Youth Action for Educational Change
A RESOURCE GUIDE

BY ALICIA WILSON-AHLSTROM, JOEL TOLMAN AND KENNETH JONES

"I have to ask myself: Are we actually being prepared? We want to know the value of the high school diploma, given that most jobs call for at least two years of college training. In these days, how far will this take us? What will it do? Actually, when you look at it, the high school diploma really does not do what it is supposed to do."

— Tyrone, Washington, DC, High School Senior

"This is the first time I've had something so important to participate in. It seems like I now know much more than most kids at my school — about how the education and juvenile justice systems connect, about how to analyze a speaker or writer's perspective, about how to motivate people. It makes me want to run something myself!"

— Alan, age 14, from the Books Not Bars project

"Here's what I want to know: Do you have a back-up plan in case this doesn't work out? This is our school, our lives. We may be bad, but that doesn't mean we should be an experiment for others."

— Bay Area High School Student

"We, the students at Simon Gratz High, want to create a student government to help teachers and students alike understand how we feel about our school...Students should have a strong and active voice in the school. Having a voice in choices that are made about our education would make students feel ownership of the school. If students feel some ownership in the school where they learn, we might have better attendance, fewer suspensions and more respect for keeping our building clean. Also, having a choice in how we are taught might make most students more enthusiastic about learning. Our future is at stake here, and we feel that we should have a say in most decisions. In addition, we feel that students have really good ideas about things that need improvement around the school."

— From a Philadelphia Student Union proposal for student government at Simon Gratz High School

"We are young adults. We can give you respect. We are able to understand the issues. We can think for ourselves. It's our education. If we have a say, it will make a difference"

— Bertha Rodriguez, Students for Justice, Denver, CO

"If you show you know and care about the material, then we will believe the material can be important for us to learn. If you will treat us as smart and capable of challenging work, then we will feel respected and rise to the challenge of demanding work. If you allow us increasing independence but agree with us on clear expectations, then we will learn to act responsibly on our own, though we will sometimes make mistakes in the process."

— The students of What Kids Can Do

Publications about school reform often start with quotes like these[1] — the practical, compelling, incisive words of students talking about their schools. This makes sense. Schools are full of young people, and young people's lives are shaped in large part by their school experiences.

But — disregarding title pages and chapter heads — the literature of school reform is not full of young people's words. Nor does school reform writing give much space to the stories from which these words come — stories in which young people change curriculum, improve teaching, shake structures, demand equity, subtly shift assumptions. In these stories, young people are actors in school change, rather than simply the recipients of changed schools.

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[1] The quotes included here are drawn from several sources that appear in this bibliography: *Fires in the Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students* (Kathleen Cushman and the students of What Kids Can Do), *Learning For Life: Youth Voices for Educational Change* (The Forum for Youth Investment), Fall 2002 *FYI Newsletter* (The Forum for Youth Investment), *Taking Democracy in Hand* (Barbara Cervone) and *Youth Acts, Community Impacts: Stories of Youth Engagement with Real Results* (Joel Tolman and Karen Pittman with Barbara Cervone, et al.).

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It is time to tell these stories. Moreover, it is time to tell these stories together. Schools in which democratic principles are practiced as well as taught, young people ringing city hall to demand equitable funding, students crunching data on the achievement gap, youth crafting legislation for the statehouse floor — these stories are part of a single narrative. Whether working inside existing reform efforts or pushing for change from the outside, whether taking on roles as researchers, advocates, organizers, decision makers, citizens or teachers, these are stories of youth action for educational change. Telling these stories together allows for a clearer assessment of what they add up to, and also for concerted action and collaboration across efforts.

Gathering the stories — and the voices, studies, reflections, frameworks and how-to guides — is the purpose of this resource guide. The publications and articles included speak directly to young people's work as school reformers, are (in our minds) substantive and useful, and could actually be accessed via libraries, the Web or computer databases. Those were the criteria that the Forum for Youth Investment used in selecting which publications to include.

Because so many of the stories have yet to be written, this guide is not as thick and sturdy as it could be. Almost none of these publications can be found in an average bookstore, and many are the informally published work of nonprofit organizations, graduate students and young people themselves. On the other hand, this guide is more robust than it ever could have been before. Many of the most incisive, substantive and useful of the publications included have been written and published in the last six months. As new efforts emerge every day, and new resources respond to their stories and questions, this guide is necessarily a work in progress. While the growing volume of resources makes the work of assembling this guide difficult, it also demonstrates the steady growth of young people's involvement in school reform.

However incomplete, this guide has several audiences and ambitions. In the hands of educators and school reformers, it will hopefully build connections to — and respect for — a new set of actors and resources that share the commitment to improved learning. For young people, it aims to encourage new reform efforts and lend support to existing ones. For the adult allies of young reformers, its purpose is to lend the tools and knowledge needed to be effective partners. Let us know how effectively it meets these goals, and how we can improve its next iterations.

GUIDES AND TOOLKITS

California State PTA. (n.d.). S*tudent Involvement Handbook.* **Los Angeles, CA: California State PTA. Retrieved January 25, 2004, from** www.capta.org/sections/membership/student-involvement-full.cfm.

This California State PTA handbook presents a plan of action for school officials and PTA members who are serious about youth action. The range of information provided includes a rationale for why youth should be involved, as well as numerous examples of actions PTA/PTSA participants can undertake to promote projects that benefit and excite both youth and adults. One of the notable sections of the handbook covers recruitment and retention of young people, a challenge for many groups and organizations that desire to build stronger relationships with youth.

Dingerson, L., & Hay, S.H. (2004). *Co/Motion: A Guide to Youth-Led Social Change* **(Rev. ed.). Washington, DC: Alliance for Justice. Order information retrieved January 25, 2004, from** www.allianceforjustice.org/research_publications/publications/collection/pub_comotionguide.html.

This guide is a comprehensive resource aimed directly at young people attempting to make a difference in their schools, communities and in society at large. The guide is written from a social justice perspective, beginning with a 50-year history of social movements in the United States and an analysis of power and social change. This context is followed by descriptions and advice regarding important stages and issues in a community organizing process: researching an issue, building community, planning, taking action, facilitating meetings, telling the story and working with the media, managing conflict, budget planning and evaluating success. The 245-page guide is not a curriculum or collection of activities; instead, it is a guide for young people and their allies, rich with examples, stories and suggested actions. While not specifically focused on school change, *Co/Motion* does offer examples and strategies relevant to school-focused efforts.

Fletcher, A. (2003). *Meaningful Student Involvement: Guide to Inclusive School Change.* **Olympia, WA: The Freechild Project. Retrieved January 25, 2004, from** www.soundout.org/MSIguide.pdf.

Adam Fletcher, creator of soundout.org — a Web site dedicated to meaningful student involvement, developed this guide to lay out the process of engaging students in

every facet of education. Undergirded by a set of "keys" to meaningful student involvement — practical and empowering involvement, integrated engagement strategies and activities, and supportive adults, among other principles — the guide aims to improve the quality of schools through inclusive and active student engagement. Two tools are presented to assist school communities in identifying, targeting and implementing effective engagement strategies — the Ladder of Student Involvement in Schools, adapted from Roger Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation, and the Dimensions of Meaningful Student Involvement. Fletcher outlines what meaningful involvement looks like at every level — elementary, middle and high school — in addition to outlining roles for staff and administrators in partnering with youth. The guide concludes by presenting examples of meaningful student involvement in researching, advocating, planning, teaching, evaluating and decision making in schools.

Fletcher, A., Nishida, M., & Williamson, G. (2001). *Meaningful Student Involvement — An Idea Guide for Schools.* **Olympia, WA: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.k12.wa.us/titlevparta/yes/pubdocs/studentinvolvement.pdf.

This guide provides a full range of roles and responsibilities that students can take on at the classroom, school and district levels to support and maintain school change. Broken into idea sections for students, teachers, building administrators and district officials, the guide offers sketches of student participation in action, and provides an edited laundry list of "within-school" opportunities for students to affect school change. Practically written, the guide also lightly introduces four outcomes of meaningful student involvement as identified by Alfie Kohn in *Choices for Children* as the rationale for inclusion: positive effects on general well-being, behavior and values, academic achievement, and the effects on teachers.

School Change Collaborative. (2000). *Listening to Student Voices.* **Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Excerpts and order information retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.nwrel.org/scpd/scc/studentvoices.

Listening to Student Voices is a toolkit for K–12 educational leaders who are interested in including students in school improvement initiatives. The materials, developed by the School Change Collaborative, have supported continuous school improvement for over 20 years. The toolkit recognizes the importance of student voice by promoting the following principles: 1) students are important stakeholders in their own education; 2) student views are distinct from adult perspectives; 3) students who become involved in improvement initiatives reap numerous benefits; 4) by enlisting students in a school's self-study workforce, students assist a school with self-improvement; and 5) committed students help move the process along. The toolkit contains an informational brochure, an introductory booklet, an overview video, and four school stories offering the perspectives of principals, teachers and students in diverse settings.

DOCUMENTATION, RESEARCH AND INITIATIVE PROFILES

Bass, K., Chace, Z., Chow, M., Nguyen, H., Olsen, L., & Valentine, M. (2002). *The Need for Change Is Now… Students Demand Justice in Their Schools.* **Oakland, CA: California Tomorrow. Order information retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.californiatomorrow.org/publications.

"In 2001, a group of multiethnic, multicultural, multilingual high school students in San Jose, California, worked together with Californians for Justice (CFJ), and organized a successful campaign that made the East Side Union High School District (ESUHSD) change the way they deal with issues of race, culture and language." These words — written by high school students at California Tomorrow — sum up *The Need for Change Is Now*, a publication documenting a youth-led drive for educational equity in California. The campaign (and the publication) followed a basic organizing framework: raising the issue, collecting data through youth-led research, organizing peers to demand new policy commitments, and working with district officials to implement demands. The results: the district's superintendent and students are working together to create a bilingual certification program, improve information on college access, and implement anti-racist trainings, among other tangible victories. *The Need for Change Is Now* includes numerous quotes from young organizers and other students, results of students' research, and in-depth descriptions of the campaign.

Berman, S.H. (2003, September). "Practicing Democracy in High School." *Educational Leadership, 61*(1). **Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Available for purchase online at** www.ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/200309/toc.html.

Working intentionally over the last decade, the Hudson Public School District has been making strides in preparing its students for active democracy. In doing so, they have created significant and multiple avenues for student involvement in the schools. This has particularly been the case at the high school level. In "Practicing Democracy in High School," Berman outlines several initiatives that the district has undertaken to support student participation in democratic self-governance. Students experience curricular supports in this process — for example, all ninth-graders take a gateway course focused on social responsibility and civic engagement. Students also experience supportive structures for engaging in democratic self-governance. These include: breaking the school population down into interest-based clusters and smaller communities of no more than 110 students; creating a regular block of time for smaller clusters to discuss school issues; and having clear avenues for submitting and acting upon student proposals for change. Berman asserts that providing authentic opportunities to practice and participate in democracy is doable, even in traditionally-sized high schools. He further reflects that regular and intentional engagement of all students brings public schools closer to their historic mission, shapes meaningful instruction while inspiring professional development, and, most importantly, prepares students for active participation in the larger democracy.

Cervone, B. (2002, May). *Taking Democracy in Hand: Youth Action for Educational Change in the San Francisco Bay Area.* **Providence, RI: What Kids Can Do with The Forum for Youth Investment. Retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.whatkidscando.org/takingdemocracy.pdf **and** www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/papers/takingdemocracy.pdf.

Taking Democracy in Hand highlights youth involvement in education reform efforts in California's Bay Area. Reflecting on these efforts, the paper discusses the parallel "wins" of both political victories and youth engagement and capacity building. In doing so, it makes the case that politics and engagement hold equal value when youth are primary agents in educational reform. Specifically, the paper discusses what works in youth-adult part-

nerships and the power of making connections across issues, groups and strategies. The challenges faced by activists complete the story. These challenges include: engaging "un-involved" youth — students whose lack of active participation in reform efforts is linked to a long-term disconnection from schools; difficulties linking with and a lack of recognition by adult-run school reform groups that fail to ally themselves with youth action efforts; and addressing critical questions for future growth of an emerging field.

Mediratta, K., & Fruchter, N. (2001, August). *Mapping the Field of Organizing for School Improvement: A Report on Education Organizing in Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, the Mississippi Delta, New York City, Philadelphia, San Francisco and Washington, DC.* **New York, NY: New York University, Institute for Education and Social Policy, with California Tomorrow, Designs for Change, and Southern Echo. Retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.nyu.edu/iesp/publications/cip/mapping/mapping_final_report.pdf.

This report documents education organizing efforts in Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, the Mississippi Delta, New York City, Philadelphia, the San Francisco Bay Area and Washington, D.C. The report maps the efforts of youth, adult and intergenerational organizing groups, citing patterns related to the geographic locations, organizing methods and goals, political contexts, and access of the various organizing group types. Youth organizing groups are strongest in places such as the Bay Area and Los Angeles, whereas adult-only organizing has the largest concentrations in Chicago and New York. The report details a landscape that uncovers some of the similar and divergent goals of adult-only and youth-only groups, as well as discussing how intergenerational organizing groups function. While the report touches broadly on each of the three types of organizing groups, it zeroes in enough to provide a great deal of information about the characteristics and challenges of youth-led organizing groups.

Johnson, J.H. (1991). "Student Voice: Motivating Students through Empowerment." (Special issue). *OSSC Bulletin, 35*(2). **(ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED337875). Order through the Educator's Reference Desk, online at** www.eduref.org.

Students who have a voice in the educational process feel "a greater sense of ownership" in that process, increasing school effectiveness and promoting greater student

engagement. Unfortunately, this understanding runs at odds with a common view that student empowerment threatens the power of school officials. Incorporating student voice into the administration requires cooperation among all school and community members. This monograph examines issues and challenges in giving students a voice in the educational process, as well as motivating them through empowerment. The first chapter offers a definition of student voice and a discussion of its evolution. The second chapter presents a review of motivational theories from the psychological and business management perspectives. Chapter three examines the correlation between student input and engagement in the school community. Finally, chapter four describes strategies for developing student voice, examines three common problems associated with student empowerment models, and presents the experiences of an Oregon high school.

Murray, S.R., & Wood, G.H. (1999). *Creating a Democratic Learning Community: The Case Study of Federal Hocking High School. Part of the Transforming Learning Communities (TLC) Project.* **Columbus, OH: Ohio State Department of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED436839). Order through the Educator's Reference Desk, online at** www.eduref.org.

Creating a Democratic Learning Community is a detailed case study of school governance and reform, highlighting the efforts of teachers, students and administrators to transform Federal Hocking High School into a democratic learning community. Chronicling efforts spanning from the 1992–93 to the 1998–99 school years, this documentation begins as a story about teacher-led efforts to make small changes in an almost "no win" school environment situation. The story unfolds as Federal Hocking tackles one issue at a time, including students in the governance and reform of the school. Examples of the meaningful participation of students include: student committees charged with addressing the major reform themes of school size and the lack of time to engage and build relationships between teachers and students, and a peer-appointed student government working directly with the principal on projects such as the student handbook and student appointments to teacher selection committees. The vision guiding the participation of students was summarized in this way, "If [students] are to become active members of the community upon graduation, the way to get them ready for that is to have them be members of the community while they are in school."

Reed, C.J. (1998, April). *Student Leadership and Restructuring: A Case Study.* **Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED424638). Order through the Educator's Reference Desk, online at** www.eduref.org.

How did students, teachers and administrators experience the involvement of students in restructuring initiatives at their school? To answer this central question, *Student Leadership and Restructuring* examines the experience of one urban high school, in which a large portion of the student body (38 percent) participated in leadership development activities and took part in an ongoing reform effort. The results of this study point to many of the consistent challenges to student involvement in school reform: inconsistent support from building leadership; tensions among teachers, students and administrators in relation to appropriate roles for students; and inconsistent institutionalization of student roles. Reed's case study is particularly valuable in that it looks beyond student governments to other sources of leadership capacity building inside schools, including identity-based organizations and coalitions that respond to particular problems and issues.

Scheie, D., with M. Robillos, M. Bischoff, & B. Langley. (2003, November). *Organizing for Youth Development and School Improvement: Final Report from a Strategic Assessment.* **Prepared for the Edward W. Hazen Foundation. Minneapolis, MN: Rainbow Research, Inc. Retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.hazenfoundation.org/ PDF%20Final%20Hazen%20Public%20Report.pdf.

In a strategic assessment conducted by Rainbow Research, Inc., the Hazen Foundation explores major themes in its youth development and public education strategy. The assessment examines and frames the impact — at both the individual and community levels — of the Foundation's work to support youth and other education-focused organizing efforts around the country. The report also describes trends among groups doing youth organizing for school improvement as well as future directions for strengthening this area of work. One of the most interesting sections of the report highlights the Foundation's support from 1999–2003 in two geographic areas — New York and Los Angeles — and presents them as case studies.

What Kids Can Do. (2001). *Making Youth Known: More Than Service: Philadelphia Students Join a Union to Improve Their Schools.* **Providence, RI: What Kids Can Do. Based on a case study by the What Kids Can Do staff in** *Youth Acts, Community Impacts: Stories of Youth Engagement with Real Results.* **Tolman, J., & Pittman, K. with B. Cervone, et al. (2001). Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc. Retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.whatkidscando.org/PhilaUnion.pdf.

Reflecting on the contributions of the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU), former Philadelphia superintendent David Hornbeck says that he should have begun "treating students as vehicles of school reform much earlier, in contrast to seeing them in the first several years primarily as the objects of school reform." New respect from educational leaders is just one of the many impacts of PSU's seven years of work, according to this case study developed by What Kids Can Do and the Forum for Youth Investment. PSU's blend of leadership development and community organizing has resulted in major funding victories, important curricular reforms, and the development of a new generation of urban school reform leaders. *More Than Service* documents these effects of PSU's work, along with the approach to engaging and supporting youth organizers that has made it possible.

Youth Strategy Project. (2004). *Chronology of California School District Takeovers.* **Oakland, CA: The Data Center. Retrieved January 25, 2004, from** www.datacenter.org/research/oaklandtakeover.pdf

This documentation effort by a group of young people working with the Youth Strategy Project chronicles the history of school district takeovers from 1978–2003 in the state of California. Written from a social justice perspective, the authors define various types of takeovers, including takeovers in which authority for schools is given over to the mayor or the state. The report makes connections and outlines relationships between various actions and decisions that have occurred over the last 25 years involving or leading up to takeovers. Several links within the electronic version of the report provide the background and history of various pieces of legislation, newspaper articles, key players and organizations, and other public documents. The authors remind readers that this documentation effort tells a story that is being recounted across the country as many school districts — the majority within urban communities of color — face takeover situations.

FRAMEWORKS AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Apple, M.W., & Beane, J.A. (Eds.). (1995). *Democratic Schools.* **Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Excerpts and order information retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.ascd.org/publications/books/1995apple/ 1995appletoc.html.

Democratic Schools shares the stories of schools in which the structures — decision making, policies, governance and culture — and curriculum — teaching and content — are rooted in democratic principles like the open flow of ideas, critical reflection, popular rule, the rights of individuals, equity, and faith in the capacity of people to solve problems. Apple and Beane, in their introduction, locate current efforts to democratize education in a long tradition of progressive education and identify the features of democratic schools. This introduction serves as the context for chapters by the leaders of four schools — Central Park East Secondary School in New York City, the Rindge School of Technical Arts in Cambridge, Massachusetts, La Escuela Fratney in Milwaukee, and a program within Marquette Middle School (now called Georgia O'Keefe Middle School) in Madison, Wisconsin.

Bolmeier, E. (1995, November/December). "6 Steps to Pupil Participation in Democratic School Control." *The Clearing House, 69*(2), 106–111. **Available through some libraries; order large-scale reprints at** www.heldref.org.

Originally written in 1947 and reprinted in 1995, *6 Steps to Pupil Participation in Democratic School Control* is described as having wielded considerable influence in its day among schools seeking to democratize the school environment to the fullest possible extent. In it, Bolmeier outlines a process for student involvement in school governance and classroom reform. Steps in the process include consistent exposure and experience in democratic processes; opportunity and structure for participation; appropriate support from adults; a physical environment conducive to the reforms being proposed; administrative support for proposed reforms; and effective guidance. While the article sticks to reform as implemented only at the classroom level, the steps in the process are adaptable to broader roles and lay out a blueprint for engagement that can be seen in youth action for educational change movements today.

Goldman, G., & Newman, J.B. (1998). *Empowering Students to Transform Schools.* **Thousand Oaks, CA; Corwin Press, Inc. Order information retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.corwinpress.com/book.aspx?pid=3598.

The authors of this book take a "total quality education" approach in creating schools that assist in mobilizing community change. They begin by informing readers on how schools can take charge of their own transformation by getting students involved. *Empowering Students to Transform Schools* presents several examples on how teachers and administrators can work as partners with young people in order to begin a plan of action. In addition to pointing to key issues in relation to today's youth, the book provides some insight on where to direct our schools for tomorrow. This addresses the possibility that we can simultaneously develop future leaders, while converting schools into learning centers for the entire community.

Hosang, D. (2003). *Youth and Community Organizing Today.* **Occasional Papers Series on Youth Organizing, No. 02. New York, NY: Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing. Retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.fcyo.org/Papers_no2_v4.qxd.pdf.

Part of the ongoing Occasional Papers Series on Youth Organizing, this report chronicles youth organizing efforts in the U.S. It examines youth-led efforts, from the earliest days just before and during the height of the Civil Rights era to more recent efforts to confront the policy environments in the 1980s and 1990s that brought with them the erosion of institutional services and supports for many youth and a rise in negative and anti-social conceptions of young people. In doing so, this second paper in the series paints a rich and full portrait of youth organizing efforts across a range of issues. Because school represents the largest institutional context for most youth, the author zeroes in on school-focused organizing in the telling of the history and current status of youth organizing, highlighting the efforts and successes of the Carolina Alliance for Fair Treatment, the Colorado Progressive Coalition's Students 4 Justice, and Generation Y in Chicago, among others. The author identifies unifying elements across geographic-, constituency- and issue-based contexts, including: a) an integrated approach to social change; b) the value placed on political education of youth leaders and members; and c) the central role of committed staff organizers. The author suggests that youth organizing, as a young field, has a challenging road ahead as the leadership seeks to permanently put youth-led organizing projects on the map of social change.

Patmor, G.L, II. (May 1999). "Involving Students in School Decision Making." *NASSP Bulletin, 83*(607), **74–78. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals. Order through the Publications Archive at** www.nassp.org/proquest.

This article outlines the results of a survey given to 236 Kentucky high school students and school-based council members (consisting of a total of 14 principals, 39 teachers and 21 parents statewide) during the 1997–98 school year. The main purposes of the study were to determine the rate at which students were participating in school decision making and to assess their level of willingness to become involved. Additionally, the research compared students' perceptions toward decision making with council members (school principals, teachers, parents). Only 30% of students and 35% of council members indicated that there were current opportunities where students were participating as decision makers. However, 77% of student responses indicated they would like to be involved in school decision making. A slight majority (55%) of council members indicated a desire for student involvement. Administrators (principals) demonstrated the most support for student views. Principal responses of 70% desiring involvement were much closer to student views (77%) than either teachers or parents (each with 52%). The author made several recommendations to school leaders (principals and/or school councils) based on the results of this study. Among the recommendations was a call for clear and expanded avenues for student awareness and involvement in decision-making responsibilities.

Pittman, K., & Tolman, J. (2002). *New Directions in School Reform: Youth Focused-Strategies versus Youth-Centered Reform.* **Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc. Retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/workingpapers/newdirections.pdf.

According to Pittman and Tolman, "Many of the reform strategies currently shaping the nation's high schools incorporate strategies to increase youth voice, choice, challenge and connection to school and community. It is not clear, however, that these youth-focused strategies stem from deeper changes in belief systems, in policies and structure, or in budget and accountability. Implementing youth-focused improvement strategies is not the same as creating youth-centered learning environments." *New Directions in School Reform* is an attempt to chart a youth-centered path to high school reform — pulling out key themes from what we know about youth development

and youth engagement, and beginning to translate these themes into the language of schools and school reform. One of these defining themes is that young people become central actors in school reform efforts.

Strauss, I.W. (1992, April). "Restructuring School Practice through Students' Voices." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA. (ERIC Document Reporduction Service No. ED347643). Order through the Educator's Reference Desk, online at www.eduref.org.

Though written in the style of a formal research paper, this article is essentially the reflection of a school principal on a six-month research process conducted in her urban middle school. During this time, a graduate student engaged students as co-researchers to identify and address a range of school-related concerns and issues — the absence or presence of caring connections between adults and students, unfairness in the school's discipline system, and shortcomings in the physical education curriculum, for instance. Strauss credits the presence of the researcher, acting as an "external change catalyst," and the researcher's efforts to build the trust and respect of the school principal for much of the venture's success." According to Strauss, "The change agent collected information which forced me to confront issues I had not chosen to deal with, to see myself and my leadership style through a different lens, and to show a vulnerability often hidden from adults on the campus."

COMMENTARY AND REFLECTION

Cushman, K. (1994, September). "Empowering Students: Essential Schools' Missing Link." *Horace, 11*(1), 1–7. Retrieved January 26, 2004, from www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/86.

"Students are too often the forgotten heart of school reform — its whole purpose and its major resource. How can their power be nurtured and tapped as schools work toward more active learning, more personal and decent school climates, and higher standards and expectations?" Cushman poses this question as she reflects upon and examines the implications of a student network meeting comprised of 250 young people involved in Essential School reform. Essential schools are organized around the belief that all students deserve practice in the habits of mind characterizing a democratic citizenry. This article

muses on the tension between theory and practice and the energy this tension creates for meaningful student involvement. Cushman argues that students who experience the type of democratizing education that Essential schools seek to offer also have a need to be supported by others in the same position. The article ends with reflection on the critical themes for supporting students as they network with peers and once they return to their home schools to implement ideas and action plans.

Kaba, M. (2000/2001, December/January). "They Listen to Me…But They Don't Act on It: Contradictory Consciousness and Student Participation in Decision-making." *The High School Journal, 84*(2), 21–34. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Available through many libraries; order at http://uncpress.unc.edu/bm-journalsbuy.html.

The author gives a thorough account of students' perceptions of participating on local school councils (LSCs), beginning with an extensive overview of the literature on youth involvement on councils. The experiences of Chicago's student LSC representatives were investigated over a six-month period during the 1996–97 school year. In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty students to explore why students think they should participate in school decision making. The author reported that students honestly felt that they have a "right" to participate in decisions affecting their education and, for the most part, did not feel intimidated by adults on the councils. However, Kaba argues that, based on the findings, students still seem to occupy the subordinate role in most of the situations and are therefore constrained to promote significant change.

Kohn, A. (1993, September). "Choices for Children: Why and How to Let Students Decide." *Phi Delta Kappan, 75*(1), 8–20. Retrieved January 26, 2004, from www.alfiekohn.org/teaching/cfc.htm.

In "Choices For Children," Kohn raises the question of children and youth's participation in making decisions and presents a rationale for this kind of participation in the school context. Kohn addresses many of the common objections and barriers to providing more venues in which young people engage in meaningful decision making. These objections include beliefs that students cannot or should not bear the responsibility of actually making decisions about a range of educational issues or more general concerns about students' lack of maturity and experience and their ability to make reasonable or respon-

sible choices within a school context. Addressing these core concerns with positive approaches in support of decision making, Kohn challenges status quo thinking and presents a case for students' self-determination as a right as basic to young people as it is to adults.

Nelson, R., & Frederick, L. (1994, April). "Can Kids Design Curriculum? Yes!" *Education Digest, 59*(8), **42. Order through the Search Archives at** www.eddigest.com.

This article discusses the Learning-Centered Curriculum-Making Project, which searches for a framework to coordinate and validate potential instructional strategies, as well as align learning practices with the strengths and developmental levels of students. In efforts to make learning experiences more purposeful, students were led through techniques to collectively develop units with teachers, in order to enhance classroom dialogue and participation. These techniques led students through three steps: 1) selecting the target theme (the focus for developing the curriculum); 2) establishing guiding questions to serve as the scope and sequence of the thematic unit; and 3) designing classroom instructional activities. The students themselves chose the activities that best suited their developmental levels. Performance-based assessments were used to evaluate the curriculum. According to the authors, students met the learning objectives they (the researchers) set across all ability levels. Although some teachers at the school had difficulty thinking of students as curriculum designers, Nelson and Frederick argue that teachers need to capitalize on students' comprehension of educational activities in order to determine which instructional practices best fit the context of a particular class.

YOUTH VOICES ON SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL REFORM

Cushman, K. (2003, April). *Fires in the Bathroom: Advice to Teachers from High School Students.* **New York, NY: The New Press. Excerpts and order information retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www. whatkidscando.org/Publications/A_FiresDirectory.html.

Fires in the Bathroom brings together the voices, experiences and questions of 40 teenagers from three cities to create a practical, compelling guide for teachers committed to working with urban high school students. Built primarily out of direct quotes from conversations with and among these young people, Cushman's book also

includes exercises for teachers intended to help them put the teenagers' advice to work in their classrooms. For the students who contributed to *Fires in the Bathroom*, key characteristics of good teaching include knowing students well, respect, high expectations, relevance, and passion for the content being taught.

Hughes, E., & Leinin, J. (2002, July). *A Snapshot of the "Perfect" School* **(Rev. ed.). Eugene, OR: Western Regional Resource Center. Excerpts and order information retrieved January 26, 2004, from** http://interact.uoregon.edu/wrrc/Snapshot.html.

Written to capture the perspectives of students with disabilities, this article documents student experiences in schools, in courses and with teachers. A great deal of the text is devoted to the direct voices of students interviewed and explores themes such as the qualities students want in teachers, experiences with curriculum and pedagogy, peer reactions to students with disabilities, and teacher reactions to students with disabilities. These "snapshots" document an important point of view of school from a group of students whose experiences are often similar, but at times divergent from other students in very important ways.

Irby, M., Pittman, K., & Tolman, J. (1999). *Motivation for Learning: Youth Voices for Educational Change.* **Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc. Retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/mtvnlrn.pdf.

This transcript of student voices from a diverse range of schools in Alaska outlines characteristics of school environments that students themselves find most conducive to learning. Students discuss four "Rs" — relationships, roles, respect and reality. These are the pillars supporting the kind of school environments in which students succeed. The students' informal dialogue mirrors policy discussions that link the social and emotional environment of schools to positive gains in student learning. The dialogue ends with participants offering their priorities for an agenda for change.

Khawajkie, E., Müller, A., Niedermayer, S., & Jolis, C.U. (n.d.). *What Makes a Good Teacher? Children Speak Their Minds.* **Paris, France: UNESCO. Retrieved January 26, 2004, from** http://unesdoc. unesco.org/images/0010/001041/104124m.pdf.

This publication — printed in a multilingual formal that includes Spanish, French and English — adds children's

voices to the international dialogue on quality teaching. It features quotes and artwork submitted to an international children's contest, through which 8- to 12-year-olds were asked to represent their vision of good teaching. Quotes and pictures are organized by themes, for example, "a good teacher is a friend," equitable treatment, competence, fostering growth and development, and future focus. As much celebratory and inspirational as a systematic attempt to bring student voices to bear on an important educational issue, *What Makes a Good Teacher* provides one model for engaging younger children in educational change work.

Kushman, J.W. (Ed.). (1997, February). *Look Who's Talking Now: Student Views of Learning in Restructuring Schools.* **Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Summary retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.nwrel.org/scpd/scc/natspec/look.shtml.

Part research report, part reflection and part how-to guide, *Look Who's Talking Now* describes the process and products of bringing student voices into the Restructuring Collaborative, a multi-year school redesign effort of the regional education laboratories. The core of the publication consists of seven case studies of school reform research efforts that involved young people as researchers, participants in research, and sources of knowledge about schools. These case studies speak to both the process for engaging students — conducting surveys, asking students to examine data, supporting students as they participate in ongoing inquiry efforts — and the results of these efforts — reflections on their school experiences, and what they would like their schools to be like. These case studies are followed by an examination of patterns in what students have to say about their schools across the case studies, and by a set of recommendations for those committed to involving students in education reform efforts.

Nieto, S. (1994, Winter). "Lessons from Students on Creating a Chance to Dream." *Harvard Educational Review, 64*(4). **Order at** http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hepg/classics.htm.

Drawing on interviews with young people from a wide variety of ethnic, racial, linguistic and class backgrounds, Nieto presents case studies depicting student perspectives on a range of school policies and practices and the effects of racism and other forms of discrimination on students' education. Beginning with a criticism of some educators' attitudes toward students, the article argues that reform

cannot be a technical process. Rather, it is essentially a moral and political dilemma. Through the case studies, the author raises critical questions about such dilemmas as: To what extent is the curriculum at odds with the experiences and backgrounds of students? Are the languages and cultures of various students unacknowledged, devalued or hidden? What are the typical pedagogical experiences of students? Nieto goes on to link these types of questions to institutional racism and discrimination, and concludes with suggestions for the transformation of schools.

Cushman, K., Cervone, B., & Rowley, L. (Eds.). (2003, May). *The Schools We Need: Creating Small High Schools That Work for Us.* **A collaborative publication produced by What Kids Can Do, Inc., the Carnegie Corporation, and students attending Bronx New Century High Schools. Retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.whatkidscando.org/bronxbooklet.PDF.

There has been a steady trend in the development of small high schools, a departure from the large facilities designed for 1,000-plus students associated with the traditional high school. Research shows that there is great value to student learning in the intimate settings provided by smaller schools. Like numerous other school reform efforts, many pockets of the small schools movement are still very adult-driven. *The Schools We Need* weaves different sets of stories in which young people are primary actors in the development and shaping of small schools. This monograph includes testimonials of students who have helped organize small schools and are currently benefiting or have recently benefited from their endeavors. The authors present stories of student involvement in the planning of the facilities, curriculum and other activities throughout the monograph. The 20 student coauthors, who served as designers on the planning teams, share their views on making the transition from large to smaller schools, working with adults as partners, and having the eye-opening experience of recognizing their full potential as community leaders.

Sebring, P.B., et al. (1996, July). *Charting Reform in Chicago: The Students Speak.* **Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research. Summary and order information retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.consortium-chicago.org/publications/p0e03.html.

Charting Reform in Chicago, according to its opening lines, "seeks to give voice to students regarding their school experiences — how they describe their teachers

and peers, their classes, and their own efforts." Through a survey of 39,000 6th, 8th and 10th graders developed with the involvement of student and teacher advisory committees, the study's authors add students' appraisals of their schools and learning experiences to Chicago's ongoing school reform efforts. While personal accounts of students' experiences of the transition to high school are included, most of the findings presented are quantitative in nature — focusing on how engaged students are in their learning, whether they feel safe in their schools, and whether they feel cared for by their teachers, for instance. *Charting Reform in Chicago* reports that the percentage of students who feel teachers show them considerable personal concern, experience high expectations, feel peer support for academic work, feel safe, and are engaged academically drops off significantly as young people move from elementary to middle to high school. At the same time, students who experience higher expectations, a more collaborative classroom climate, more personal concern, and greater levels of safety are less likely to be absent, are more academically engaged, and are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities.

Students 4 Justice. (2001/2002). *Struggling to Succeed: Student Perspectives on Post-Bussing Reforms and Broken Promises at Denver's Manual High School* **and** *On the Outside Looking In: Racial Tracking at Denver's East High School.* **Denver, CO: Students 4 Justice, Colorado Progressive Coalition.** *On the Outside Looking In* **retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/fyi/2.2/summarys4j.pdf. **For more information visit** www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/fyi/2.2/fall2002voices.htm. **To order copies, contact** coprogressive@aol.com **or go to** www.progressivecoalition.org.

Struggling to Succeed and *On the Outside Looking In* are the products of student-led campaigns to fight for racial justice in two Denver public high schools. *On the Outside Looking In* draws together quantitative survey results, student quotes and school enrollment data to highlight a pattern of racial tracking that results from uneven access to information and support. *Struggling to Succeed* examines the impact of the end of bussing in the Denver schools, the break-up of a large high school into smaller units, and the pattern of racial segregation that resulted from each of these changes. In the process, the report provides valuable student insights into the growing small schools movement. The research presented in these two reports, along with students' consistent advocacy efforts, has resulted in media attention, commitments from administrators and changes in school policy.

Wasley, P.A., Hampel, R.L., & Clark, R.W. (1997). *Kids and School Reform.* **San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Order information retrieved January 26, 2004, from** www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0787910651.html**.**

The authors of *Kids and School Reform* set out on five years of research on schools in the midst of reform efforts, asking a simple question: What are the experiences of young people in changing schools? Through interviews and observations, Wasley and her colleagues looked for evidence of improved student outcomes, perceptions of the change process, and school features that seemed to make a genuine difference. The book that results from this research, while not primarily a compilation of student voices, includes extended excerpts from interviews with six students who form *Kids and School Reform's* central cast. Based on their interviews and observations, the authors identify several "key connections" that seem to result in better learning in schools: a combination of broad teacher repertoire and familiar routine; an integration of caring and high expectations; a blending of rigor and innovation; and a synergy between small scale and civil discourse. The schools included in the study are all part of the Coalition of Essential Schools, but are otherwise significantly different in scale, geography, demographics, etc.

MEDIA COVERAGE

Increasingly, young people's work as school reformers is making it into the news. Some of this news coverage is in the mainstream media — the nation's major newspapers, television networks and the like. In other cases, the education media is picking up on youth action for educational change. A few Web sites, such as those maintained by What Kids Can Do and Wire Tap, provide regularly updated scans of current news stories, including those featuring young people's educational reform work. But, perhaps the media outlets giving the most attention to these efforts are those run by young people themselves. What follows is a partial accounting of youth action for educational change in the news. It is not, and cannot be, comprehensive. But it gives an indication of the scope of

media outlets covering this topic, as well as the tenor and focus of their coverage.

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