

SHIRLEY M.McBAY

## Improving Education for Minorities

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*We have a long way to go, but the successes of hundreds of projects nationwide show that hope is very much alive.*

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By the year 2015 or so, minorities will make up one-third of our population and a higher proportion of our work force. From this group can come a major share of the skilled technicians, scientists, engineers, and doctors, as well as teachers, generals, policymakers, financiers, and a host of other professionals that America needs to move ahead in the twenty-first century. That is only possible if members of minority and majority groups alike work together to reverse many of the adverse conditions now shadowing our prosperity.

I am optimistic about such a future. My colleagues and I in the Quality Education for Minorities Project have spent much of the last year traveling around the nation, and we have seen evidence of hope in hundreds of programs in which minority children from even the most disadvantaged backgrounds are enthusiastically learning.

The Project was created in 1987 to develop a set of strategies that would help ensure the continuous flow of minority students through the educational pipeline. In our travels, therefore, we kept several major questions foremost in mind: How do we identify what works? How do we replicate those programs wherever they are needed? And how do we change the system itself to make supplemental programs eventually unnecessary? After speaking at length with educators, policymakers, parents, and students to learn about successful programs—including regional meetings we held in New York, San Antonio, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, Anchorage, Albuquerque, San Juan, and Boston—we began to develop a consensus about what needs to be done to improve our educational system for minority students.

I would like to share with you some of the lessons we learned. I wish I could report that a few magic bullets are available, or that in some cities a bold new program has completely erased the educational disadvantages faced by minority youth. Unfortunately, the problems stem from deep roots, and their answers are many and complex. In some locales, however, enough answers are in place to the point that black, Hispanic,

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and Indian children are pursuing their dreams in science, mathematics, engineering, and other critical fields.

Sometimes the difference is a single teacher such as Jaime Escalante (whose story was recently dramatized in the film, *Stand and Deliver*) or an inspired parent or community advocate; and sometimes the difference is a program or system of programs to which many contribute. In any case, such activities are only the beginning; much work remains to be done in applying their successes throughout the country. But the point is that hope is alive.

Let me present these lessons in the form of nine short principles, with examples:

**The first and most obvious principle is that interventions should occur at the earliest possible time.**

Early intervention in preschool and parent education, along with day care and nutrition, is essential. It has lasting effects and, as the Committee for Economic Development recently demonstrated in its report, *Children in Need*, it is extremely cost-effective.

One of the most carefully evaluated and best-known early childhood education efforts was the Perry Preschool Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Low-IQ, disadvantaged three- and four-year-olds were placed in a two-year preschool program in the mid- 1960s, and followed through age 19. The Perry Preschool followed many of the precepts, such as participatory learning by the children and home visits by teachers, now urged by child development specialists.

Compared to children not enrolled in any preschool, those in the Perry Preschool gained 11 points in IQ scores, had much lower rates of enrollment in special education, and much greater high school graduation rates: 67 percent compared to just 49 percent for the control group. They were also half as likely to be arrested and about 60 percent more likely to be employed.

Despite these benefits, less than 4 out of 10 four-year-olds with family incomes below \$10,000 are enrolled in any preschool program. Head Start, which has also been carefully evaluated and shown to benefit disadvantaged students, serves only one out of six of the 2.5 million eligible low-income children.

Virtually all studies of successful early childhood education stress the benefits of *family* education. One of the most acclaimed parental education programs is now under way in Missouri—the state-funded Parents as Teachers program, which serves more than 30 percent of parents with young children in the state. Child development specialists from the local school districts start visiting families after the birth of the child and continue until the child enters school. A recent study showed that three-year-olds from participating families were more advanced in language development, problem-solving, and other skills than a control group.

A similar program is the Texas-based AVANCE, which provides a comprehensive nine-month training course for Hispanic parents and their children under age four. Parents take classes in communication, discipline, and other child development issues, and are provided educational toys for home use. By understanding and accepting the role as primary teachers of their children, parents have higher aspiration levels for them and a new sense of hope. Preliminary evaluations show that the AVANCE child is more verbal, better adjusted socially, better coordinated, and more eager to learn than his or her peers. And the AVANCE parent is more likely to be involved with the child's school and serve as a parent leader. Parents are also returning to school, getting General Education Development degrees, and preparing for college through classes offered at the AVANCE centers.

**Second, we must restructure our school systems to promote rather than discourage the education of minority students.** To achieve this goal, we must introduce a great deal more flexibility, decentralization, and, most importantly, accountability into the systems. Administrators and teachers must have the authority and resources to respond to the unique needs of the students they serve, but at the same time we must be able to hold them accountable for results. That includes the right to promote and fire based upon the impact these educators have on children. Lack of accountability allows some teachers to remain quietly in the classroom, poisoning the expectations of minority youngsters.

One of the most important examples of system-wide restructuring is in Dade County, Florida, which is leading the way in teacher professionalization and school-based management. Among the broad changes taking place in the Dade County schools, which are 45 percent Hispanic and 25 percent black, are the

School-Based Management/Shared Decisionmaking Program, in which teachers and administrators jointly develop a system of management for their individual schools (including budget allocation, goal-setting, and evaluation); and Satellite Learning Centers, in which elementary schools are being set up at central locations convenient to worksites in order to assist working parents and solve after-school day-care concerns.

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Restructuring can also take place in the classroom itself, by eliminating as much as possible the tracking that steers children as young as ages six and seven irreversibly away from academic pursuits.

A notable example is the work done by members of the Coalition of Essential Schools, based at Brown University. Although each of the 56 member schools in the coalition follows its own path toward educational equity and excellence, they have several things in common: a trend toward teachers functioning not as didactic sources of knowledge but rather as coaches helping students to perform the work of learning; flexible class schedules that respond to the course requirements and not to the exigencies of the 45-minute period; closer teacher-student relationships by limiting the number of students per teacher to no more than 80 per day; and a focus on competency-based testing—that is, on demonstrations of achievement rather than multiple choice testing.

Essential schools also incorporate several of the elements deemed critical for success with disadvantaged minority youth; closer relationships between students and an adult figure; new ways to demonstrate academic achievement that overcome the biases inherent in present standardized tests; high expectations from teachers as well as students that are generated by the strong sense of belonging; and a common core curriculum in place of the tracking that relegates so many minority youth to an inferior education.

Heterogeneous classrooms, along with nontraditional teaching techniques such as cooperative learning and peer tutoring, can reach many of the students we now write off. In Baltimore, for example, students use the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition Program, in which small learning teams of mixed abilities work together to master material presented first by the teacher in the classroom. A study showed significant increases among these students in reading and language skills over the control group.

**The third principle is to make curricula more responsive to the needs of minority children.** That will require teachers to use texts, lesson plans, and other resources that are better able to instill a sense of pride and self-esteem in their students. Further, minority children need to be taught the same kinds of higher-order skills—and by that I mean the ability to frame as well as solve problems, to use knowledge, to communicate effectively, and to think critically—as their more affluent peers in the suburbs are learning. We must revise the way we test knowledge, not so that we can learn whether students are good at taking tests, but rather whether they are actually able to use the material they are learning. Given the threat to many low-income children from malnutrition, drug or alcohol abuse, and inadequate medical care, we must also incorporate health-education materials into the curricula beginning as early as grade three.

There are many examples of curricula that are sensitive to issues of ethnic and cultural identity, but one of the most interesting was developed at the tribal school on the reservation of the Fond du Lac band of the Minnesota Chippewa tribe. The tribal school, most of whose 130 students have dropped out or been pushed out of the public schools in the area, uses traditional Indian values as a pedagogical building block. For example, noncompetition among students is favored due to the Indian belief that it is not right for one student to embarrass another by succeeding when the other fails. Thus the school allows group work and sharing by encouraging two or more students to join forces on assignments. And although students move through the grade levels by demonstrating mastery of concepts, they remain with their peers who may be working at different grade levels. In similar keeping with Indian learning customs, physical movement is allowed within the classroom.

**Fourth, we must find a way to make the best teachers available to those who need them the most.** All too often, it is the least experienced teachers who are assigned to the lowest-achieving schools. Instead, through financial and administrative incentives, we must recruit the *best* teachers for the toughest schools. As part of this effort, we must redouble our efforts to recruit more minority teachers.

To begin meeting the need for minority teachers, we must seek out and nurture minority students with the talent and interest to become teachers. In Washington, D.C., for example, the Coolidge High School's Teaching Professionals Program offers participants a chance to take special supplemental high-school courses in education, speech, computers, and humanities, and assigns seniors in the four-year program to a public school as assistant to a full-time teacher. If graduates of the program agree to teach at least three years in the District schools, they are guaranteed financial aid for college.

Another approach is to mine the existing talent pools in community and historically black colleges. A new program recently announced by the Charles A. Dana Foundation will link teacher training programs at Morehouse and Spelman Colleges and Hampton, Tuskegee, and Xavier Universities with Duke University. The program will give grants to 150 education students at the historically black institutions so that they can complete college without debt, and will provide them with teaching and research experience—including a summer research internship at Duke.

**Fifth, we must change the role of schools in society.** Schools have to stand in for absent parents, substitute for welfare departments, work with teenage parents, deal with drug and sexual abuse, provide afternoon and evening day care, and undertake a host of other extracurricular activities—in effect, social services—that go far beyond the band or the football team.

An outstanding example of an educational program concerned with the total needs of young people is Rich's Academy, run by Exodus, Inc., in Atlanta. Located on the top floor of Rich's store, the Academy provides family, health care, counseling, and employment services, and linkages to other social services, for its 100 students, all of whom are dropouts or pushouts from the public high schools in Atlanta. The seven-year-old program establishes deeply rooted teacher-student relationships that provide for some students the only loving family in their lives.

The school's physical location allows students to work in, and feel connected to, a middle-class environment that provides ordinary but important role models for them. By helping students deal with their physical and emotional needs, and by providing an atmosphere in which they can feel accepted and confident, Rich's Academy gives extremely high-risk students a chance to recapture their lives.

Another example is the New Futures alternative school for pregnant teenagers in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The school provides its students with pregnancy counseling, nutritional care, health services, parental training, psychological counseling, vocational services, and child care. New Futures, which is part of the Albuquerque public schools, has served more than 4,300 students since it opened in 1970. Although nationally, less than half of all teen parents graduate from high school, more than three-quarters of the New Futures students have either graduated or are still in school. The program has also had success in preventing low birthweights and repeat pregnancies.

**Sixth, we must do a better job of coordinating existing community programs and services that help minority youth.** While there are many successful programs in nearly all communities, urban and rural, often such programs are offered in a scattered fashion. Local service coordinating bodies may be necessary to target services, avoid duplication, and seek funding for new programs.

I am aware of no existing programs that serve in the community-wide coordinating role that I am suggesting, but there are models in some areas that begin to fulfill it. In San Antonio, for example, Target 90, a nonprofit planning board, marshals community resources to improve the quality of life in the city. The 4,000 volunteers serving on its many task forces help coordinate school/business partnerships, a dropout-prevention collaborative, a collaborative to improve science teaching, and a local education fund that allocates small grants to teachers for innovative classroom projects.

On a national scale, the Linkages Project of the American Association for the Advancement of Science brings together community-based advocacy and service organizations with scientists and engineers to

improve mathematics and science education for minority and female students. Sponsored by the Office for Opportunities in Science, Linkages provides a common source of information on issues related to the management and development of community-based organizations, and sponsors meetings and seminars with groups involved with precollege science and mathematics programs.

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**Seventh, we must revitalize the resources available from minority communities themselves.** The exodus of middle-income minority families from the inner cities, the diminishing role of the black church, and, to some degree, the very success of integration have weakened the community institutions and networks that formerly served as informal safety nets for the poorest children. Where minority children are succeeding in school, one almost always finds support and participation from parents, local businesses, and community organizations.

One example is the 100 Black Men of Los Angeles' Young Black Scholars Program, which seeks to increase the number of academically prepared black high school graduates in the city. The program works with black ninth-grade students and their parents to monitor individual student achievement, provide after-school and Saturday tutorial services, sponsor enrichment experiences, fund scholarships for graduates, and provide college and career-opportunity counseling. Cosponsored by several black-oriented sororities, fraternities, and civic organizations, the Young Black Scholars Program seeks to have 1,000 black students graduate in Los Angeles County by 1990 with a grade-point average above 3.0.

The National Council of La Raza sponsors several similar programs designed to aid Hispanic students, and in addition has introduced the Parents as Partners program in Kansas City to help parents acquire the skills necessary to provide a home environment that supports and encourages education. It also helps parents develop leadership skills that they can use to participate more effectively in the local school decisionmaking process, including training in the structure and functions of school advisory committees, school governance, school budgets, and effective advocacy strategies.

**Eighth, we must formalize links between segments of the educational pipeline.** We know that there are critical leakages at the various transition points: from middle to high school, high school to college, and college to graduate school. One of the most effective ways to plug the leaks is to expose students early on to higher levels of education.

There are many dramatic and successful examples of linkages between segments of the educational pipeline. What makes such programs work is that they provide reciprocal benefit: Students from younger grades are enriched by interacting with older students or college faculty; older students, in turn, benefit from the increased self-esteem that accompanies service to others. Prospective college students find that their horizons are widened; the colleges and faculty gain in their recruiting efforts, as well as by expanding their own appreciation of the diversity of their students. This recognition of mutual gain has sparked a renewed interest in such linkages in recent years.

One example is Mission High School, in a predominantly Hispanic section of San Francisco. Students can take college-credit courses, in classrooms on the high school campus, taught by faculty (often bilingual) from California State University at San Francisco. Middle College High School in Long Island City, New York, takes a slightly different approach: The school is actually located on the campus of LaGuardia Community College. Students at the high school benefit from the intensive counseling, flexible schedule, self-paced curricula, and individualized attention. But further, they all gain from firsthand exposure to the world of higher education.

On my own campus, the Minorities Introduction to Engineering and Science program (MITES) provides a six-week summer residential program at M.I.T., for approximately 40 minority high school students who have completed their junior year, to enhance their senior year and ready them for college. In addition to pursuing academic coursework—in mathematics,

physics, biochemistry, humanities, and design—students attend seminars on study skills and time management, meet with top scientists and policymakers, spend one day each week touring industrial or public-sector agencies involved in mathematics and science, and meet with campus library, admissions, financial aid, and police representatives to learn more about the college environment. Youngsters are thus exposed to hands-on science, meet potential role models, and are provided a friendly process for making the transition to higher education—exactly the elements thought to be crucial to success in science and engineering fields.

**The ninth and final principle is that we must make incentives clear for minorities in higher education.**

When you think about it, fulfilling that goal begins by demonstrating to young black, Hispanic, and Indian children that a college education pays off not only in intellectual challenge but in income and prestige. The alternative can sometimes seem more attractive when they see high-school dropouts riding around in Mercedes Benzes while teachers drive Chevrolets.

Part of the answer lies in expanded recruitment of minority students and improved incentives for departments when it comes to minority hiring. Another part is better mentoring and research opportunities for young minority scholars. And the most basic part is in establishing zero tolerance for racist behavior by students, faculty, or staff.

One of the most far-reaching programs under way at any college campus to achieve lasting student and faculty diversity is the “Madison Plan” at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Under the leadership of Donna Shalala, the university has launched efforts to double its number of minority undergraduates over the next five years, create 150 new financial-aid packages for low-income students, raise \$4 million in endowments to increase scholarships and another \$4 million for new minority graduate and professional fellowships, hire 70 new minority faculty members, and promote another 125.

### **Equal access to quality**

If these principles are followed, I foresee a nation moving forward. I can even imagine a time when all citizens will be able to participate fully in the American work force, prospering from their growing skills and able to adapt to and improve upon the rapid changes in the workplace.

This will occur because all of our children—minority and majority alike—will have had access to a quality education throughout their lives. By the time they graduate from high school, they will be well grounded in biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, and English; they will be fluent in at least one other language; and they will have strong writing, analytical, problem-solving, and computer skills.

Such achievements will be due in no small part to improvements in schools, as well as to an array of after-school and weekend programs. But perhaps most important will be the increased value placed on learning and achievement by parents who understand the potential in their children that education can help realize. And in a kind of virtuous cycle, access to a quality education will rekindle a love of learning in families and will pave the way for further academic success.

Students entering higher education will have developed skill and comfort in test-taking. During their pre-college years, they will have had repeated experiences with new methods of testing that not only assess their knowledge and understanding of specific academic concepts, but also evaluate their writing and reasoning skills, their leadership and entrepreneurial promise, and their other special talents.

These college students will be secure in the knowledge and appreciation of their own heritage, which they will have acquired both at home and in the classroom. They will be confident of their ability to contribute to academic discussions, and they will not hesitate to ask questions of their professors. Their self-esteem will be high and evident through the leadership positions they hold in student organizations and in their living groups.

As in high school, they will receive their education from well-trained and enthusiastic minority and non-minority teachers who have high expectations of all students and who are supportive of their career aspirations. These students will find living and learning environments that are supportive and friendly, and a climate in which racist, sexist, and other disparaging attitudes are not tolerated.

These students of the future will find it difficult to imagine the world of prejudice, crime, and violence their parents and grandparents feared they might in-

herit Their futures will be bright, for they will be well-disciplined, hard-working, and eager to learn. They will feel confident that they will be judged on the quality of their work—not on their ethnic background or the color of their skin.

### *Recommended reading*

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