program, these student creations can be

uploaded to the teacher's central unit and displayed in front of the class, allowing students to show their own work to their classmates while providing explanations and narration.

The second path is called "Participatory Aggregation to a Common Public Display." Similar to "Mathematical Performances," students utilize their wireless handheld devices, either alone or in small groups, to solve problems or construct mathematical examples. These student creations are then uploaded and systematically displayed to the class and discussed, revealing patterns, eliciting generalizations, or contextualizing special cases, all of which help raise student attention from individual objects to existing classrooms.

Throughout all of these exercises, students are encouraged to participate, helping motivate them to learn mathematics. This is especially important for students in urban settings, where mathematics education can often be lacking, resulting in students who perpetually underachieve on mathematics evaluations. Since underachievement is a strong factor in predicting dropout behavior, encouraging students to excel in mathematics, a core subject area, can help reduce their likelihood of dropping out.

SimCalc classrooms have been linked to positive attitudes towards school in general and learning mathematics in particular, along with working collaboratively, working privately, and using technology. SimCalc has shown positive signs at scale and across diverse school settings, showing that it can have an impact on reducing dropout rates at a national level by not only deepening students' knowledge of mathematics, but also by providing a motivation to further their education and pursuit of knowledge.

—Stephen J. Hegedus, Ph.D.
Founding Director

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Viewpoint

Nearly 50 years ago in a statement to Congress, President John F. Kennedy warned us that, "We neglect our cities at our peril, for in neglecting them we neglect the nation." Since then, tremendous challenges have emerged in urban cities throughout the U.S.; challenges created by economic forces that have rapidly repositioned our country's economy toward knowledge- and service-based industries and have left them virtually powerless to overcome this volatility and meet the incredible demands of a society and economy that requires an increasingly educated workforce.

So why should we care? And exactly what makes President Kennedy's statement relevant or true?

There are those who look at our nation's urban areas, where dropout rates are unacceptably high, and decide that the problem is not theirs; that the challenge of reducing urban dropout rates is an isolated responsibility of the cities and the blame lies with those districts and their students. To believe this is to fail to understand the societal challenges facing students in urban schools as well as how those urban dropout rates affect us all.

We neglect our cities at our peril, for in neglecting them we neglect the nation.

—President John F. Kennedy

Research has demonstrated the intrinsic relationship between economic development and educational attainment. As a society we have failed to recognize that this relationship is applicable and significant well beyond the individual level.

Suburban school superintendents who believe that they do not have a dropout "problem," when they are part of a region with urban centers beset by high dropout rates, couldn't be more wrong as evidence suggests that businesses look at regional educational attainment data when deciding where to locate and expand. The loss to a regional economy of a missed business development opportunity affects everyone in a region, regardless of their personal educational attainment level.

Likewise, this nation cannot be great if its cities are not healthy. And our cities cannot be healthy, eco-

nomically and otherwise, unless we collectively address what is happening educationally in our cities. There must be a fundamental understanding on the part of all communities which mirrors the words of President Kennedy: "As our urban cores go, so too go our regions, so too go our states, and so too goes our nation."

Cities are the cornerstone of our nation's survival. From the production of steel and automobiles, to textiles and manufactured goods, they were once some of the wealthiest places in the world. And while deindustrialization and suburban sprawl have weakened them, we must work together to once again make them the centers of technological and educational innovation. If we do so, everyone stands to benefit.

—Edward M. Lambert, Jr.
Director of the UMass Dartmouth
Urban Initiative

The purpose of Viewpoint is to allow professionals to express their opinions about issues related to dropout prevention. The opinions expressed by these authors do not necessarily reflect those of the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network.

 National Dropout Prevention Center/Network

NEWSLETTER

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