

Albert Shanker

The former AFT president led the charge to defend public education by improving it. A new biography tells the story.

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By Richard D. Kahlenberg



PHOTOGRAPH BY RUSSELL CURTIS

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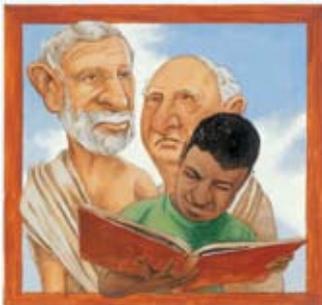
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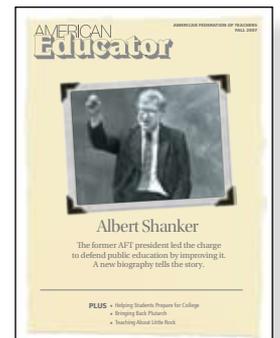
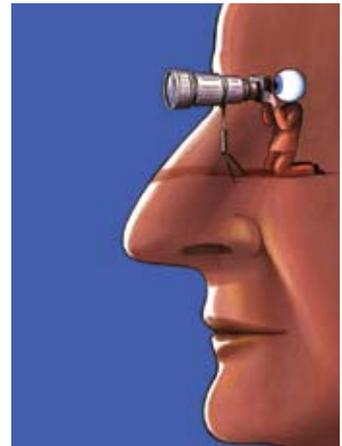
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PHOTOGRAPH BY CURTIS ACKERMAN

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Want to See the World? Go on Summer Sabbatical

Teachers often tell their students that the world is their classroom. Thanks to one man's generosity, teachers can more fully experience that world for themselves—and inspire their students with a sense of adventure.

A decade ago, businessman Raymond Plank, chairman of the board of the Apache Corporation, established a program in his hometown of Minneapolis to provide teachers with summer sabbaticals that they themselves design. The positive influence of Plank's Latin teacher in the 1930s prompted him to create such a program. It grew into the Fund for Teachers, a public foundation that offers professional learning opportunities that take American educators around the globe. Fund grants are awarded to pre-K- through 12th-grade teachers with more than three years experience. To win the grants, teachers submit a proposal that outlines how their summer fellowship will make them a better teacher.

Applications opened October 1, 2007, for summer sabbaticals in 2008 and must be submitted online. The application deadline is January 31, 2008. The program is limited to certain parts of the country, although Fund officials ultimately want to raise enough money to take the program nationwide. Currently, teachers in 29 states, Puerto Rico, and more than 100 cities are eligible to apply. (To see if you are eligible, check the map posted here: www.fundforteachers.org/apply.html.)



This summer, two teachers toured schools and visited classrooms as they studied how math is taught in Singapore.

To date, more than 2,500 teachers from 47 states have studied and traveled throughout the U.S. and 91 other countries on all seven continents. The Fund has supported an array of learning experiences for teachers including the exploration of active volcanoes in Hawaii, the study of Islam through Morocco's political, social, and economic development, and a trek across Laos to observe Hmong culture.

To learn more, visit www.fundforteachers.org.



WORTHWHILE WEB SITES

Constitution DotOrg

Typically, teachers must take students on field trips to view our nation's most important documents. They're tucked away in libraries or stored under glass in museums where visitors stand in line to catch a glimpse of American history. For teachers who are tired of saying "No pushing!" and "Don't touch anything!" and students tired of standing in lines, there's good news: As of this fall, there's no more waiting. A comprehensive collection of Constitution-related sources and materials is now available online.

ConSource provides access to roughly 1,100 of this country's most important founding documents from more than 90 archives across the eastern seaboard. Several important collections are currently available, including James Madison's notes on the Constitutional Convention, the Federalist Papers, and the Bill of Rights' legislative history. More documents will become available on the site throughout the year. For instance, George Washington's private and public correspondence is expected by December.

With original constitutional sources located under one Web address, students can examine the Constitution firsthand, and gain greater insight into the ideals that brought our laws and freedoms into being. ConSource is a much-needed resource since the general public's knowledge of the Constitution is sorely lacking. According to a poll by



the National Constitution Center, 62 percent of Americans cannot name all three branches of the Federal government; 84 percent believe that the famous phrase

"all men are created equal" is in the U.S. Constitution; and one in five do not know that the President is Commander in Chief of the U.S. Armed Forces.

To freshen up on your constitutional history and provide students with the keys to understanding our nation's founding, visit www.ConSource.org.

Wonder Girls

With all the famous men in science—Einstein, Newton, Watson and Crick—young girls may wonder, are there any women scientists, too? The answer, of course, is yes. But the truth is their numbers are few.

That's why the National Academy of Sciences has created www.iwaswondering.org, a Web site that features the accomplishments of contemporary women in science and the various scientific careers that young girls (and boys) can pursue. The site draws from *Women's Adventures in Science*, a biography series for middle-school students that chronicles the lives of today's working female scientists.

Diane France, a bone detective, Shirley Ann Jackson, a subatomic explorer, and Adriana Ocampo, a space geologist, among others, are profiled on the site, hosted by

a teenage cartoon character named Lia.

Research has shown that girls' participation in the sciences often lags behind that of their male peers. For instance, a report by the National Center for Education Standards (2000), *Trends in Educational Equity of Girls and Women*, noted that in fourth grade the number of girls and boys who like math and science is about the same. But by eighth grade, twice as many boys as girls show an interest in these subjects, a finding posted on www.iwaswondering.org.

Besides interactive games, the site also provides a parent-teacher guide with suggestions for engaging girls in science in the classroom and at home. These include making

sure to select girl volunteers just as often as boys and to praise girls for their intellectual contributions.

Have your students visit www.iwaswondering.org to start inspiring a new generation of female scientists today.



The Agenda That Saved Public Education

Albert Shanker was president of the AFT from 1974 until his death in 1997. His ideas about teacher unionism, improving schools, and the importance of public education have substantially shaped the perspective of the modern AFT. In a new biography of Shanker, excerpted below, the author, Richard Kahlenberg, argues that Al's "biggest accomplishment of all was surely to preserve a system of public education against those who would like to see it dismantled in favor of a system of private-school vouchers." Explaining his plan to defend public education by improving it, Al often said, "you can't beat something with nothing." He redefined the role of union leader to include advocacy of education reform, and was constantly trying out thoughtful ideas for improvement. The need to counter bad ideas with good ones is as vital today as it was 10 or 20 years ago. All of us in education still have much to learn from his life.

—EDITORS

By Richard D. Kahlenberg

Albert Shanker was a man constantly on the go. As president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in New York City and the AFT nationally, he was forever giving speeches, negotiating contracts, testifying before Congress, walking picket lines, and meeting with

Richard D. Kahlenberg is senior fellow at The Century Foundation and author of numerous articles and books, including All Together Now: Creating Middle-Class Schools Through Public School Choice. This article is excerpted from Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy, by Richard D. Kahlenberg, © 2007 Richard D. Kahlenberg. Used by arrangement with Columbia University Press, N.Y. All rights reserved.

unionist and human rights activists abroad. He was constantly churning out new ideas, which he outlined in some 1,300 weekly "Where We Stand" columns, commenting on education reform, unions, race relations, and politics. He was passionate about his work, traveling 300,000 to 500,000 miles a year.

He started down this extraordinary path in 1960. Back then, collective bargaining for teachers was generally thought impossible because it was illegal for public employees to go on strike. Shanker and a handful of other teachers in New York City convinced several thousand colleagues to break the law and risk being fired. Because the school board could not dismiss all the striking teachers, it backed down and eventually recognized the right of the UFT to bargain on behalf of teachers. Other teachers joined on, and from 1960 to 1968, union representation grew from five percent of New York City's teaching staff to 97 percent.¹ With collective bargaining came a huge change in the culture of teaching. Teachers had been accustomed to being pushed around: They were poorly paid, forced to eat their lunches while supervising students, and told to bring a doctor's note if they were out sick. Collective bargaining brought them higher salaries and also greater dignity.²

"He was the George Washington of the teaching profession," said union leader Tom Mooney. "He's the one who rallied us to liberate ourselves."³

As head of a union of teachers, Shanker stood at the intersection of the two great engines for equality in the U.S.—public education and organized labor. He once told an interviewer, "If I didn't have to make a living, I would have done this as a volunteer."⁴

Between his role as a father of modern teacher unions and his role as a leading education reformer, Shanker was arguably the single individual most responsible for preserving public education in the U.S. during the last quar-



Shanker teaches class at the Harvard University School of Education in the fall of 1987. Inset, family photograph of Shanker with his sister, Pearl.



WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVE



WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVE

The early days. Left, Shanker as a young teacher in New York City. Above, he hunts and pecks for yet another “Where We Stand,” the weekly New York Times column he wrote from 1970 until his death in 1997.

and influence. “He always felt that if there hadn’t been good public education, then certainly we would never have been able to do what we did,” his sister Pearl notes.⁷ His childhood friend Ed Flower says that for Shanker personally, everything he achieved was not through any personal contacts that his parents had—they were poor people without influence—it was through public education. As the head of the teachers’ union, Flower says, Shanker wanted to do well for his members. But education “was a be all and end all,” because Shanker believed “what these kids are going to learn in school, what they are going to achieve mentally, [is] going to set the rest of their lives.”⁸ Years later, Shanker would write: “Whenever the problems connected with school reform seem especially tough, I think about this. I think about what public education gave me—a kid who couldn’t even speak English when I entered first grade. I think about what it has given me and can give to countless numbers of other kids like me. And I know that keeping public education together is worth whatever it takes.”⁹ Shanker argued:

Our public schools have played a major part in the building of a nation.

They brought together countless children from different cultures—to share a common experience, to develop understanding and tolerance of differences. The public schools “Americanized”; they taught our language and our history.... Only public schools are designed to educate every child; only public schools serve to bring many diverse groups together.¹⁰

ter of the 20th century. Though Shanker held no public office, he became supremely influential, constantly invoked in education circles. “In the course of the past two decades,” educator and author E. D. Hirsch, Jr., wrote in 1997, “Albert Shanker made himself

the most important figure in American education.”⁵ While secretaries of education came and went, as did presidents of the much larger National Education Association (NEA), Shanker endured, and he outdid and out-thought all of them. If Horace Mann was the key educational figure in the 19th century and John Dewey in the first half of the 20th century, Albert Shanker has stood as the most influential figure since. As a central thinker, writer, and player in all the great education debates of the last quarter century—whether school restructuring, teacher quality, or education standards—he was, journalist Sara Mosle argues, “our Dewey.”⁶

Shanker’s commitment was both philosophical and personal. Public education had allowed Shanker, the son of a newspaper deliveryman, to rise to a position of power

A New Type of Union Leader

Shanker became the most influential education reformer of the second half of the 20th century by utterly transforming the role of a teachers’ union leader. Shanker saw that by the early 1980s the great labor agenda of the previous epoch—Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare, the minimum wage, and civil rights—had run into a political cul-de-sac. But education still had political backing. Education groups had been fairly isolated as a community, but that changed when, for the first time, governors and business people became intimately involved in education in the 1980s. Only one leader from the education community fully recognized this change, educator Michael Usdan says. “Shanker was really kind of the prime ambassador” of the education community to business people and governors.¹¹

Education reform has been around as long as there has been education, but if there was a turning point in recent times, it came on April 26, 1983, with the publication of a report called *A Nation at Risk*. Against the backdrop of

“I think about what public education gave me—a kid who couldn’t even speak English when I entered first grade.... And I know that keeping public education together is worth whatever it takes.”

—*Albert Shanker*

declining American dominance following the war in Vietnam, the Iran hostage crisis, and the collapse of the American automobile industry, the Reagan Administration’s National Commission on Excellence in Education warned that poor test scores compared to other developed countries threatened to further undermine American economic competitiveness with Japan and West Germany.¹² *A Nation at Risk* was different from the numerous other education reports released each year: People listened. Education historian Diane Ravitch called *A Nation at Risk* “the most important education reform document of the 20th century.”¹³ And Albert Shanker’s role in the report’s reception was pivotal.

There was a great deal of pressure within labor and education circles to be critical of anything associated with Ronald Reagan.¹⁴ Recalls education-policy expert Jim Kelly, “The first reaction from ... almost all education leaders was to trash the report.”¹⁵ The major educational organizations—the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the American Association of School Administrators, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the National School Boards Association—were all cool to the report. The NEA’s Don Cameron called *A Nation at Risk* and other similar reports “the usual doom and gloom.”¹⁶ Milt Goldberg, the executive director of the National Commission on Excellence in Education recalls that the NEA “didn’t like it at all” and that he was hissed at when he spoke to an NEA convention audience about the report.¹⁷ The NEA executive committee, Cameron later said, “believed that the *A Nation at Risk* report and its attendant publicity had no legs, and that this latest incarnation of education

reform was just another passing fad that would fade like the morning haze.”¹⁸

When *A Nation at Risk* was released in 1983, Shanker and a group of top union officials sat together and read the document. Sandra Feldman, who succeeded Shanker as the president of the AFT in 1997, recalled: “We all had this visceral reaction to it. You know, ‘This is horrible. They’re attacking teachers.’ Everyone was watching Al to hear his response. When Al finished reading the report, he closed the book and looked up at all of us and said, ‘The report is right, and not only that, we should say that before our members.’”¹⁹

Shanker’s embrace of *A Nation at Risk* represented an enormous departure from past AFT policy. Here was a major union leader endorsing a report that said public education was in trouble, proposed merit pay, had the strong backing of business, de-emphasized the importance of labor’s equality agenda, and put emphasis on all kids rather than just the poor. It was “absolutely momentous, a watershed moment” for the AFT, says longtime staffer Greg Humphrey.²⁰ Said Sandra Feldman: “It was very significant. The union hadn’t thought that way before.”²¹

Moreover, the AFT’s embrace of *A Nation at Risk* gave Shanker a seat at the reform table that might not have been available had he simply been obstructionist. Says education reformer Marc Tucker: “He saw the future coming and he thought that teachers could lead it and not get rolled over by it.”²² Shanker knew that by becoming part of the debate, he could seek to influence and shape it.²³ Governors and others with creative ideas would often go to the AFT for their input, because there was a possibility the AFT might be open. The NEA, by contrast, was seen as inflexible.²⁴ Educator Michael Usdan says Shanker’s embrace of *A Nation at Risk* helped him navigate the new “politics of education” in the early 1980s. While teacher unions were being reviled as special-interest groups that blocked promising reforms, Shanker let loose with a flurry of his own reform proposals that one newspaper said made the AFT look as much like a think tank as a union.²⁵

Proposing Peer Assistance and Review

As the issue of teacher quality gained salience following the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, critics were complaining that the system of tenure, backed by union lawyers, made it virtually impossible to fire inadequate teachers. Shanker was willing to rethink the issue, although he was opposed to abolishing tenure. Given the low pay provided to teachers, tenure was an important tool for attracting good-quality teachers. More fundamentally, tenure was essential to protecting academic freedom. Tenure had been established in New York City back in 1917 to protect against political firings of teachers.²⁶ Under tenure, said Shanker, “an elected politician can’t say, ‘I’m going to fire you because you didn’t support me in the last election.’”²⁷ Before tenure, it was also common for districts to fire senior teachers and hire younger, cheaper ones in lean times.²⁸ If teachers did not have tenure, unions argued,

teachers would have an incentive to give students good grades for fear that a bad grade might trigger an effort by parents to fire them.

Eliminating tenure was out of the question, but defending teacher incompetence was equally intolerable and politically unacceptable. Was there a third way? In 1984, Shanker embraced an explosive one: peer review. Two years earlier, Shanker had come across a new, highly controversial plan used in Toledo, Ohio, in which expert teachers were involved in reviewing new and veteran teachers, providing assistance, and in some cases, recommending termination of employment for colleagues. The notion struck at the heart of what unionism stood for—solidarity and job security—but Shanker was intrigued.

Peer review was not merely a defensive measure to preserve tenure, Shanker argued. It was a way of advancing two long-held union objectives: democratization of the workplace and increasing professionalization. Peer review and assistance would make teacher unions more like craft guilds, which have apprenticeships and job-placement programs.²⁹ Peer review would also strengthen the case for teacher involvement in other areas, like textbook selection and curriculum development. If teachers implied that only administrators were smart enough to be able to determine who is a good teacher, that would undercut the argument that teachers should be involved in these other areas, Shanker said.³⁰ (To read more about peer review, see the sidebar on page 10.)

Making Teaching a Profession

By the mid 1980s, Shanker was ready to move into high gear with his agenda to reinvent teacher unionism and promote the professionalization of teaching. In 1985, he gave a trio of speeches—at the National Press Club in January, at the NYSUT convention in Niagara Falls in April, and at an AFT educational issues convention in July—that offered a radically different vision for teachers and would be remembered as among his most famous.

In the January 1985 speech at the National Press Club, Shanker proposed a rigorous national exam for new teachers, something that “no national organization in American education” had ever done, Shanker noted.³¹ The existing system of state-by-state teacher standards, supported by the NEA, was not working, Shanker said. Twelve states did not even have tests, and while many of the rest used the Educational Testing Service’s National Teachers Examination, each state set its own passing score.³² Shanker said the existing standards “would be considered a joke by any other profession.” He said a Florida test for math teachers required only a sixth-grade proficiency. “That’s equivalent to licensing a doctor on the basis of elementary biology.”³³

Shanker had long argued that while passing the test did not mean a candidate would be a good teacher, a teacher who did not know basic content was unlikely to be effective.³⁴ He argued that the national teachers’ exam would help professionalize teaching, making teachers more like doctors and lawyers who must pass licensing examinations.

Eliminating tenure was out of the question, but defending teacher incompetence was equally intolerable and politically unacceptable. Was there a third way?

And he backed up the proposal with a declaration that the AFT would limit membership to those who passed.³⁵

In April 1985, Shanker delivered his second major address of the trio at the NYSUT convention in Niagara Falls. In the hour-long speech, Shanker argued for a “new professionalism.” Just as the AFT had revolutionized teaching by introducing collective bargaining 25 years earlier, he said, it was time for “a second revolution,” in which teachers would “take a step beyond collective bargaining” to improve education.³⁶ Limiting action to collective bargaining made teachers appear unprofessional, he said. “We tend to be viewed today as though we are acting only in our own self-interest, wanting better salaries and smaller classes so our lives can be made easier. That image is standing in the way of our achieving professional status, for not only must we act on behalf of our clients, we must be perceived as acting that way.”³⁷

In the speech, Shanker outlined a classical definition of what it meant to be a professional. A professional receives a liberal-arts education, then specialized training, and then must pass a rigorous exam before beginning to practice. She participates in an internship, is guided by mentors, and participates in reviewing the performance of colleagues. The reciprocal set of rights—greater autonomy and higher compensation—comes once these professional responsibilities are met.³⁸ In Shanker’s vision, policies like a rigorous national test, peer review, and career ladders were not just defensive moves against critics of public school teachers, they were prerequisites to the professionalization of teaching. It was one of Shanker’s most important speeches not because it contained a number of new policy propos-

als, but because it provided a conceptual framework that tied together much of what he had been proposing under a rubric of teacher professionalization.

If Shanker's Niagara Falls speech made professionalism the organizing principle, his third added a new plank of tremendous importance. In a July 11, 1985, address to the AFT's Quality Educational Standards in Teaching (QuEST) conference in Washington, D.C., Shanker again made front-page news by backing an innovative compromise on the merit pay issue: a system under which excellent teachers could receive national board certification, akin to doctors—and extra pay.³⁹ He told the conference: "We've heard the arguments about merit pay for at least 50 years, and the issue does not go away. Most people in this country believe hard work and better work ought to be rewarded, and opposing this makes us look like we are not interested in quality. So we ought to think about ways of handling the issue while avoiding the pitfalls."⁴⁰

Shanker called for the creation of a series of new national boards, made up largely of teachers and set up in different areas of the curriculum, like math, science, and history, to certify "superduper" teachers who passed a rigorous test and other evaluations. Local school boards and states would then have an incentive to pay board-certified teachers salary premiums. Shanker estimated that about 20 percent of the nation's two million teachers might become board certified.⁴¹

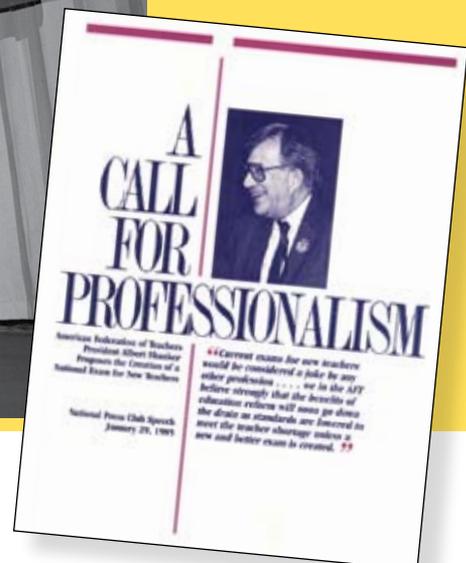
The proposal for national boards was meant to satisfy the key goals of merit pay proposals: attracting and retaining high-quality teachers. Because teachers reach their top salary level by their mid-thirties, precisely when people in other professions see their salaries take off, the main way to increase one's salary was to move into administration. Board certification offered a way to keep excellent

Policies like a rigorous national test, peer review, and career ladders were not just defensive moves against critics of public school teachers, they were prerequisites to the professionalization of teaching.

teachers in the classroom.⁴² At the same time, a national board, using objective criteria, would avoid the problems of favoritism that plagued traditional merit pay schemes. And because there was no fixed quota limiting who could qualify, national board certification would not pit teachers against one another and discourage cooperation the way many merit pay schemes did.⁴³ Likewise, teachers would not be penalized for out-of-school influences because



High standards for teachers and strong professional development—like that offered in the AFT's QuEST (Quality Education Standards in Teaching) Conferences—were among Shanker's top priorities.



extra pay was linked to extra qualifications, not student achievement.

Shanker's embrace of education reform won him plaudits from the press, the academy, foundations, the business community, and leaders in government. *The New Republic* ran the story "Albert Shanker, Statesman: The Fiery Unionist as Educational Leader," while the *Wall Street Journal* declared: "Shanker, Once-Militant Head of Teachers' Union, Now Is Called Original Thinker in Education."⁴⁴ A *U.S. News & World Report* story on the New American Establishment named Shanker as one of 10 key voices on education, along with the U.S. Secretary of Education, the presidents of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, the University of Chicago, New York University, the University of California, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the then-governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton.

Throughout his career, Shanker was guided by the related goals of democracy in education and the professionalization of teaching. In 1960, 1962, 1967, and 1968,

Shanker led militant strikes to raise the status of the profession and promote and defend a voice for teachers. That call for greater teacher voice continued to sound in his education proposals in the 1980s, albeit in a different political and educational environment. Peer review, for example, not only answered an argument for abolishing tenure, it gave expert teachers a greater voice in determining who would remain in the profession and who should leave. Likewise, the National Board was not only an answer to merit pay, it strengthened democratic control over the profession by ensuring that rewards would be determined not only by the whims of supervisors, but by objective criteria and an evaluation conducted mostly by fellow teachers. Shanker understood that teacher unions could sometimes look like they were unconcerned about educational quality. In launching proposals like the national teacher exam and National Board, he not only engaged in a defensive maneuver, blunting the effectiveness of the "special-interest" charge, but he also affirmatively engaged in a long-term project of marrying trade unionism and the professionalization of teaching.

Peer Assistance and Review

Peer assistance and review was the brainchild of Dal Lawrence, the union president in Toledo, Ohio, an AFT affiliate. Like Shanker, Lawrence had strong union credentials that gave him credibility with members to try innovative things. He was also a maverick. For a number of years, Lawrence pushed the idea of improving teacher professionalism by having expert teachers mentor new teachers the way doctors mentor interns. He conducted a referendum among the members about the concept of peer assistance, and there was overwhelming support.¹

Administrators in Toledo initially balked at the idea, because they viewed it as the principals' job to mentor and train new teachers. Principals worried that if they did not have an evaluation to hang over teachers, they could not get them to do what they wanted. But at one collective-bargaining session in March 1981, the attorney for the school district suggested: "If we can use these expert teachers to also work with our veteran teachers who are having severe difficulties, you've got a

deal." Lawrence shook hands, knowing it was going to be controversial. "Here we were, a teacher union, and we were evaluating and even recommending the non-renewal and terminations of teachers," Lawrence recalls. But when he went to the teachers, they supported him.²

Under the plan, Toledo set up a nine-member advisory board (consisting of five teachers and four administrators) to make decisions on assisting and, if necessary, terminating the employment of new and veteran teachers. Six votes were required for action.³

Lawrence and a couple of teachers traveled to Washington, D.C., in 1982 to explain their program of teacher evaluation, and many members of the AFT Executive Council were livid. "There were people cursing; they were pounding the table," Lawrence recalls, arguing the Toledo plan violated AFT policy. "It was a really bad scene," he says, "worse than I expected." No one spoke in favor of the plan until Shanker stepped in and said, "I think there's something you're missing." Lawrence says, "that was the

first clue that maybe he was on our side." Shanker proceeded to point out that teachers in other countries—including Canada and Great Britain—had similar programs and were more highly regarded than in the U.S. If teachers acted like doctors and lawyers and other self-regulated professions, they might win greater respect. Shanker did not win over the Executive Council, Lawrence recalls. "There were a lot of quiet, sullen people who left that room, and not one of them came over and shook my hand," but Shanker had planted the seed.⁴

On February 5, 1984, Shanker went public with his openness to peer review and devoted a "Where We Stand" column to the Toledo plan. He spelled out how it worked, and while he acknowledged the novelty and controversy of a system in which unions are involved in dismissing teachers, he said the program had been successful in reinforcing public confidence in the school system. "After a period of failures to pass bond issues, the 1982 large bond issue was passed with 70 percent of voters, the largest margin

The Charter School Idea

In the mid-to-late 1980s, Shanker helped launch another important education reform: teacher-run “charter schools.” In Shanker’s original vision, these publicly financed schools would give teachers greater freedom to experiment with innovative teaching techniques, student groupings, and other education reforms. The experiments would be time-limited and subject to rigorous evaluation. Having propelled the idea, however, he would watch with increasing distress as the movement transformed into something quite different than he originally intended, with many—though not all—charter schools actually undercutting his initial vision.

Shanker’s concept of charter schools grew out of his belief that schooling needed to be “restructured,” to move beyond the old factory model of education. Fundamentally, the factory model—in which principals barked orders to teachers who lectured students who were passed from classroom to classroom and expected to learn at the same pace—was not working well for many kids and many teachers.⁴⁵ “You have to be like a doctor,” Shanker said. “If

the medicine doesn’t work, he doesn’t bawl the hell out of you because you didn’t respond to his pill. You’ve got to try a variety of things.”⁴⁶

Shanker’s thoughts about restructuring and choice came together in a landmark address he gave at the National Press Club on March 31, 1988. In the speech and in subsequent articles, Shanker suggested that small groups of teachers and parents (as few as six) submit research-based proposals for schools (or schools within schools) to a panel consisting of the local school board and union officials. The teachers would say: “We’ve got a way of doing something different. We’ve got a way of reaching the kids that are not being reached by what the school is doing.” Once given a “charter,” the school would then be left alone for five or 10 years, as long as parents and teachers continued to support the experiment and there was no precipitous drop in achievement. Shanker also made clear that the charter schools should not draw from the pool of the most advantaged children, but rather should reflect the general school population.⁴⁷

In keeping with the teacher-led vision for charter

Lawrence pushed the idea of improving teacher professionalism by having expert teachers mentor new teachers the way doctors mentor interns.

in the history of the city—a sure sign of public confidence in the schools.”⁵ Union leaders started phoning to find out more about the program—including Rochester, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, and Columbus.

In his State of the Union speech at the 1984 AFT convention and in subsequent interviews and articles, Shanker laid out the case for the Toledo plan. He began by acknowledging that peer review was unpopular with teachers. “I know I am sticking my neck out,” Shanker said.⁶ He acknowledged that under tradi-

tional labor-management relations, there is a bright line between workers and supervisors to avoid dual loyalties.⁷ In his speech, he said: “We get a lot of questions—like how can teachers who are members of the union be involved in saying that another union member shouldn’t be retained as a teacher?”⁸ But it was time to acknowledge, he said, “that some teachers are excellent, some are very good, some are good, and some are terrible.”⁹ Shanker argued: “Either we are going to have to say that we are willing to improve the profession ourselves or the governors are going to act for us.”¹⁰

Teachers have a strong self-interest in favoring a system that weeds out substandard colleagues. “Teachers have to live with the results of other people’s bad teaching—the students who don’t know anything,” Shanker wrote.¹¹ In fact, because teachers more than administrators had to live with the consequences of incompetent colleagues and knew what others were doing wrong, peer review led to more dismissals than had occurred when administrators were in charge. In Cincinnati, which was the second city in the country to

adopt peer review, 10.5 percent of new teachers were found less than satisfactory by teacher reviewers, compared to 4 percent by administrators, and 5 percent were recommended for dismissal by teachers, compared with 1.6 percent of those evaluated by principals.¹² The same was true in other cities.¹³

In subsequent years, peer-review programs spread from Toledo and Cincinnati to Rochester, Columbus, Minneapolis, Seattle, Pittsburgh, Hammond, and elsewhere, some 30 cities in all.¹⁴ Toledo’s peer-review program was recognized by the Rand Corporation and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government as a model for teacher evaluation.¹⁵ In Toledo, peer review proved to be exceedingly popular, with teacher support on the order of 10-to-1.¹⁶

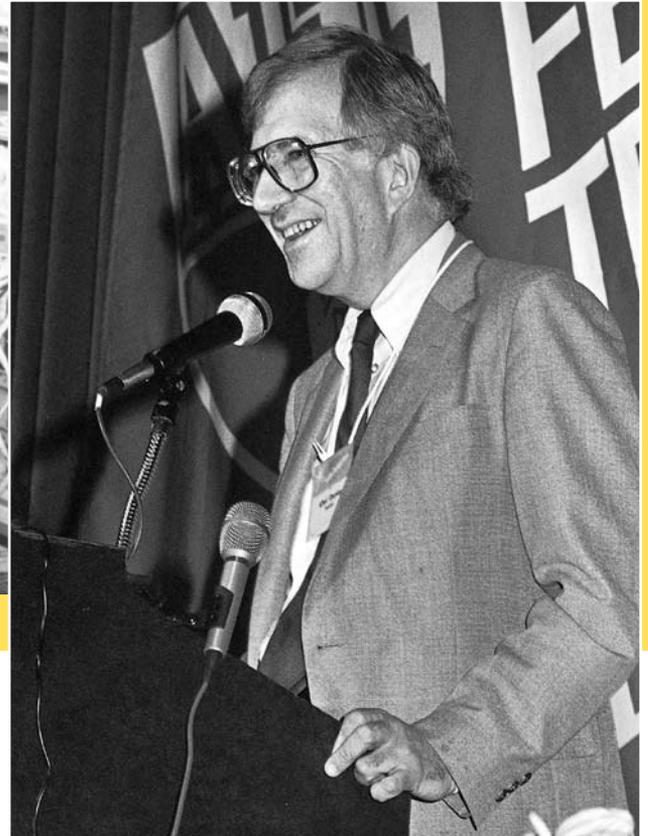
—R.D.K.

For more information on peer assistance and review for new teachers, go to www.aft.org/topics/charting-the-course/downloads/chartingteachingqualityWEB.pdf.

Endnotes for this excerpt are listed on American Educator’s Web site at www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/fall2007/index.htm.



Left, Shanker and civil rights advocate Bayard Rustin rally to save paraprofessionals' jobs in 1970. Below, Shanker delivers a speech at the AFT Convention in Los Angeles in 1983.



schools, the union would remain a central player, Shanker said. He called for districts to “create joint school board–union panels that would review preliminary proposals and help find seed money for the teachers to develop final proposals.”⁴⁸ Indeed, Shanker noted that the places where education reform and restructuring were occurring most actively were those areas where unions were strong. “You don’t see these creative things happening where teachers don’t have any voice or power or influence,” he said.⁴⁹

In the coming years, however, as state after state adopted charter-school laws and the federal government pitched in with seed money, Shanker watched with alarm as the concept he put forward began to move away from a public school reform effort to look more like a private school voucher plan.⁵⁰ Shanker was strongly opposed to vouchers—and anything resembling vouchers—because he questioned the very premise of voucher (and many charter) advocates: that we should give parents and kids whatever they want. Maximizing choice, he said,

may be the point of shopping malls. But it is not the point of education, and it is certainly not the reason the public—parents and non-parents alike—pays taxes to support education. We do so not to satisfy the individual wants of parents and students, but because of the public interest in producing an educated citizenry capable of exercising the rights of liberty and being productive members of society.⁵¹

Shanker soured on the charter-school movement pri-

marily because of dramatic changes in the movement itself. But in part, he changed his own mind about what type of education reform was most likely to improve the academic achievement of children. He became increasingly convinced that reforms like school restructuring and charter schools put the cart before the horse, because there was no general agreement on the goals to be pursued.⁵² First, you needed outcome standards, so you could evaluate whether or not the reforms were helping or hurting.⁵³ A system of public school choice and charter schools without a system of standards made little sense. Shanker asked: How could parents judge schools without a system of standards in place to give a basis for comparison?⁵⁴

Shanker began intensively examining systems abroad and came to the conclusion that having a high-quality national curriculum was critical. The reason innovative schooling in places like the Holweide School in Cologne worked well was that Germany had in place standards and a common curriculum.⁵⁵ In a March 1992 speech, Shanker argued: “What the Canadians and the Germans and the French and the Dutch and the Swedes and the Japanese and others have shown is that you can, in a pretty traditional system, do things that bring about substantially bet-

Shanker noted that the places where education reform and restructuring were occurring most actively were those areas where unions were strong. “You don’t see these creative things happening where teachers don’t have any voice or power or influence,” he said.

ter results than the results that we produce.”⁵⁶ Shanker later argued that the countries that did well on the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) were not those with “vouchers or charter schools or any of the other jazzy schemes that we are being urged to try. Nearly all of these nations have clear and rigorous national or state curriculum standards, and everything they do in the schools is hitched to these standards.”⁵⁷

Charter schools were not empowering teachers; they were trying to undercut teacher unions. They were not providing innovative and creative ways of teaching an agreed-upon curriculum; they were creating their very own curricula. And there was no evidence that the experiments were raising student achievement, the ultimate test. So in the final years of his life, Shanker turned away from charters to a very different idea, where he would make his biggest mark yet: education standards.

Champion of the Standards Movement

A Nation at Risk had done a good job of outlining what courses students should take and for how many years they should take them, but there was still a big hole at the center of American education: the lack of agreement on what skills and knowledge students should master. Teachers had textbooks, but no real guidance on what to prioritize, so they were essentially asked to create their own curricula. They ended up choosing very different topics to pursue, creating incoherence and confusion. A teacher could not assume to know what students had learned the year before, so just to be safe, many teachers ended up repeating material that some students had already learned, which was a waste of time and also induced boredom and created discipline problems. Given an incoherent curriculum, teach-

ers had little ground on which to collaborate and improve their skills. Since teachers were not on the same page content-wise, professional development tended to focus on vacuous topics such as learning styles, rather than on how best to teach, for example, the French Revolution.⁵⁸ Likewise, although testing had long existed, too often it assessed general skills, like an SAT test, rather than curriculum knowledge (like an AP test would assess).⁵⁹

In an influential paper, education reformers Marshall Smith and his co-author Jennifer O’Day argued for an alternative to this chaos: standards-based reform that could promote both excellence and equity.⁶⁰ Smith and O’Day outlined a systemic reform in which all horses—standards, curriculum, textbooks, tests, teacher training, and teacher development—pulled in the same direction. Directing everything was a “curriculum framework” or content standard of “what students should know and be able to do.” The actual curriculum, materials, and state assessments would flow from the standards. Teacher licenses would be based on demonstrating the skills needed to teach the agreed-upon content. Finally, students and educators would be held accountable for mastering the content as measured by student assessments.⁶¹

Shanker wholeheartedly embraced standards-based reform. Many of America’s competitors in Europe and Japan had systems of national standards, rigorous testing, and student accountability, and Shanker saw that these systems were providing higher levels of student achievement. The systems were coherent and made life more predictable for both teachers and students. Everyone knew in advance what was expected of them, and the system turned teachers and students from adversaries into allies. “It’s like the Olympics,” Shanker said. “There’s an external standard that students need to meet, and the teacher is there to help the student make it.”⁶²

Shanker rejected the idea that a system of standards and testing would cramp teacher creativity and require them to “teach to the test.” This would be a problem if states used unsophisticated multiple-choice tests, which put an emphasis on drilling and test-taking skills. But it was possible to develop excellent assessments, carefully tied to underlying curriculum, as was done in other high-achieving countries. Shanker argued: “Teaching to the test is something positive when you have really good tests.”⁶³ Indeed, Shanker was worried about an overemphasis on teacher creativity when it came to curriculum and teaching techniques. Professionals have certain protocols, based on research. He argued: “An ailing patient wouldn’t want a doctor who said, ‘I know what’s usually done in situations like yours. But I like to be creative.’”⁶⁴ Instead, Shanker said teachers, like doctors, should normally follow the protocols of pedagogy and apply creativity only in the hard cases when traditional methods did not work.⁶⁵

Shanker also argued that common content standards were egalitarian because they sought to teach children knowledge that is required to do well in mainstream society. In the 1980s, Shanker had become an early advocate of University of Virginia English Professor E. D. Hirsch’s

Teachers had textbooks, but no real guidance on what to prioritize; they had little ground on which to collaborate and improve their skills. Since teachers were not on the same page content-wise, professional development tended to focus on vacuous topics such as learning styles, rather than on how best to teach, for example, the French Revolution.

argument that American students needed to be “culturally literate”—to master a body of facts that literate Americans know. While middle-class children usually pick up some of that knowledge on their own at home, poor kids rarely do, Shanker said.⁶⁶ Content standards also promote equity by making it clear to all the measures by which students were going to be judged. Standards also prevented poor children from receiving a less challenging curriculum.⁶⁷ He argued, “In a system without standards, they often go to schools where little or nothing is expected of them.”⁶⁸ Looking internationally, Shanker argued that systems in Germany, France, and Japan did better with low-income students because they have high standards: “Equity is better served by demanding a lot of all students—and helping them meet those demands.”⁶⁹

As the standards movement began to pick up steam in the late 1980s, Shanker found himself virtually alone among members of the education establishment ready to join governors and business leaders in support.⁷⁰ Accountability was particularly risky for AFT teachers, education-policy analyst Michael Cohen says, because AFT “members were teaching in urban schools that were, by and large, not producing results” compared to the suburban districts, which were largely represented by the NEA.⁷¹ But Shanker made a critical calculation that standards-based reform was the single best way to preserve public education, and he made that case directly to his skeptical membership.

It would have been unusual enough for Shanker, as a teachers’ union leader, to join the standards and accountability movement that made so many of his members nervous. But what was truly astounding to many was that he became the widely recognized leader of the movement. The *Los Angeles Times* labeled Shanker “the earliest and loudest voice for establishing and raising universal curriculum standards.”⁷²

Cancer Strikes

In the fall of 1993, while going for other tests, doctors discovered that Shanker had bladder cancer.⁷³ In November 1993, Shanker had a tumor removed from his bladder in an operation at George Washington University Hospital. The doctors were encouraged that the cancer did not appear to have invaded the wall of the bladder. But in a subsequent visit, the doctors discovered that the cancer had returned.⁷⁴ In March 1994, Shanker had to have his entire bladder removed.⁷⁵ Shortly thereafter, Eadie Shanker decided to retire from her job at the City University of New York to spend more time with her husband.⁷⁶

In July 1994, Shanker ran for re-election as AFT president, saying his doctors had given him a “very good prognosis” for a full recovery. He was going through chemotherapy, however, and joked at the convention about his “new hairdo.” He thanked the delegates for their flowers and cards and said, “It’s been a very tough year, but it meant a lot.” He was re-elected unanimously.⁷⁷

Then, in April 1996, Shanker was dealt an enormous setback when cancer was discovered in his lungs.⁷⁸ He began intensive chemotherapy and radiation treatment, but he tried to carry on his active schedule. He continued to travel overseas, and would research the local hospitals in advance in case he ran into trouble. He also kept writing his “Where We Stand” column. Eadie Shanker remembers, “Al would be home in bed. His column would be read to him over the phone and he’d go back and forth with Marcia Reecer about it.”⁷⁹ Eadie says, “staying president of the union is what kept him alive.”⁸⁰

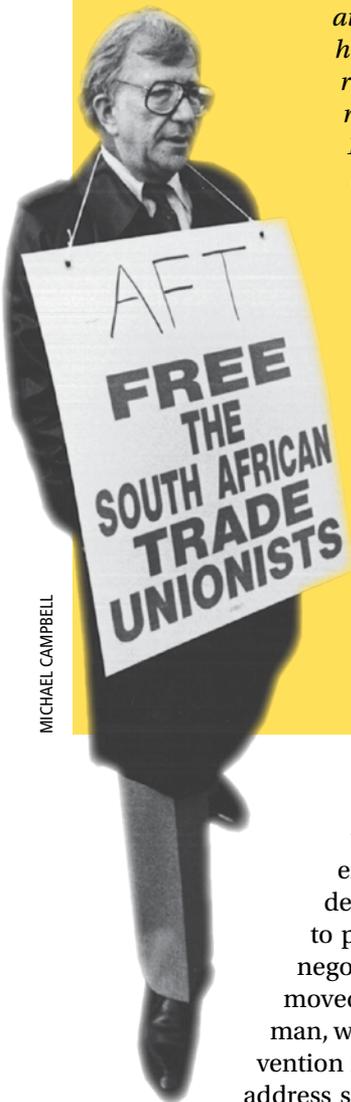
As the AFT national convention in Cincinnati approached in early August 1996, Shanker considered not seeking re-election, but eventually decided to run.⁸¹ He was scheduled to give his regular State of the Union speech on August 2, but was too ill. The next day, however, he rallied his strength. A reporter from the *Los Angeles Times* wrote: “Thousands of teachers jumped to their feet when Shanker, obviously ill, slipped out unannounced from behind a heavy curtain and made his way slowly across the stage. Their applause thundered across the immense hall, and tears streamed down some faces.” He delivered “a rousing, hour-long keynote speech.”⁸²

Shanker covered a number of topics, but is most remembered for saying two things. The first was a spirited defense of trade unions. He declared: “We’ve got a good story to tell. We’ve got a great historic institution to preserve.... We’ve overcome tremendous odds, and we’ve done it





UFT/ROBERT F. WAGNER LABOR ARCHIVES



MICHAEL CAMPBELL

Shanker was committed to human rights at home and abroad. Above, he and his wife Eadie are escorted through a refugee camp in Thailand in 1978. Top right, Shanker enjoys an evening in 1967 with Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph, national leaders with whom he worked closely throughout the Civil Rights Movement. Bottom right, Shanker marches to generate support for Soviet dissidents Andrei Sakharov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Left, Shanker joins a demonstration in front of the South African embassy in Washington, D.C., in 1984.



WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVE

against money and animosity and power...⁸³ The second point was that teacher unions needed to fully engage in education reform. He told delegates: “It is as much your duty to preserve public education as it is to negotiate a good contract.”⁸⁴ Many were moved by the sight of a completely bald man, who was transported around the convention in an electric cart and delivered his address sitting down, telling delegates, once again, that teachers needed to go beyond their narrow self-interest to preserve an institution so fundamental to democratic society.⁸⁵

Rooted in Democracy

It was a fitting final State of the Union speech. Throughout his life, Shanker faced critics and allies who thought he had

a strange mix of traditionally liberal and conservative views. But Shanker argued that all of his views were part of a well-thought-out ideology that put democracy at the core.

Shanker’s traditionally liberal positions—on unions, public education, and economic inequality—all found their roots in a democratic ideology. Unions to Shanker were not merely economic actors, they were institutions to democratize capitalism, provide a voice to workers in their occupations, and counter the strong influence of corporations. Responding to critics, like Bob Dole, who tried to praise teachers while villifying their unions, Shanker asked: “Who started teacher unions? Who pays the dues that keep them going? Who elects the officers and determines union policies?”⁸⁶ And he pointed out: “Unions developed because teachers thought they needed them” to raise salaries and lift up the dignity of the profession.⁸⁷ Likewise, Shanker’s justification for public education also fundamentally came back to democratic principles. He believed that the public schools’ mission was to provide two ingredients central to

a well-functioning democracy: social mobility and social cohesion. His support for policies promoting greater economic equality (minimum wage, healthcare, and the like) was based on the fact that democracy can only work well when there is a strong middle class.⁸⁸ In an overwhelmingly poor and uneducated society, dangerous demagogues can manipulate the masses more easily, and extreme economic inequality skews political power through the use of money in politics.⁸⁹

But Shanker's traditionally conservative positions on issues such as student discipline, multiculturalism, and human rights were also rooted in a democratic ideology. Shanker's tough discipline policies were about keeping

public schools truly public spaces. Just as yielding to disorder in public parks undercut their democratic nature, so yielding to disorder in the classroom led to middle-class flight from public schools and increased pressure for school vouchers, both of which undercut the democratic function of schooling. Shanker proposed "alternative educational settings for students who are violent and regularly so disruptive that they prevent all the other children from learning."⁹⁰ He argued that "We need to help violent kids, but letting them rule the schools isn't helping them, and it's destroying the kids who want to save themselves. That's not decent, wise, or practical."⁹¹

Similarly, while Shanker had long pushed for the inclu-

"Where We Stand"

"Where We Stand," a weekly paid column, began running in December 1970, in the Sunday *New York Times*' Week in Review section. Its impact was monumental.

In the late 1960s, Shanker had grown frustrated that his attempts to be published in various magazines and newspapers had been rebuffed. One day, while he was having lunch with Arnold Beichman, an academic and former unionist with the electrical workers, Beichman suggested that Shanker buy an advertisement in the *Times*. "Just buy the space like General Motors buys space," Beichman said.

While paid columns are today quite common, "Where We Stand" appears to have been the first paid column of its type in the *Times*.¹ The placement was ideal, because Shanker felt he was not getting fair coverage in the newspaper. Initially, Beichman says, Abe Rosenthal, managing editor of the *Times*, refused to sell space to Shanker, but Shanker appealed to the publisher, Punch Sulzberger, who overrode Rosenthal.²

"In 1968," Shanker recalled, "I became convinced that I had been dead wrong in believing that the public's opinion of me didn't matter. Public schools depend on public support. And the public was not likely to support the schools for long if they thought the teachers were led by a madman."³ Shanker explained, "I decided to devote some time and

energy to letting people know that the union's president was someone who read books and had ideals and ideas about how to fix schools."⁴ The UFT agreed to sponsor the space for 13 weeks, with the option to extend for a year. The annual cost was \$100,000.⁵ Shanker's ability to get the union to spend an extraordinary sum for something so unfamiliar to unions was a sign of his clout within the organization.⁶

The column lasted more than 13 weeks—indeed, it lasted many more than 13 years. It always appeared with his picture. For more than a quarter of a century, Shanker's face—adorned with "black horn-rimmed glasses and a mournful cast, like Eyeore in 'Winnie the Pooh,'" said the *Times*—appeared at the head of more than 1,300 eight-hundred-word columns.⁷ If his columns were compiled in average-size books of 150,000 words each, the columns would fill seven volumes.

The gambit worked because Shanker was a font of ideas, and he was a font of ideas because he was forever reading. Shanker's childhood love of books never left him, and he was constantly reading, even though he was practically blind in one eye.⁸ He loved history, philosophy, and politics, and his favorite authors included George Orwell, Edmund Wilson, Irving Howe, Arthur Koestler, Bernard Malamud, and Ignazio Silone.⁹ He also loved to read magazines like *The New Republic*, *Dis-*

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sent, *Commentary*, *Encounter*, the *Public Interest*, the *Economist*, *Politics*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Scientific American*, the *Paris Review*, and the *Partisan Review*, and he would save all the back issues.¹⁰

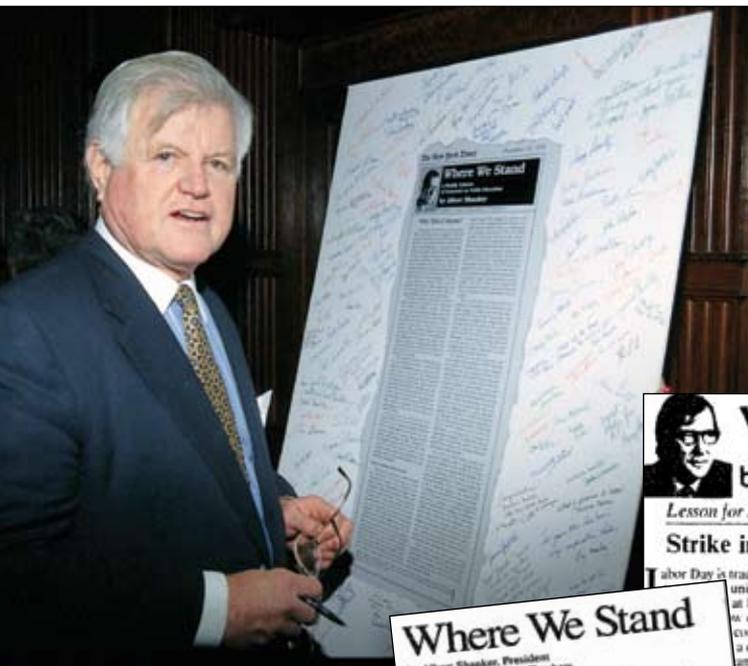
His library was tremendously broad, from philosophy to religion, from education to politics, from Aquinas and Aristotle to Zinsser and Zimoviev. In his 4,000-book collection, he had several books on Orwell,

sion of various ethnic contributions into the history curriculum, he believed that the core knowledge of the dominant culture was essential for all students to master if they wished to advance socioeconomically within the society. Shanker cited E. D. Hirsch's research, which found that in West Germany and France, the children of low-income Turkish guest workers and other immigrants did much better academically than low-income Americans in part because they were exposed from a very early age to the key elements of the dominant culture.⁹² Shanker argued:

Some people have been very critical of Hirsch's proposals on the grounds that they try to impose the dominant

culture on groups that would rather have their children learn their own culture. But the thrust of Hirsch's proposal is egalitarian. He believes that by starting early and by giving all children the same core knowledge to learn, we can prevent the creation of an educational underclass.⁹³

As a result, Shanker opposed extreme forms of multiculturalism that turned away from the sensible idea that students should learn about all different groups and claimed that minority students should mainly learn about their own group's accomplishments and learn history from the point of view of their own group.⁹⁴ Extreme multiculturalism, Shanker said, "isn't really multiculturalism at all



MILTON WILLIAMS

In 1995, Senator Ted Kennedy attended a New York Times-sponsored reception to celebrate the 25th anniversary of "Where We Stand."

colleague says, were "the requirements of a democratic society."¹⁶

Many of the columns sought to make readers understand what it is like to be a teacher.¹⁷ And he would return time and time again to outline a "liberal" opposition to school vouchers and a "conservative" concern about school discipline.¹⁸ He sometimes had guest columns from

a variety of authors—from Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Bayard Rustin to Diane Ravitch. But most columns he wrote himself, with the help of a succession of writers.

The column was famous for taking complicated scholarly ideas and presenting them in readable form.²⁶ Like George Orwell, Shanker avoided the intel-

lectual's fondness for abstraction and instead paid attention to concrete realities.²⁷ The columns also took definite positions, reflecting Shanker's character, taking "stands" as the column's title suggested.

The column became a phenomenon in education circles. It made Shanker, said the *Washington Post*, "the best-read educator in America."²⁹ His column was, says education professor Maurice Berube, "the only column on national education dealing with national issues that was read by everybody."³⁰

—R.D.K.

14 books by Dewey, 22 books by or about Sidney Hook, and books by George Counts and Lawrence Cremin. His office, says writer Ronald Radosh, "wasn't like what you expect your regular union leader's office to be," he said. "It was like an academic's office: papers, books, every kind of book."¹¹

Shanker also encouraged his staff and union officials to read. Union official Velma Hill recalls that she would come into the office to talk about a particular issue and Shanker would say, "Velma, did you read this article? Well, what did you think of this article?" Staffers felt pressure to keep up on their reading.¹² Lorretta Johnson

remembers the AFT vice presidents receiving loads of reading materials from Shanker, which would take a whole week to read. He "wanted his vice presidents to read and to understand."¹³

The column provided a discipline that helped Shanker think through issues, forcing him to arrive at positions.¹⁵ The topics ranged widely, from education reform to human rights to labor unions to civil rights. What tied together the various columns, one



remembers the AFT vice presidents receiving loads of reading materials from Shanker, which would take a whole week to read. He "wanted his vice presidents to read and to understand."¹³

Endnotes for this excerpt are listed on *American Educator's* Web site at www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/fall2007/index.htm.

but ethnocentrism.”⁹⁵ By calling common history a sham, extreme multiculturalism, Shanker said, would undercut the central rationale for public education:

Americans have always seen public schools as places where children from various groups would learn to live together and value each other and where they would become acquainted with the common civic culture. If public schools become places where children learn that, fundamentally, they are not American, there will be no reason for taxpayers to continue supporting them. And there will be little to hold society together.⁹⁶

Lastly, Shanker was just as rooted in democracy when it came to human rights—whether that left him aligned with liberals or conservatives. He argued: “When men and women are imprisoned, tortured, and killed because they dare to speak, write, or organize, it makes no difference whether they were silenced by leftists or a rightist dictator. The action must be condemned.”⁹⁷ And he denounced what he saw as a double standard on the left. In the late 1970s, when the Vietnamese government was causing mass starvation in occupied Cambodia, Shanker asked: “Where are the expressions of outrage? Where are the demonstrations? How can it be that there are protests only against American support for the Shahs ... —whose crimes may be real enough and surely merit exposure—and none at all against the Soviet Union and Vietnam, who are within weeks of annihilating and wiping out an entire culture from the face of the earth?”⁹⁸

Shanker remained, to the end, a liberal, and over a 30-year period he stood squarely for two central pillars of liberal thought: public education and organized labor. For Shanker, all roads led back to democracy.

On consecutive days in early February 1997, not long before he died, Shanker received two tributes—one from the President of the United States and one from the president of the National Education Association. Neither mentioned Shanker by name publicly at the time, but there was little question about who inspired both sets of remarks.

On February 4, 1997, President Clinton devoted most of his State of the Union address to education, which he called his “number-one priority” for his second term. Clinton laid out a 10-point plan for education, the most important of which

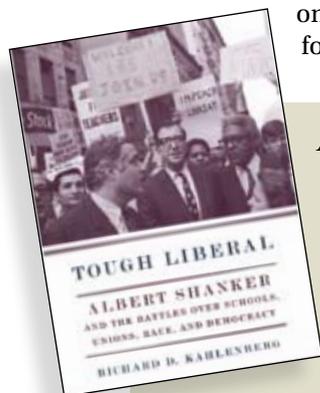
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was a call for voluntary national tests by 1999. The tests would be given to fourth-graders in reading and eighth-graders in math. The federal government would pay for the creation of the tests. Standards themselves would continue to be set by states, and the national tests would be voluntary—states would not be required to use them.⁹⁹ The vision of national tests rather than national standards was not precisely what Shanker had advocated, but it was a big step in the right direction.

Shanker watched the speech on television from his hospital bed and commented that Clinton was “the best that we’re ever going to do.”¹⁰⁰ Shanker’s son Michael says: “Just being able to see the look on my father’s face, even though he was sick ... of basically his life’s work being brought to the State of the Union address ... was pretty amazing.”¹⁰¹ After the speech, Clinton called Shanker and told him: “You know, I hope you feel good now, because you’ve been telling us to do this for years and years and years, and finally your crusade will be America’s crusade.”¹⁰²

Shanker returned the compliment in one of his last columns. It began: “With his State of the Union speech, President Clinton demonstrated that he is indeed the education president. The American public has been demanding higher academic standards. They are right, and with the President’s leadership, we are now far closer to reaching that goal.” Clinton knew that it is not “somehow kinder and more humane to expect less of poor kids in low-achieving schools.”¹⁰³

The second tribute came on February 5, the day after Clinton’s speech, when Bob Chase, the newly elected president of the NEA, gave an extraordinary address at the



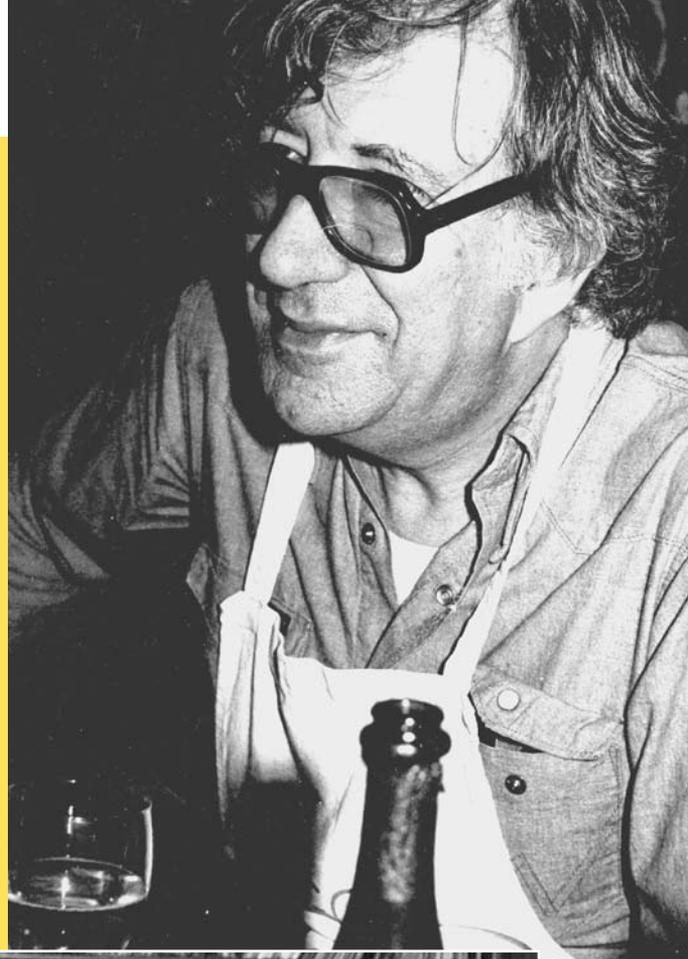
AFT members may purchase Kahlenberg’s book, Tough Liberal, at a discounted rate of \$18.00 including shipping (a discount of 40 percent off the list price). Visit AFT’s online store at www.aftstore.org/aft/product/enlarged.asp?ProductId=906401.



“How would our world be different if Al Shanker had gone on, as he planned, to become a professor of philosophy rather than a leader of teachers, an education reformer, a union activist, and a public writer? ... As a founding father of collective bargaining for teachers and a leading education reformer, he is the single person most responsible for reshaping and preserving public education in the last half of the 20th century.”

—Richard D. Kahlenberg
Tough Liberal

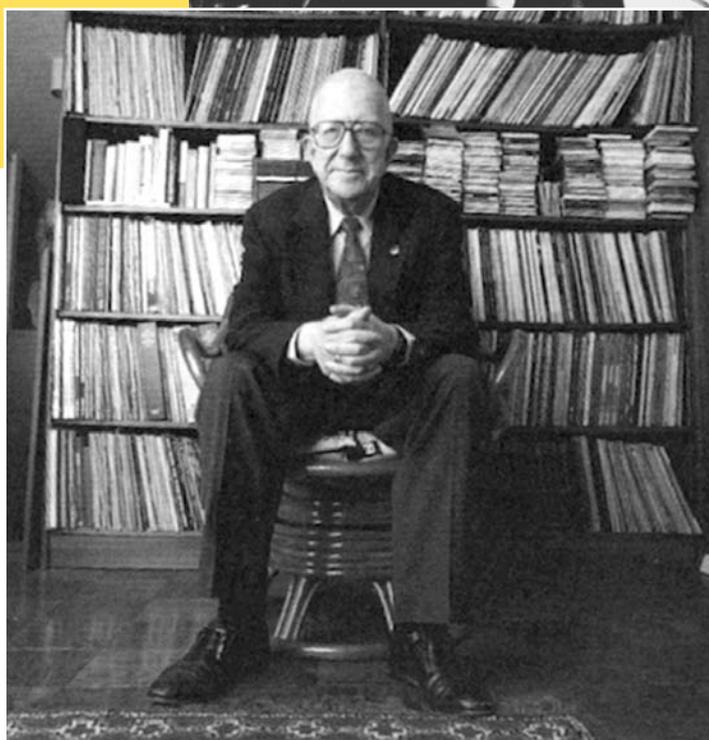
JENNIE SHANKER



National Press Club, acknowledging NEA errors.¹⁰⁴ He conceded that “in some instances, we have used our power to block uncomfortable changes, to protect the narrow interests of our members, and not to advance the interests of students and schools.” He called for a “New Unionism” that puts “issues of school quality front and center at the bargaining table.” He said the union must now embrace such reforms as peer review, or America would end up with a system of private-school vouchers. “We must revitalize our public schools from within, or they will be dismantled from without,” he declared.¹⁰⁵

The speech was motivated in part by an internal report that argued the NEA needed to become active in education reform and not just stick to traditional union activities.¹⁰⁶ But it had Shanker’s fingerprints all over it. Education writer Thomas Toch notes: “It was exactly the same message that Albert Shanker had delivered ... 12 years earlier.”¹⁰⁷ Chase later acknowledged his debt to Shanker. “Al taught us that we can defend public education without defending public education’s status quo,” he said. For those at the NEA, Chase commented, Shanker was a “tough teacher.”¹⁰⁸

As February progressed, Shanker knew the end was near. As Shanker lay in the hospital, his sister Pearl came



WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVE

to visit for the last time. He told her if he had to live his life over again, there was not much he would do differently. On February 22, 1997, Al Shanker died with much of his family by his side. □

Due to the numerous interviews and extensive document review, the endnotes for this excerpt are listed on *American Educator*’s Web site at www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/fall2007/index.htm.

Teaching Plutarch in the Age of Hollywood

By Gilbert T. Sewall

In the summer of 2006, at the Huntington Library in San Marino, Calif., I had the pleasure of working with a dozen Los Angeles high school teachers, test-driving the classics in the curriculum. Part of a three-year National Endowment for the Humanities project, the two-week workshop explored lessons and resources for high school classrooms, connecting antiquity to the here and now. I learned a lot from those teachers, including where the classics can better fit into history and English lessons. But when I reflect on our time together, what really stands out is one memorable June afternoon meeting centered on Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*.

The *Lives* present a challenge for teachers, as do other classical works: Gladiators may have some student appeal, as the success of the recent film *300* suggests, but the classics' more typical fare is a tougher sell. Teachers often wonder if classical stories and the role models they hold up have much bearing on contemporary student life. In addition, Plutarch's language is daunting. Even short extracts in translation are challenging. Worse, they sometimes elicit hostility from teachers, especially among those who want to feature contemporary issues and new heroes. All in all, Plutarch's reputation is not what it used to be. Today, many regard his work as the musty old thing in the attic.

In the age of Hollywood, Plutarch has something of a style problem. Plutarch's idea of a role model is not a

prince or a movie star—nor would he admire their “messages.” His moral preferences are not ambiguous or easily ducked. Plutarch is not an admirer of a “whatever” view of one's own life. Thinking many of his principles of character to be wise, my aim in this article—as it was on that June afternoon in California—is to look at Plutarch from a more positive angle.

But first, why should we care about Plutarch and his *Lives* at all?

The *Lives* were the most ambitious biographical project in the ancient world. The biographies were written about 100 A.D., after Rome had conquered the Mediterranean and Europe. Many are lost, but enough remain, about 50 of them, varying in length up to 30,000 words, to fill volumes and volumes.

Plutarch was a sage and celebrity in the Roman Empire, a leading thinker whose biographies, commentaries, and moral philosophy provided “a lesson for the living.” The age in which he lived—recorded by the contemporary poet Juvenal—was one of rich, worldly power and literary achievement. The culture was sophisticated in ways like our own.

Plutarch, a Greek writing in Greek, the language of the educated classes throughout the Roman world, was equally versed in two cultures. He made his reputation in Rome. His “famous men” had lived centuries before, but they had names as well known to first-century Greeks and Romans as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln are to Americans today. He sought to link the heroes of Greece and Rome, making comparisons. Writing about them as pairs and “parallel lives,” Plutarch meant to blunt the sharp stereotypes that were common then of powerful, commercial, practical Rome and scholarly,

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esthetic Greece, once mighty, but now overtaken. The *Lives* were designed to encourage mutual respect and bonds between Greeks and Romans. The stories stressed their common heritage. In designing his *Lives* in such a way, Plutarch sought to forge bonds between Greece and Rome—and in doing so, was taking on what amounted to a bicultural project.

The *Lives* were immensely popular throughout the Roman Empire. They were a revived “hit” in the Elizabethan era. There is no telling how many of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesars* are being read in classrooms across America on any given day, but the whole story comes, replete with quotations, from Plutarch. Harry Truman claimed his first source of political wisdom came from Plutarch, read to him by his father. Mary Shelley’s self-aware monster explains in a beautiful passage how Plutarch has given him humanity. Plutarch’s *Lives* and the Bible were the two most widely read books in America between 1750 and 1900.

Epitomes—short, abridged “good parts” in translation—made Plutarch familiar to people of all ages and backgrounds. Plutarch entered European letters and American lore. Pericles, Solon, Alexander, Cicero, Cato, Brutus, Antony, Caesar, and Cleopatra, among others, became symbols to which all educated people referred and made allusions. Some became so well known that they were stock figures in theater and drama, books and treatises, popular speech, and political oratory.

The *Lives* were more than a handbook of public leadership, although they were that. Before Sigmund Freud, psychology, and self-help books, for many generations and countless people, Plutarch provided a guide to probity and time-honored clues to a successful life. Plutarch admired steadiness and condemned rashness, illustrating its perils repeatedly through his examples. As he tells his stories, he comments on the attitudes, personalities, styles, manners, winning ways, and character defects that animate the great and move them toward success or failure.

In his life of Pericles, the great Athenian leader who had lived 500 years before, Plutarch reflected on the intricacies of writing history and biography:

So very difficult a matter is it to trace and find out the truth of anything by history, when, on the one hand, those who afterwards write it find long periods of time intercepting their view, and, on the other hand, the contemporary records of any actions and lives, partly through envy and ill-will, partly through favour and flattery, pervert and distort truth.

From the Renaissance to modern times, kings and courtiers read Plutarch for guidance on conduct and public affairs. In time, people of all backgrounds and classes read Plutarch for self-improvement, for self-help, and for insight into human character. Plutarch had an enormous influence on the 18th-century revolutions. George Washington modeled himself on Plutarch’s old heroes, and Napoleon considered the *Lives* a manual of military and

Before Sigmund Freud, Plutarch provided a guide to probity and time-honored clues to a successful life. Plutarch admired steadiness and condemned rashness, illustrating its perils repeatedly through his examples.

civil rule. Regarding character formation, Plutarch may be ancient, but he is far from musty. The *Lives* offer role models that are truly timeless.

Plutarch may enrich lessons in social studies, government, ancient and modern history, biography, and literature. Let’s examine some of these applications.

Plutarch and the Founders

In the late 18th century, spurred by classical ideas, Americans established a republican government modeled on Greek and Roman principles. This was a form of government that cherished liberty, using ancient models to try to reform government, protect individuals, advance liberty, and constrain tyranny. As Brown University historian Gordon S. Wood observes, “Such classicism was not only a scholarly ornament of educated Americans; it helped to shape their values and their ideals of behavior.” Classicism was filtered through the experience of the Enlightenment, inspiring leaders in American thought and culture for several generations. For Americans, the “traits of character most praised were classical ones” and the classics were “crucial to their attempt to understand the moral and social basis of politics.”

Eighteenth-century American revolutionaries were looking for keys to successful government. In an age

of kings, republican examples were few. The American Founders wanted to protect citizens against monarchical rule. For the Founders, the ancient opponents of tyranny and monarchy portrayed in Plutarch's *Lives* provided illustrations of heroism. In addition, the revolutionaries admired antiquity's unprecedented achievements in political order ("government by the governed"), especially Roman models of law and jurisprudence ("the rule of law"). These, said the Founders, were the foundations of enlightened liberalism, and as such, deserved popular respect and knowledge. The Greeks and Romans had debated and developed the principles of justice, the rule of law, and due process over the course of centuries, the Americans knew, and what had resulted were the first versions of democracy and citizenship.

Plutarch's account of Cato the Younger, adapted by the great 18th-century playwright Joseph Addison, impressed George Washington as did no other classical story. To spur morale, he produced the play for his troops at Valley Forge. Facing the encroaching Caesar and his split forces, in the Addison version, Cato makes the following speech on liberty:

The hand of fate is over us, and heav'n
Exacts severity from all our thoughts:
It is not now a time to talk of aught
But chains or conquest; liberty or death.

As his fate is sealed, Cato offers his case for freedom and liberty:

Alas! my friends!
Why mourn you thus? let not a private loss
Afflict your hearts. 'Tis Rome requires our tears.
The mistress of the world, the seat of empire,
The nurse of heroes, the delight of gods,
That humbled the proud tyrants of the earth,
And set the nations free, Rome is no more.
O liberty! O virtue! O my country!

The play does not have
a Hollywood ending.

Eighteenth-century American revolutionaries were looking for keys to successful government. In an age of kings, republican examples were few. The ancient opponents of tyranny and monarchy portrayed in Plutarch's *Lives* provided illustrations of heroism.

Cato commits suicide rather than submit to Caesar. He chooses death over surrender, the loss of liberty, and the takeover of his country. Cato's valor in the face of defeat by Caesar was the source of a powerful line of American thinking, one shared by citizens young and old: "Live free or die" and "Give me liberty or give me death."

Plutarch met the needs of other eminent Americans as well: His stories of the patriotic Spartan women stirred Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, and Judith Sargent Murray. And textbook author



Noah Webster turned to Plutarch for basic themes in his early American civics and readers, advertising Plutarch's ethics and ideals to later American generations.

In Plutarch's moral stories and insights, we may discern the sources and substance of American idealism. Clarifying these ideals helps us grasp the ancient origins of very modern notions of freedom and individuality. By studying Plutarch, students may obtain insight into the foundation of their liberties. The classics are everywhere in the American language, government, and widely held notions of good and bad.

Plutarch and Your Students

Interested in applying Plutarch's *Lives* to more than just history courses, the Los Angeles teachers I worked with, who were part of a consortium called Humanitas, sought more inventive applications. They turned to Plutarch's own description of what he sought to take from history:

Using history as a mirror I try by whatever means I can to improve my own life and to model it by the standard of all that is best in those whose lives I write.

As a result I feel as though I were conversing and indeed living with them; by means of history I receive each one of them in turn, welcome and entertain them as guests and consider their stature and their qualities and select from their actions the most authoritative and the best with a view to getting to know them.

What greater pleasure could one enjoy than this or what more efficacious in improving one's own character?

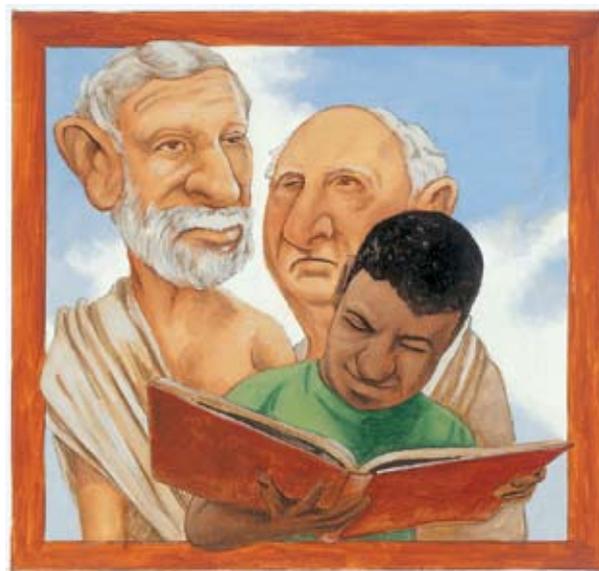
And Plutarch's explanation of how he intended to do it:

I am not engaged in writing history, but lives. And the most glorious exploits do not always furnish us with the clearest discoveries of virtue or vice in men; sometimes a matter of less moment, an expression or a jest, informs us better of their characters and inclinations, than the most famous sieges, the greatest armaments, or the bloodiest battles.

These inquiries into character raise the subject of role models, what Plutarch and the 18th-century revolutionaries in North America and France called *exempla virtutis* (examples of virtue). Plutarch gives plenty of insight into psychology and what makes people tick, especially political leaders. Plutarch's moral narratives, contrasting as they do with some contemporary mores, can act as sharp foils in classroom discussions about ideals and role models.

Plutarch assumed that personalities were shaped by example. Role models affected the development of attitudes—habits of thought and action—that lasted a lifetime. Said Plutarch tartly, “if you live with a lame man, you will learn to limp.” In a complex effort meant to entertain and edify, Plutarch provided historical models to his readers designed to free them, to continue the tart metaphor, from the lame.

In Plutarch's moral stories and insights, we may discern the sources and substance of American idealism. Clarifying these ideals helps us grasp the ancient origins of very modern notions of freedom and individuality.



In his annals of greatness, Plutarch emphasized bravery, endurance, generosity, and constancy. He praised simplicity in manners, love of beauty and liberty, and patriotism. As one teacher remarked during the workshop, there is a clear connection between Plutarch-style virtue and the Boy Scout code: Plutarch idealizes trust, loyalty, help, friendship, courtesy, kindness, obedience, and more. According to his eminent translator Arthur Clough, Plutarch's “interest is less for politics and the changes of empires, and much more for personal character and individual actions and motives to action; duty performed and rewarded; arrogance chastised, hasty anger corrected; humanity, fair dealing, and generosity.”

One teacher who attended the 2006 workshop uses Plutarch in an original way. He builds from Plutarch's construct
(Continued on page 28)

Plutarch for the Sound-Bite Generation

Let me be the first to admit that teaching with Plutarch is a challenge. For high school students, the language is difficult and the references obscure. But it is still possible—and worthwhile—to introduce students to Plutarch through excerpts from the Lives. Below are two excerpts that could be incorporated into a variety of history, literature, or even current events classes. Several more—including two on Cleopatra and Mark Antony—are on American Educator's Web site: www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/index.htm (click on the current issue, then scroll through the table of contents for the Web exclusive).

You may find that students need a "warm-up" exercise before they dive into an excerpt; in that case, maxims are a great place to start. Punchy and debatable, maxims hint at the character issues that Plutarch raises throughout the Lives. Five maxims appear near the end of the main article; several more are on American Educator's Web site.

Throughout his writing, Plutarch contemplates character and manners, good and bad, particularly in those who rule and govern. In teaching with Plutarch, one central question is this: What qualities did Plutarch look for in a leader? Another key question arises from the language itself, since many translations of Plutarch were done over 100 years ago. What does the modern reader do when confronted with a maxim that says, "Man is neither by birth nor disposition a savage ... but only becomes so by indulging in vices..." or an excerpt, like the one below on Fabius, that disdains "womanish lamentations"? With guidance, students can learn to peel back modern meanings and see that Plutarch's messages and morals forcefully condemn all forms of debauchery and weakness.

Quintus Fabius Maximus Cunctator (d. 203 B.C.)

Fabius was famous for use of a "waiting game" and "delaying tactics" as a soldier. George Washington has been called "the American Fabius" and the Fabian Society in the U.K. was named after him. What qualities of personality and mind made Fabius a leader in the midst of crisis and disaster?

"Misfortune tests the quality of our friends," Euripides tells us, and the same test, it would seem, reveals the prudent general. The very strategy, which before the battle had been condemned as passive and cowardly, now came to be regarded as the product of a superhuman power of reasoning, or rather of a divine, almost miraculous intelligence, capable of penetrating the future and of prophesying a disaster which could scarcely be believed by those who experienced it. So it was upon Fabius that the Romans centered their last hopes. His wisdom was the sanctuary to which men fled for refuge as they might to a temple or an altar, and they believed that it was his practical capacity above all which had preserved the unity of Rome at this moment, and had prevented her citizens from deserting the city and dispersing.

For when, as had happened during the disasters of the Gallic invasion, the people had felt secure, it was

Fabius who had appeared to be cautious and timid, but now, when all others were giving way to boundless grief and helpless bewilderment, he was the only man to walk the streets with a resolute step, a serene expression, and a kindly voice. It was he who checked all womanish lamentations, and prevented those who wished to bewail their sorrows from assembling in public. On the other hand, he persuaded the Senate to continue to hold its meetings, stiffened the resolution of the magistrates, and made himself the strength and the moving spirit of all the offices of state, since every man looked to him for guidance.

Trans. I. Scott-Kilvert*

Cato the Elder (d. 149 B.C.)

Cato the Elder was the great-grandfather of Cato the Younger (a hero of George Washington who perished while trying to fight Julius Caesar). The older Cato lived a hundred years before the fall of the republic. He was a farmer of modest origins, yet he became one of the legendary Roman statesmen who repeatedly advised the Roman Senate to strike out against Carthage, its rival for control of the Mediterranean. Why was Cato the Elder a figure of integrity to the Founders, as his great-grandson was a hero of liberty? How did Cato's view of the slave illustrate a harsh aspect of antiquity? (See American Educator's Web site for a longer version of this excerpt.)

Cato's speeches continued to add greatly to his reputation, so that he came to be known as the Roman Demosthenes, but what created an even more powerful impression than his eloquence was his manner of living. His powers of expression merely set a standard for young men, which many of them were already striving their utmost to attain. But a man who observed the ancestral custom of working his own land, who was content with a cold breakfast, a frugal dinner, the simplest clothing, and a humble cottage to live in, and who actually thought it was more admirable to renounce luxuries than to acquire them—such a person was conspicuous by his rarity....

He tells us that ... he never paid more than 1,500 drachmas for a slave since he was not looking for the exquisite or handsome type of domestic servant, but for sturdy laborers such as grooms and herdsmen, and that when they became too old to work, he felt it his duty to sell them rather than feed so many useless mouths. In general he considered that nothing is cheap if it is superfluous, that what a man does not need is dear even if it cost only a penny, and that one should buy land for tilling and grazing, not to make into gardens, where the object is merely to sprinkle the lawns and sweep the paths.

Trans. I. Scott-Kilvert*

—G.T.S.

*These excerpts were drawn from Michael Grant's *Readings in the Classical Historians*, published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1993.

Can Plutarch Regain Popularity?

By Roger Kimball

Like all ancient authors today, Plutarch is at best a name to most people, even—especially?—to most college-educated people. You, dear reader, are of a select group, because you know that Plutarch (c. 46–c. 120) was a Greek biographer and moral philosopher who wrote, among other things, a famous series of “parallel lives” comparing various Greek and Roman figures. Perhaps, like me, you first learned about Plutarch from reading the notes to *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Timon of Athens*, or *Coriolanus*, the four plays for whose plots Shakespeare drew heavily upon the then-recently translated Plutarch. Perhaps you also, like me, dipped casually into the odd volume of Plutarch now and again, to find out more about Pericles, Cicero, Alexander the Great, or some other antique worthy. Probably, like me, you left it at that.

Literary fashion is a mysterious thing. Why is it that Sir Walter Scott, for example, whom generations of readers found absolutely spellbinding, is unread and, for many of us, unreadable today? Why is it that the Renaissance Italian poet Tasso, who fired imaginations from Milton and Dryden to Shelley, Byron, and Goethe, should now subsist as a decoration in scholarly footnotes instead of as a living presence? Why is it that Plutarch—“for centuries

Europe’s schoolmaster,” as the classicist C.

J. Gianakaris put it—should quite suddenly move from center stage to the mental off-off-Broadway of reference books and dissertations? If Plutarch, in Sir Paul Harvey’s words, is “one of the most attractive of

ancient authors, writing with charm, geniality, and tact, so as always to interest the reader,” why does he no longer interest us?

Doubtless there are many reasons: the shelf life of novelty, competing attractions, educational atrophy, the temper of the age. It seems clear, at any rate, that wholesale changes of taste are never *merely* matters of taste. They token a larger metamorphosis: new eyes, new ears, a new scale of values and literary-philosophical assumptions. It is part of the baffling cruelty of fashion to render mute what only yesterday spoke with such extraordinary force and persuasiveness.

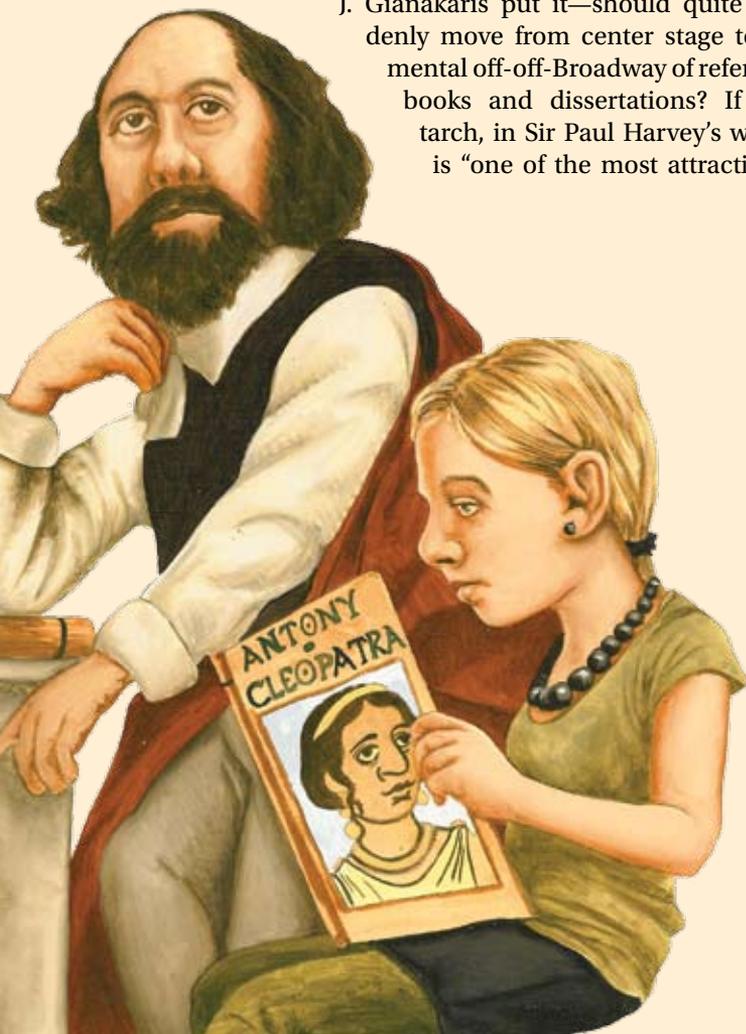
Henri IV of France, in a letter to his wife, wrote that “Plutarch always delights me with a fresh novelty. To love him is to love me; for he has long been the instructor of my youth, my conscience, and has whispered in my ear many good suggestions and maxims for my conduct.” Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Milton, Bacon, and many others learned and freely borrowed from him. The person who brought Plutarch to Western Europe was Jacques Amyot, who published a French translation of the *Lives* in 1559. Amyot’s translations swept educated Europe. In a way, they made as deep an impression in England as France, for Thomas North, who published an English translation of the *Lives* in 1579, based his work not on Plutarch’s Greek but on Amyot’s French. It was North’s Plutarch that Shakespeare, for example, absorbed and refigured to such happy effect. Here is Plutarch, in North’s translation, on Antony’s first glimpse of Cleopatra:

[S]he disdained to set forward otherwise, but to take her barge in the river of Cydnus, the poop whereof was of gold, the sails of purple, and the oars of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sound of the music of flutes, howboys, citherns, viols, and such other instruments as they played upon the barge. And now for the person of herself: she was laid under a pavilion of cloth of gold of tissue, apparelled and attired like the goddess Venus commonly drawn in picture; and hard by her, on either hand of her, pretty fair boys apparelled as painters do set forth Cupid, with little fans in their hands, with the which they fanned wind upon her.

And here is Shakespeare:

The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Burned on the water; the poop was beaten gold,
Purple the sails, and so perfumed, that
The winds were love-sick with them, the oars were silver
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made

Roger Kimball is co-editor and publisher of *The New Criterion* and president and publisher of *Encounter Books*. Excerpted with permission from “Plutarch and the Issue of Character,” *The New Criterion*, Volume 19, No. 4, December 2000.



Literary fashion is a mysterious thing. Wholesale changes of taste are never *merely* matters of taste. They token a larger metamorphosis: new eyes, new ears, a new scale of values and literary-philosophical assumptions. It is part of the baffling cruelty of fashion to render mute what only yesterday spoke with such extraordinary force and persuasiveness.

The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their stroke. For her own person,
It beggared all description; she did lie
In her pavilion—cloth-of-gold of tissue—
O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature; on each side her
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
With divers-coloured fans, whose wind did seem
To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool.

It is pretty clear that Plutarch regarded himself first of all as a philosopher. But posterity has tended to regard him rather as a kind of moral compendium: a repository of vivid characters, arresting anecdotes, dramatically engaging conflicts. Plutarch regarded history as a moral theater whose performances it was his task to recapitulate for the edification of himself and his readers. Considered as a “mirror” for the soul (as Plutarch says in his life of Timoleon), history provided a series of cautionary tales, of virtue compromised and virtue salvaged.

Plutarch did not go in for salacious details about his subjects as, for example, did his younger Roman contemporary Suetonius (c. 70–c. 160) in his *Lives of the Caesars*. But his biographies, though sometimes rambling, are nonetheless powerfully entertaining and informative.

How could they fail to be? Plutarch had assembled some of the most extraordinary personalities of antiquity, and he endeavored to portray not so much what they did but who they were.

Again and again Plutarch stresses that his overriding purpose is to edify. In his life of Demetrius, one of the bad hats who scrambled for power after the death of Alexander the Great, Plutarch acknowledges that evil men must be discussed—not for themselves but because “we shall be all the more eager to watch and imitate the lives of the good if we are not left without a description of what is mean and reprehensible.” In general, it was Plutarch’s policy either to winnow out what was disreputable or to surround it with exculpating extenuations.

Plutarch pursued this high-minded procedure not out of primness or timidity but because he thought it the most effective propaganda for virtue. There is something about the display of virtuous character, Plutarch believed, that inspires emulation. In a famous passage in his life of Pericles, Plutarch notes that there are many things which we admire that we do not seek to imitate or emulate. When it comes to “perfumes and purple dyes,” for example, we may be “taken with the things themselves well enough, but we do not think dyers and perfumers otherwise than low and sordid people.” But the spectacle of virtue in action is different. The “bare statement of virtuous actions,” Plutarch wrote,

can so affect men’s minds as to create at once both admiration of the things done and desire to imitate the doers of them. The goods of fortune we would possess and would enjoy; those of virtue we long to practice and exercise: we are content to receive the former from others, the latter we wish others to experience from us. Moral good is a practical stimulus; it is no sooner seen, than it inspires an impulse to practice.

We moderns, of course, chalk up Plutarch’s belief in the magnetic properties of the moral good to his “charming naïveté.” It is curious that today we are much more apt to emulate what pleases us than what we approve. Hence it is that the contemporary equivalents of Plutarch’s perfumers and dyers are among our most prominent culture heroes, as of course are celebrity artists of all sorts. What does this change tell us about ourselves? What does it mean that a rock star or television personality is adulated by millions? The issue of character, in both senses of “issue,” was at the heart of Plutarch’s teaching. It was also at the heart of Western culture for the centuries in which Plutarch was accounted an indispensable guide. Countless people turned to Plutarch not only for entertainment but also for moral intelligence. He was, as one scholar put it, “simply one of the most influential writers who ever lived,” not because of his art but because of the dignity he portrayed. We have lost our taste for that species of nobility. To an extraordinary extent, character has ceased to impress us. Which is one reason, I believe, that Plutarch and the humanity he championed have become increasingly inaccessible. □

(Continued from page 24)

of the “parallel lives.” Plutarch compared the achievements of Greeks and Romans in pairs, for example, Demosthenes and Cicero, making comparisons between men of different centuries to illuminate the constancy of virtue and worthy action over time and in different places. In such a vein, after introducing Plutarch’s project, the teacher asks students, in the style of Plutarch, to choose two American figures, one from the 19th and the other from the 20th century, then write an essay that explains their common qualities of style and achievement.

Adolescence presents young people with choices about lifestyle and attitude. They’ll imitate *something*: What will it be? By high school, students know that behavior has consequences; they have noble sentiments and face manifold temptations. Contemporary culture tends to rig the contest on behalf of character traits that Plutarch would frown upon.

The cultural critic Tyler Cowen observes that different role models capture public attention today: “Entertainers and sports figures have displaced politicians, military leaders, and moral preachers as the most famous individuals in society, and in some cases, as the most admired.” Furthermore, he says, “many people seek out whichever role models will validate that behavior... fans use the famous for their own purposes.” Thus, bad behavior by celebrities is not only made to seem glamorous and fun, it is useful for individuals who are attracted to (and looking for excuses to pursue) easy pleasure and anti-social behavior.

The workshop teachers agreed that positive role models for students often came from their own families. Some families provide magnificent role models in distressing circumstances. But “good” family values, the teachers observed, are not always dominant in character formation. They noted the modeling power of television and ubiquity of social arrangements that undercut families.

The manners and tastes promoted by television have long interested sociologists. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), Neal Postman argued that electronic media increasingly entertain rather than inform, a trend that is having an immense impact on schools and other cultural institutions. What Hollywood often glorifies is rash, showy, adversarial behavior. Bravery and violence go hand in hand. Similarly, *Times* columnist Maureen Dowd coined the phrase “Hollywood values” to describe the combination of “out-of-control egos, blatant materialism, a dog-eat-dog ethos, and a devotion to pretense” that she thought had become conspicuous features of leadership in American politics.

Ever the moralist, Plutarch pitches a different recipe for success and happiness, not only in his *Lives* but also in his other writing on moral philosophy:

Though boys throw stones at frogs in sport, the frogs do not die in sport but in earnest.

Good fortune will elevate even petty minds and give them the appearance of a certain greatness and state-

By high school, students know that behavior has consequences; they have noble sentiments and face manifold temptations. Contemporary culture tends to rig the contest on behalf of character traits that Plutarch would frown upon.

liness, as from their high place they look down upon the world; but the truly noble and resolved spirit raises itself, and becomes more conspicuous in times of disaster and ill fortune.

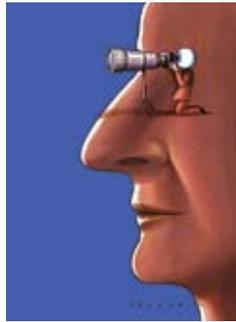
Man is neither by birth nor disposition a savage, nor of unsocial habits, but only becomes so by indulging in vices contrary to his nature.

A shortcut to riches is to subtract from our desires.

The very spring and root of honesty and virtue lie in good education.

The wisdom that these maxims are trying to convey is worth exploring and writing about in high school courses. The values contest is perpetual, something faced by each generation. Will tomorrow’s model be Tiger Woods or 50 Cent? Plutarch would have an easy time here. He would not hesitate making a choice, describing in graphic language why one values recipe is superior to the other, and what makes a hero and a scoundrel. Nor would he hesitate in arguing that such clarity is exactly what our students need. □

Focusing on Academic Intensity and the Road to College Success



Eight years ago, Clifford Adelman, then a senior researcher with the U.S. Department of Education, published a striking finding—high school students’ “academic resources” (a combination of high school curriculum, score on an SAT-like test, and class rank) have a greater impact on completing a bachelor’s degree than socioeconomic status.

His study, *Answers in the Tool Box*, made news and a couple of its key findings—such as the importance of taking challenging academic courses and, in particular, taking a math class beyond Algebra II—even seeped into popular culture.

Last year, Adelman published *The Toolbox Revisited*, using more recent data, and reconfirmed the importance of academic resources for completing (not just entering) college. Here’s how he summed up the key points: “Two national longitudinal studies, a decade apart, have told similar stories. When the second story reinforces the first—and sheds even more light—something has to be right, and it behooves us to pay attention. Both of them provide support for current efforts to improve the quality of high school curricula and the participation in those curricula of ever larger proportions of students.”

Pay attention we will—starting with a closer look at the impact of students’ socioeconomic status versus their academic resources. After breaking both variables into quintiles and doing some sophisticated analyses, Adelman determined that for each step up in socioeconomic status, the probability of earning a bachelor’s degree goes up by about seven percent—but for each step up in academic resources, the probability of earning a bachelor’s degree goes up by about 15 percent.

As in the previous study, Adelman dug a little further. Unpacking the academic resources data, he found that of the three factors (high school curriculum, score on an SAT-like test, and class rank), the intensity and quality of the high school curriculum is the most important. More specifically, curriculum reflects 42 percent of the academic resources students bring to higher education; score on an SAT-like test reflects 25 percent; and class rank/GPA reflects 33 percent.

It’s one thing to know that an academically intense curriculum is important—it’s another to see what it looks like. By studying students’ high school transcripts, Adelman devised an intensity scale with 31 levels. Those at the top level had earned at least the following:

- 3.75 or more Carnegie units of English
- 3.75 or more Carnegie units of mathematics
- highest mathematics of calculus, precalculus, or trigonometry
- 2.5 or more Carnegie units of science or more than 2.0 Carnegie units of core laboratory science (biology, chemistry, and physics)
- more than 2.0 Carnegie Units of foreign languages
- more than 2.0 Carnegie Units of history and social studies
- 1.0 or more Carnegie Units of computer science
- more than one Advanced Placement course

In addition, they had no remedial English or math courses. This is a high-powered transcript—and it paid off: 95 percent of the students who reached this top level on the intensity scale earned a bachelor’s degree within eight years of high school graduation.

Providing students the opportunity to take and succeed in such courses is obviously critical. So how do we do it? That’s the million-dollar question. Many schools, generally in poor areas, don’t even offer the most advanced courses—often because they can’t find an adequate supply of math and science teachers. But even where they do, they still face the enormous challenge of helping more students complete them. Not all kids have the necessary background knowledge, study skills, or preparation.

AVID, a program founded by an English teacher nearly 30 years ago, may help. The following pages share the founder’s story. They also detail AVID’s simple, yet effective structure by featuring one high school’s experience with AVID.

—EDITORS

Focusing on the Forgotten

How to Put More Kids on the Track to College Success

By Jennifer Jacobson

Not long ago, Cesar Moran was more concerned with hanging out with his friends than making good grades. His parents, Mexican immigrants, did not go to college. His father works in construction, his mother, in an office that sells wallpaper. Although they always reminded Cesar to do his homework and wanted him to attend college, they couldn't exactly help him with either. So he had little academic support at home.

Cesar is the very kind of student—an under-achiever in need of challenging courses—that education researcher Clifford Adelman is talking about. As explained in the editors' note (p.29), Adelman has found that the intensity of a student's high school curriculum is the most important precollegiate factor in earning a college degree. Based on that finding, what to do seems obvious: Assign virtually all students to honors, Advanced Placement (AP), and other college-prep courses. But how to do it is not so obvious: Without the right kind of support, many students would fail these classes.

Take Cesar, for instance. He wasn't necessarily a bad student or a troublemaker. He just didn't push himself to study—until somebody did. And he didn't have the background knowledge or study skills that advanced courses require—until somebody taught them to him. That person, of course, was a teacher. An AVID teacher.

In his sophomore year, Cesar enrolled in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a program that seeks to expose average students to rigorous courses that will prepare them for college. Students aren't thrown into

honors or Advanced Placement classes, and left to sink or swim. Rather, they receive a variety of instructional supports, including tutors and note-taking strategies, to help them succeed.

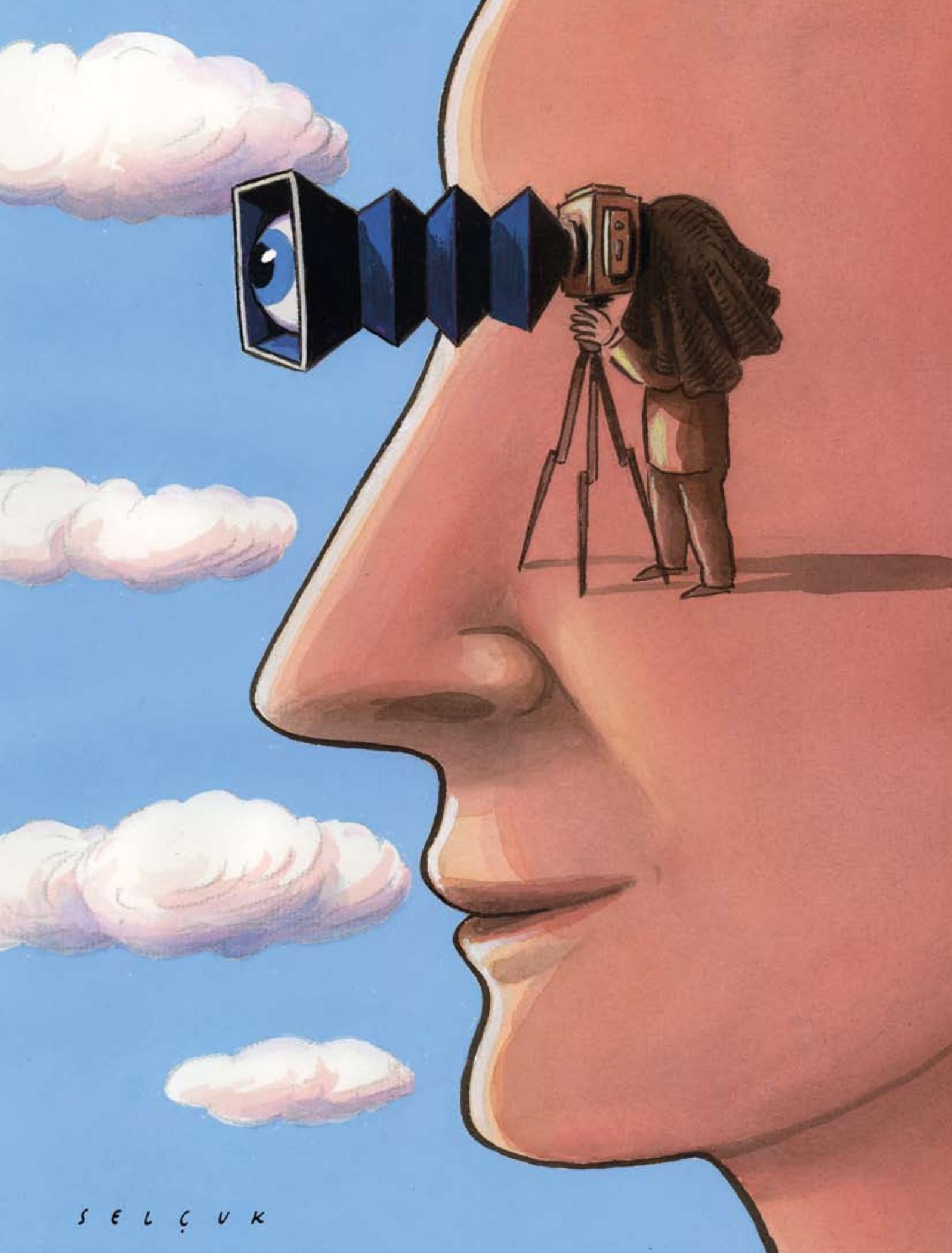
While Adelman's research pinpoints what students need to succeed in college, it doesn't provide a concrete framework to implement such knowledge. That's where AVID comes in.

The program's hallmarks are exceedingly practical. AVID provides students with a teacher who regularly checks their work in all of their classes, works with them daily to improve their writing and study skills, and, so they don't fall behind, stays in close contact with students' content area teachers. Most importantly, AVID students must take responsibility for their own education. AVID requires them to challenge themselves, and not simply coast through easy classes; they must take at least one AP or honors class each year.

AVID is not an intervention program for at-risk kids who may drop out of school or end up in jail. It's for that often overlooked kid in the middle, who is bright and has great potential. It's for students who would be the first in their family to attend college, but who never dreamed they could do so because they didn't have the grades or the money. AVID is also for teachers striving to reach the Cesar Morans in their classrooms. It's for teachers who want to expand access to higher level classes to more students, regardless of race or class.

Now more than ever, students need a college degree to land a good job and enjoy a quality life. But for some, higher education remains out of reach. The application process is confusing and daunting for kids whose parents never went through it themselves. AVID, though, gives these students the support structure that more advantaged kids already

Jennifer Jacobson is assistant editor at American Educator. Previously she was a journalist with the Chronicle of Higher Education.



S E L Ç U K

have. And, says Mary Catherine Swanson, AVID's founder, it provides someone to believe in them, someone to say, "I know you're smart. I know you can do this."

Opening Doors

At Clairemont High School in San Diego, a prestigious, high-scoring school with a well-to-do student body, Swanson became that someone. In 1980, she served as the chairwoman of Clairemont's English department. That year, in response to court-ordered desegregation, low-income, minority students were bused to the school. Swanson did not want them to be tracked into less rigorous courses and to graduate with fewer doors, professional and academic, open to them.

A longtime teacher, she had taught both honors students and those who struggled to read. She had chosen teaching over a career in journalism because she loved literature and wanted to make a difference in children's lives. But upon learning that those new students from less rigorous schools would transfer to her own school, she wondered what would happen to them. Many would be kids in-between, students with average or below-average grades and basic skills who wanted to attend college but didn't know how.

Swanson recruited these students to enroll in a new program she created: AVID. She did this by talking to counselors at inner-city middle schools who knew of eighth-graders who would be attending Clairemont in the fall and who earned mainly Cs, had few or no discipline problems, attended school regularly, and qualified for free or reduced-price meals.

Swanson explained to the counselors, students, and their parents that she would teach them in a 50-minute classroom period each day, called the AVID elective. In that class, she and a handful of tutors (local college students) would improve AVID students' note-taking, organizational, and study skills by intensely focusing on reading and writing. The rest of the day the AVID students—there were roughly 30 of them that first year—would take their core classes with the rest of the student body. One or two of those classes would be honors or Advanced Placement, in which AVID students would be supported thanks to the AVID elective.

The program became so successful at graduating these students and helping them enroll in college that in 1986, the San Diego County Office of Education hired Swanson to disseminate AVID throughout the county. In 1995, AVID went national. Swanson founded the AVID Center, a non-profit organization, to implement the program across the country. It now operates in more than 3,500 schools in 45 states and 15 countries, with nearly 250,000 students enrolled in the AVID elective.

Swanson incorporated an intense focus on writing into AVID because the very act of putting words on paper provides students with the analytical tools that will prepare them for college. "Writing," Swanson says in *Wall of Fame*, a book on the history of AVID, "is a core skill that is used

"Writing is a core skill that is used in every step of the learning process, from note-taking to study questions to analysis to essay writing. The constant, comprehensive, and very demanding use of writing in AVID forces students to absorb what they read and hear and distill it in their own words."

—Mary Catherine Swanson

in every step of the learning process, from note-taking to study questions to analysis to essay writing. The constant, comprehensive, and very demanding use of writing in AVID forces students to absorb what they read and hear and distill it in their own words. And when students have to read each other's run-on sentences, garbled phrases, and interminable paragraphs, peers become tough editors, demanding simplicity, clarity, and structure" (Freedman, 2002).

Today, the AVID elective has a well-structured curriculum that focuses on writing. AVID students learn how to take "Cornell notes," which teaches them how to analyze and synthesize a text and then summarize what they've read. They must also keep a three-inch, three-ring binder to help them organize all their assignments.

AVID programs exist in both middle and high schools. But high schools can adopt AVID without having their feeder middle schools offer the program. In middle schools that do use AVID, students learn the basics of Cornell note-taking and, through writing, to hone their thinking skills, says Mark Wolfe, AVID's national director of curriculum. They learn how to write a good summary and to identify and write a thesis statement. They also learn how to prepare an essay. In high school, students focus on spe-

cific writing styles, such as persuasive writing, and how to collect and cite sources.

The curriculum is structured so that the lessons allow teachers to differentiate instruction, Wolfe says. For each lesson there's a foundational, an intermediate, and an advanced level. During AVID workshops, teachers are trained to identify at which level they need to teach each of their students.

The AVID curriculum also focuses on preparing students for the college application process and prompts them to start thinking about their interests in future careers. While middle school students learn economic life lessons, such as how to balance a budget, and begin thinking about what kind of colleges to attend, juniors in high school actually investigate their colleges of choice and begin applying for scholarships.

AVID also provides training materials for the AVID tutors. These guide tutors on how to work with students and what kinds of questions to ask them to make sure they're learning. Additionally, AVID has developed a set of books in English, math, science, and social studies for content area teachers. The books focus on how to teach writing in that particular subject.

San Antonio's Solution

Just as AVID teaches students how to structure their writing, it also shows them how to manage their time by structuring their day. AVID students at Thomas A. Edison High School in San Antonio thrive on that structure. On a Tuesday in March, they look alert and hard at work in both their AVID elective and Advanced Placement classes. They read, write, and take notes, and fully engage with the material in front of them.

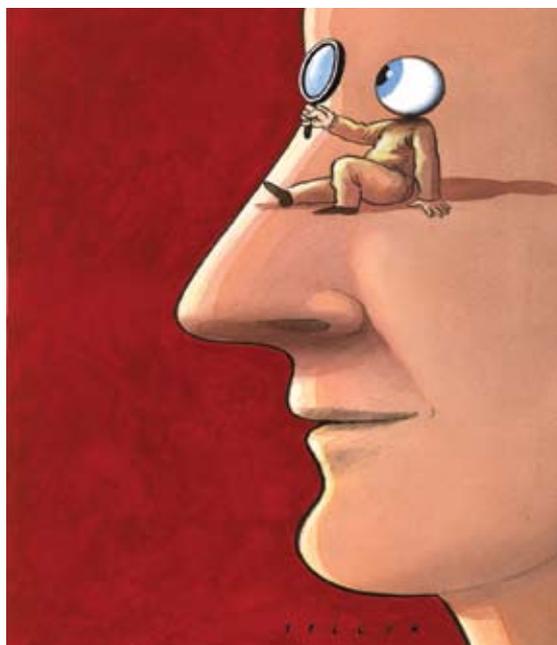
Dalia Johnston sets the tone for such behavior. For a little more than a year, she has served as the school's AVID coordinator and elective teacher. Previously, she had taught English at Edison for five years. Nearly 100 percent of the school's students are Hispanic and eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals. Roughly 150 students in the 1,500-student school are enrolled in AVID, which began at Edison a decade ago.

Low student achievement throughout San Antonio's high schools prompted the superintendent at the time to hire a slew of new principals and send them to San Diego to learn about AVID. San Diego's population, a significant percentage of which was low-income and largely Hispanic, mirrored the district's own. The San Antonio principals, impressed with what they had learned, gave the superintendent the green light to implement AVID.

Rudy Martinez was Edison's first AVID coordinator. For eight years, he ran the school's program. Then, nearly two years ago, the AVID Center recruited him to be the assistant director of its central division. He says he chose Johnston as his replacement because she cared about kids as much as he did.

When Johnston first arrived at Edison in 2002, Martinez encouraged her to attend the AVID Center's summer

Just as AVID teaches students how to structure their writing, it also shows them how to manage their time by structuring their day.



institute, in which teachers spend an entire week learning how to implement AVID strategies, such as teaching students how to take Cornell notes, organize their binders, and improve their writing. After the institute, Johnston found the strategies useful and began implementing them in her English class. When Martinez approached her about succeeding him as AVID coordinator, she jumped at the opportunity. "These kids unfortunately don't have anyone at home to tell them how to go about going on to college," she says. "I felt like I was going to have the time to talk to the students about life."

To recruit them, Johnston works with AVID's site team at the school. The eight-member team, made up of Johnston, five content area teachers, an administrator, and a counselor, meets every nine weeks (and communicates weekly by e-mail) to discuss the program and identify potential students. Johnston also meets with teachers in Edison's feeder middle schools to find students who would be a good match for the program—students who earn mostly Bs and Cs and would be the first in their families to attend college. Johnston and the site team interview students to determine if they have the individual motivation to succeed.

(Continued on page 35)

When Challenged, Average Kids Succeed

In both *Answers in the Toolbox* and *The Toolbox Revisited* (see p. 29), Adelman urged policymakers to use his findings to help more students complete bachelor's degrees by ensuring the intensity and quality of the high school curriculum. As he wrote in *Answers to the Toolbox*, it "is the only component of pre-college preparation that we can do something about, the only component in which everybody can be at the top—provided a) that they have the opportunity-to-learn and b) that they take advantage of the opportunity."

AVID certainly provides that opportunity. Although the program has been evaluated only to a modest extent, AVID's own data indicate that it's quite successful.* As of last year, 94 percent of students who completed AVID had enrolled in college, 77 percent at a four-year college and 17 percent at a two-year college. AVID's four-year college-going rate is more than double the national average of 35 percent. AVID's success with minority students is also compelling. Latino AVID graduates attend four-year colleges at almost two times the national average. And its African-

American graduates do so at one and a half times the national average.

Unfortunately, there are no data on the number of AVID graduates who actually earn four-year degrees. But researchers have studied AVID graduates' retention rates in college, at least in the short-term. According to one study, after two years, 89 percent of the AVID students in one four-year university were still enrolled and on track to graduate—a retention rate that well exceeded the college average (Mehan et al., 1996).

A study by Texas researchers found that AVID also contributes to overall school improvement (Watt et al., 2006). The study examined 10 high schools that had received federal grants to implement AVID in the fall of 1999. The researchers followed these 10 schools, which were in five districts, over four years. Compared to schools without AVID, the AVID high schools had improved their accountability ratings substantially. Using Texas' terminology, three of the 10 schools went from "low-performing" in 1999 to "acceptable" in 2002. Two schools went from "acceptable" to "exemplary," two schools went from "acceptable" to "recognized,"

and three schools remained "acceptable" from 1999 to 2002. None of the AVID high schools' accountability ratings dropped in the four-year period, and none are now classified as "low-performing." The study notes that these changes occurred after two or three years of the program—not right away. In comparison, the high schools without AVID increased their accountability ratings, on average, but only slightly. Only two of the schools went from "acceptable" to "recognized," and one dropped from "acceptable" to "low-performing."

—J.J.

*It also has more evidence of its effectiveness than two widely known federal programs developed to help disadvantaged students prepare for college: Upward Bound and GEAR UP. For example, an evaluation of Upward Bound found that it had limited or no effect on total high school credits or grades and no effect on the college-going rates of the average participant. It did, however, increase the four-year college going rates of students who, when they began the program, did not expect to earn a bachelor's degree (Myers et al., 2004). GEAR UP fares a little better: Recent research indicates that GEAR UP increases students' knowledge of, and desire to attend, college—but it is not as effective as AVID in increasing students' enrollment in advanced courses, a factor that previous research has found is strongly related to completing college (Watt et al., 2007).

Think AVID Might Be Right for Your School?

Contact one of AVID's regional offices and then attend an AVID "awareness session" to learn about AVID's core strategies, known as WICR (writing, inquiry, collaboration, and reading), as well as AVID's 11 essentials, which include voluntary participation on the part of students and teachers, scheduling the AVID elective class during the regular school day, and submission of AVID student achievement data to the AVID Center. Next, visit an AVID school to see the program in action.

Implementing AVID takes about a year. A school must form a site team, made up of content area

teachers, the AVID coordinator, an administrator, and a counselor. The site team must attend AVID's summer institute to develop an implementation plan, and learn how to identify and recruit students and tutors. Then in the fall, the school enrolls its first AVID class.

All this, of course, costs money. Schools must pay a membership fee to consult with the AVID regional offices and receive newsletters and other publications. The summer institute costs \$4,760, not including travel and lodging. The AVID curriculum and other materials cost \$4,500 for high schools and \$4,000 for middle schools. Along with the

program's other features, including professional development, the total cost of adopting AVID approaches nearly \$20,000 annually.

Once schools have offered the program for several years, they can apply to become AVID national demonstration sites, of which there are about 100. (In San Antonio, Edison High School is one.) The recognition signals that a school has implemented a college-going culture and expanded AVID strategies, such as Cornell notes, school-wide, and has done an outstanding job engaging parents and recruiting students.

—J.J.

(Continued from page 33)

Helping Students Help Themselves

It's clear from the way she has decorated her classroom that Johnston wants them to sustain that motivation. A sign saying, "AVID ALL-STARS," hangs above the doorway. Pennants from Arizona State University, St. Mary's University, and Southwest Texas University line the walls. Johnston has also posted students' college acceptance letters on a bulletin board that says "College Corner."

On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Johnston teaches the AVID curriculum to her two freshmen sections, one sophomore, one junior, and one senior section. As of the spring, she was teaching about 50 freshmen, 35 sophomores, 34 juniors, and 25 seniors. Students must take the AVID elective for at least three years. Johnston attributes the attrition rate to students moving or deciding they don't want to take more rigorous courses. In those, she emphasizes, AVID can only help students who want to continue to help themselves.

Johnston assigns each class work that is appropriate for that particular grade. For instance, this spring her freshmen had been researching college admission requirements and the application process, while her juniors were writing research papers on how leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Muhammad Ali, and Gandhi changed society.

Each Friday Johnston tries to invite guest speakers, such as former Edison AVID students now in college, while Tuesdays and Thursdays are tutorial days. On a Tuesday in March, Johnston walks a visitor around her classroom. Instead of individual desks, there are tables with different signs on them. One says science another says English, another math, another social studies, and another electives. Students must sit at the table with the sign of the subject they have chosen to work on that day.

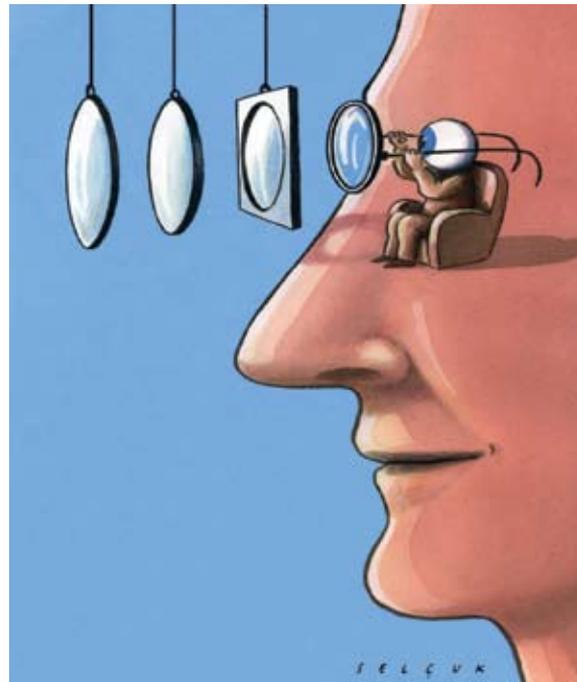
On a tutorial day, the AVID tutor collects a paper from students detailing what subject and which assignment they will work on. The class is more than a structured study hall. During each 50-minute tutorial, "the students need to acquire a new piece of information," Johnston says. To that end, she and the tutor walk around the room to check in with students to see if they need extra support. Students also help each other.

At the math table, Paul Garcia, a junior, sits hunched over a sheet of pre-calculus problems. As he puzzles over how to solve them, he asks his classmate, David Montemayor, "What are you doing after school?" David, looking up from his work, says, "Need help?" Paul says yes.

At the English table, Anabel Gonzales, a junior, sits reading *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* for her AP English class. "Right now, we're focusing on affirmative action," she says.

"Do you want some gum, Miss?" Anabel asks a few seconds later, pulling a pack from her bag. Johnston politely says no thank you. The atmosphere in the tutorial may be a bit informal and relaxed, but Anabel's schedule this year is anything but. In addition to the AVID elective and AP English, she's also taking AP math and AP U.S. History.

Johnston keeps close track of her students. She regularly checks their binders and gives them progress reports every three weeks. Johnston also talks to her students' AP teachers daily so the students don't fall through the cracks.



Convincing the Skeptics

To make sure Anabel and the rest of the AVID students keep up with their AP coursework, Johnston keeps close track of her students. She regularly checks their binders and gives them progress reports every three weeks. Johnston also talks to her students' AP teachers daily so the students don't fall through the cracks.

Not long ago, such dialogue between AVID teachers and those who taught AP was rare. At many schools—including Clairemont High, where Mary Catherine Swanson founded the program nearly three decades ago—relations between the two groups were not always smooth. Carol Frausto, the AVID coordinator for the San Antonio Independent School

(Continued on page 46)

Be the First in Your Family to Go to College

You Can Do It—and This Advice from Other First-Generation College Students Can Help

By Kathleen Cushman

Hazel Janssen thinks of herself as an artist. “I love to act,” she says, “but I also knit, I sew, I shoot and edit movies.” When she found herself crammed into the overcrowded classrooms of a huge Denver high school, she fell behind in her work and lost interest in school. “I need a lot of attention,” she says. “If I have questions, I need them answered. And I work better at my own pace.” At 16, she dropped out and moved in with her boyfriend. She decided not to worry about college. Maybe she didn’t even need it, since she wanted to live the artist’s life. Her father and mother did not have college degrees, so why should she?

Six months later, Hazel was having second thoughts. College might help her find a job that paid more—or maybe she could learn acting or directing in a college program. But she had another worry. At this point, what college would want her? Was she even “college material”?

All around the country, young people ask themselves that question, especially those whose parents did not go to college. Not all of these students choose to drop out of high school, as Hazel did. They might get their diplomas and then look for work instead of aiming for higher education. They might stick it out in high school, but notice that nobody ever mentions college as an option for them.

Kathleen Cushman is an education writer from What Kids Can Do, an organization that publicizes adolescents’ views, especially regarding their schools and communities. This article is excerpted with permission from First in the Family: Advice About College from First-Generation Students—Your High School Years, Next Generation Press, 2005.

You may already be planning your way to college. But if not—if your situation sounds like any of these—you could be asking yourself, “Am I college material?” In the pages that follow, students who are the first in their family to go to college tell how they said yes to that question. They describe how they overcame obstacles like paying tuition, and made it to college—and how you could, too.

Consider the alternatives you face without a college degree.

Attending a technical high school in Oakland, Calif., Niema Jordan often heard friends say that they had better things to do with their time than go to college.

You have to think about, what does “better with your time” mean? You may say, “Well, I know somebody who makes such and such amount of money,” but those people are exceptions to the rule. There’s no guarantee that you will be the next exception. Think about where that part-time or full-time job is going to have you in 10 years, as opposed to where college is going to have you in 10 years. You can find statistics anywhere on the difference between the salaries of a high school graduate and a college graduate.

I think one of the main things that prevents people from going to college is not being able to see far enough into the future. I think it comes from always having to worry about the here and now. My mom was never worried about how she was going to feed me in 10 years. She was worried about how she was going to get food on the table for tonight.

—Niema



Start planning as early in high school as you can.

Starting in ninth grade, you make decisions that will affect your path to college. As you go about selecting your high school courses, signing up for extracurricular activities, getting support, and doing homework, you are developing the strengths that will show up on your college applications later.

But it's not all about waiting for a college to say yes to you. You decide where to apply, and the earlier you start considering what you want, the better your chances of getting it. As you find out more about what you like and don't like, you can start to compile a list of colleges that appeal to you. Niema made her way through high school with college always on her to-do list.

I think you should start freshman year. Things are easier when you plan ahead of time: "Okay, what does it take for me to graduate from high school, what does it take for me to get into college?" You could very well graduate from high school and not have the required courses to get into college. So you have to figure that out. Then ask, "What are some possible colleges that I can get into?"

The earlier you start, the easier it is for you to be picky, to find something that you really like. You want to have a list of what it is you're looking for in a school, so you can rule some schools out.

—Niema

Like all students with that goal, Niema had to stay on top of things, meeting every deadline on time and figuring

out dozens of unfamiliar requirements. It helps to have a checklist to keep you organized and on schedule. Take a look at the box on page 41; it has samples of checklists for 9th- through 12th-graders that will make figuring out the path to college much easier.

Even if you don't start planning in high school, it's not too late for anybody to go to college.

Attending high school in rural Indiana, John Berry did not work very hard at his classes. Almost no one else went to college from his school.

I came from a high school where you did the bare minimum. That was basically the expectation.... Most of my friends either went into the military or started their families, worked in restaurants or grocery stores, got factory jobs.

I worked in a factory making door panels for Subarus, and then I moved to the city and worked as the night kitchen manager for a restaurant. When they closed the place, I ended up doing maintenance for a moving company. It just wasn't what I was meant to do. I'm not mechanically inclined at all. I have to think which way to turn a screwdriver to tighten a screw!

I thought, "This is not the job for me," but I had bills to pay. I had two options: I could either go back to school or move back with my family. I always knew in the back of my mind that the only real way I'm ever going to make anything of myself is to go back to school.

—John

Two-Year's the Ticket

With all the talk about four-year colleges, it may seem to students like they face a stark choice: Either get a bachelor's degree or end up at a fast-food joint, flipping burgers for the rest of their lives. Many students fear that without a four-year degree they will be destined to work in dead-end, low-paying jobs. They worry that because they can't afford the rising cost of tuition, college is not an option for them. They often don't realize there's another way they can continue their education and secure their economic future. They can attend community college.

Created nearly 100 years ago to help produce a more skilled workforce, community colleges offer two-year degrees in a variety of skilled trades—such as healthcare,

paralegal studies, plumbing, electrical work, and graphic design—and are located close to home. With the degrees, known as associate's degrees, students can enter the workplace or go on to earn a bachelor's degree by transferring to a four-year institution. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, 50 percent of new nurses and the majority of new healthcare workers are educated at community colleges; nearly 80 percent of firefighters, law-enforcement officers, and emergency medical technicians earn their credentials there; roughly 20 percent of those who receive bachelor's degrees started their higher education at community colleges; and half of all students take classes at a community college on their way to

earning a bachelor's degree.

Classes at community colleges are offered at convenient times, and admissions are open, which means students can enroll regardless of their previous academic experience, although students who are not ready for college-level work must enroll in remedial classes that do not count toward an associate's degree. Low tuition also makes community college an attractive option. The average annual cost at a public community college is \$2,191, a sticker price thousands of dollars cheaper than the typical four-year university.

To learn more about community colleges visit www.aacc.nche.edu or talk to your college counselor about ones near you.

—EDITORS

John was already 25 years old when he applied for college, and he chose a commuter college* (Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne) where the average student is 24 years old. Once enrolled, he kept working at a restaurant job, and took a full course load as well. He plans to go on for a graduate degree, and wants some day to teach history at a university. "College is what you make of it," he says. "You can do anything if you make time for it."

Get a good idea of what's out there by doing your own research.

Like many urban high schools, the one Niema attended did not have enough college counselors to help all students. So she set out to look for answers and determine which colleges would make a good match for her.

I didn't have a big sister or brother or even a cousin to go to and say, "What did you do in order to get in?" So I read other people's accounts in books. I looked at the admissions Web sites for the different colleges. Maybe you have an ideal college in mind—that's where some people start out. I know people who were like, "I want to go to an Ivy League." So they went online and researched all the requirements, and that's how they planned out their high school career. For me, it wasn't necessarily that I wanted to get into a certain school. I just wanted to get into college.

Things don't always fall in your lap, you know what I'm saying? Like, everybody's not searching you out. Everybody's not looking for you. You have to take the initiative.

—Niema



Aileen Rosario moved with her family to Paterson, N.J., when she was 16. Both of her parents are Dominican immigrants who do not speak English, and they worried about bad influences in the Bronx, where they had been living. They had reasons to worry. Most of Aileen's six siblings dropped out of high school; three young nephews were living with her and her mother, while her brother served time in jail. In New Jersey, Aileen applied for a summer program at a local college.

It was free, and I decided to go just to see the experience. We stayed on campus for three weeks, but we came home Thursdays and went back on Sunday evenings. We took college classes in critical thinking, public speaking, English, and math. If you passed the class, you would get college credit, but if you didn't, you just went there. They gave us two or three hours tutoring, so we could do all our homework, and we went to events. It was a good experience.

—Aileen

Practice taking college entrance tests and writing personal essays before you need them for your application.

Most colleges require some form of standardized tests before they accept you. To make sure you have the most options, early in 11th grade, start asking your guidance office about prep courses for both the SAT and the ACT. (Some colleges have policies about which of these tests they want you to take.) The more you get familiar with the tests, the better you do on them. Schedules for giving those tests are set early, so it is worth putting them on your calendar.

Many colleges also require you to include a personal essay in your application, so they can get a better sense of who you are and how you think. As the first in your family to go to college, you have something important to tell them in this essay. Admissions boards will take a real interest in how you came to be the person you are. The challenges you have faced, the people who inspired you, the obstacles you have overcome, and your hopes for the future are all good topics for a college essay.

If you keep a journal in high school, you might draw on it for ideas to get you started when the time comes for the application essay. Writing poetry also can help free up your thoughts and emotions and give you new ideas that you can develop later in an essay. If your English teacher assigns the class to write a personal essay (or even a letter to the editor), consider it as a tryout for the application essay, and ask for feedback on how to make it better. And, go through as many drafts as you possibly can.

Get help from all sides. It's not just you—the application process is complicated.

Don't let the paperwork discourage you from applying

*At a commuter college, students attend classes but do not live at the college.

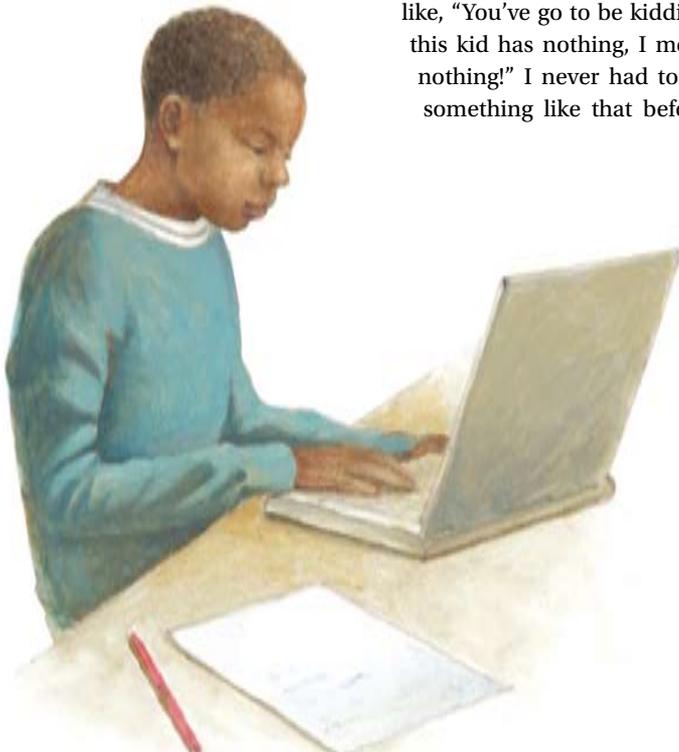
for college and financial aid. If you need someone to help you do it, ask your guidance office, your mentor or employer, even a teacher. If no one can answer your question, you can also call the college itself. They are used to answering questions, especially about the financial aid application.

Eric Polk spent his high school years in East Nashville, Tenn., at a struggling school. Supported by Aid to Families with Dependent Children, he lived with his mother and sister in the poorest section of town. Eric got help from a community organization where he had an internship, but in the end he had to sit down with his mother and go over the family's records.

Doing the financial aid forms, that whole process was hard. I didn't know what the heck I was doing—I would sit down at the computer and just cry! I would just look at the screen like, "What are you asking me? I don't know what this means! I don't have this! Mom, as busy as you are, sit down with me, help me." And dealing with a parent who does not know how to use a computer, that was the longest process of my life—like, "Mom! What are you doing!!"

My advice is just to keep a record of what you're doing in the whole process. Have Social Security numbers handy, have bills handy, keep all your receipts, keep all your bank statements if you have them. Through the whole process, I put together a binder of everything I was supposed to have, copies and dates of stuff that I turned things in, student loans, promissory notes, all that stuff. I have copies of my FAFSA,[†] CSS Profile,[‡] and of the application itself. Even for stuff that I had to do online I printed it out, and I have all of it. You're going to have to send multiple copies of multiple copies of the same thing!

The hardest thing was trying to pinpoint what our income was. And I know that financial aid committee was like, "You've got to be kidding, this kid has nothing, I mean nothing!" I never had to do something like that before,



having to prove our living situation. And because it's already below the poverty level, trying to explain why when they say, "This doesn't match up, how are you able to survive off just this?"

—Eric

Remember, once you are in college you must apply again for financial aid every year, in the early spring. As a high school senior, Niema got help from a volunteer at CollegeWorks, an organization that mentors students through the college and financial aid application process. By the second time around, as a first-year college student, she felt more confident doing it herself.

My mom was working, my step-dad was working, raising a family, they didn't have time to do all the paperwork for me, so senior year I worked with a program called CollegeWorks. They had a financial aid counselor who told me what forms I needed to get done, gave me the paperwork, the worksheets. Based on his advice I filled out all my forms to get my aid for freshman year. Right now the time is coming up again for me to do financial aid, so I called my mom: "Send me your tax papers, so I can fill out all these forms, I'm handling this on my own."

—Niema

Stephanie Serda's family did not interfere with her plans to go to college, but they didn't expect it either. Now that she is at a state university in Ohio, she worries about whether her two younger brothers will be prepared to follow in her footsteps. Because her brothers started out on the non-college track, she thinks they may not have the chance to take challenging courses that will get them ready for college.

I really want to see them come to college and it's hard for me to not pressure them. I know my parents don't pressure them at all, because they didn't pressure me. So I encouraged them and pushed them a little. I was telling them, "Come on, guys, just study harder, 'cause if you do good in those classes, they'll put you back up into regular or college prep classes."

—Stephanie

Stephanie is right to worry. If you want to go to college, right from the start you have to raise your voice, ask for what you need, and keep your eyes open about what classes and opportunities your high school offers you. Many colleges will value the fact that you have the courage and strength to go after your goals without the resources that many students take for granted. If you make good choices and stand up for yourself, you can go after the preparation and support you need. □

[†]Free Application for Federal Student Aid, a required financial aid application form administered by the U.S. Department of Education.

[‡]College Scholarship Service Profile, a financial aid application form administered by the College Board and required by many colleges.

The Journey Begins Now

With all the financial aid forms, teacher recommendations, and the vast array of colleges out there, many students don't know how to start the daunting process of applying to a four-year university. Clicking on www.firstinthefamily.org/checklist/ can help. Students can download "planning checklists," which detail what goals and objectives college-bound students should achieve each year, from 9th through 12th grade. For instance, the ninth-grade checklist (part of which is shown below left)

suggests students let their teachers know they plan to go to college and make sure their courses are considered "college prep" by checking with their guidance counselor. The list encourages students to read as much as they can to become better thinkers and to get involved in activities they care about in or after school. It also recommends that ninth-graders begin to research colleges that match their interests. The 11th-grade checklist (part of which is shown below right) includes reminders such as checking test schedules for the PSAT, SAT, or ACT and offers additional tools like the College Board's "My Organizer." The checklist also features a valuable tip: If students can't afford to pay the fees for tests like the SAT or ACT, they should ask their counselor to help them apply for a waiver, so they can still take the test.

—EDITORS

Your Planning Checklist

From *First in the Family: Advice About College from First-Generation Students – Your High School Years*, by Kathleen Cushman (Next Generation Press, 2005)

Grade 9

- Let your teachers know that you plan to go to college.
- Are your courses considered "college prep"? If you don't know, ask your guidance counselor to make sure they are.
- TIP** Colleges like to see challenging courses on your record, even if you get lower grades in them.
- TIP** If you want to play sports in college, you should know that college athletic teams have requirements about what high school courses you take.

Let your teachers get to know you better. For a start, write down the names of the ones you

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____

Do you know other students like you who are planning to go to college? It helps to share. Write down the names of the ones you trust or admire most:

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____

Read as much as you can this year. It will give you new ideas, make you a better reader. Start a list of things you enjoy reading:

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____

Get involved in activities you care about—at school and after school (including clubs, group, jobs, etc.). List the ones that most appeal to you:

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____

Think about your current interests. What career fields might match up with your interests?

YOUR INTEREST

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Your Planning Checklist

From *First in the Family: Advice About College from First-Generation Students – Your High School Years*, by Kathleen Cushman (Next Generation Press, 2005)

Grade 11

- At the start of the year, make a special folder marked "College." Keep everything connected to your college planning here—information, schedules, forms, and anything else.
- Check test schedules for PSAT, SAT or ACT, and register yourself for tests on "My Organizer" at www.collegeboard.com.

TIP Many college entrance tests like these charge a fee. If you cannot afford the fee, ask your counselor to help you apply for a waiver, so you can take the test anyway.

- Find out where "test prep" courses are given, and sign up for them.

TIP The more familiar you are with college admission tests, the better you will do on them. Take practice tests as often as you can.

- Attend a college fair to get more information about colleges. You can also write, telephone, or use the Internet to ask colleges to send you materials.

- Don't delay college planning because your family cannot afford to pay for college. Low-income students receive funding—ask your school counselor to help meet college costs.

- Colleges want to see demanding courses on your grade 11 schedule. Use this space to list the most challenging courses that you can take this year:

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____
5. _____ 6. _____

- Junior year grades are very important in college admissions. If you are having trouble with your schoolwork, ask for help. If the teacher does not have time for you, ask another adult or a student who is doing well in that class.

- At the end of your junior year, you will need to ask two teachers to write you a letter of recommendation to go in your school file. Choose the teachers who know you the best (even if you didn't have them this year), and write their names here:

1. _____ 2. _____

TIP Don't be shy about asking for a recommendation. Just say, "You were an important teacher for me, and I wonder if you would consider writing me a college recommendation and giving it to my guidance counselor." (Only the college and the guidance office, not you, are allowed to see the recommendation.)

- Stay involved in the activities you most care about—at school, after school, and in the summer. Which ones do you most care about this year? List them here, along with any leadership role you have in them:

1. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 4. _____

Teaching the Legacy of Little Rock

On September 23, 1957, nine brave African-American teenagers walked through an angry, white mob to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Ark. What followed was a standoff between the state of Arkansas and the federal government over the right of black students to attend an all-white school. Just three years earlier, in 1954, the Supreme Court had ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated schools were unequal. Nonetheless, some state officials defied the ruling. Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus was one of them.

When Faubus ordered the state's National Guard to surround Central High and prevent the nine students from entering, President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered the 101st Airborne Division to Little Rock to escort the students safely into the school and uphold the Supreme Court's ruling. The event became known as the "Little Rock Crisis" and signified one of the many struggles for civil rights in our country's history.

Last month marked the 50th anniversary of integration at Central High. Though the celebrations and commemorations have subsided, the story of the "Little Rock Nine" can be taught at any point in the school year. As shown over the next three pages, *American Educator* has compiled a short list of Web sites that offer teachers a starting point for developing lessons on desegregation and has asked the lone senior in the Little Rock Nine, Ernest Green, to reflect on his time at Central High.

The National Park Service, which maintains Central High—a national historic site—offers nine lesson plans on the crisis at Little Rock on its Web site (www.nps.gov/chsc/index.htm). Most are listed as appropriate for grades 9-12, while a few can be taught to younger children. Lesson #6, for instance, is geared toward grades

5-12. It teaches the contributions of "the Nine" to the Civil Rights Movement and helps students understand courage in the face of adversity. The Web site's "History and Culture" section also has classroom-worthy materials—a timeline and several two-page handouts (including one in Spanish) on topics such as the Women's Emergency Committee that formed to support the desegregation plan.

For teachers looking to supplement their lessons with documents from the period, the online archive created jointly by the *Arkansas Democrat* and *Arkansas Gazette* (www.ardemgaz.com/prev/central/index.html) and the manuscript holdings of the Eisenhower Center (www.eisenhower.archives.gov/dl/LittleRock/littlerockdocuments.html) are excellent resources. The *Democrat* and *Gazette*, the two statewide newspapers of that era, provide a timeline from the *Brown v. Board* decision to the events at Central High. The site also provides links to editorials and articles covering the crisis 50 years ago, as well as photographs that appeared in both papers.

The Eisenhower Center archives include links to statements by President Eisenhower and Governor Faubus defending their positions, as well as their letters and telegrams from that time. In a draft of one speech, Eisenhower refers to Little Rock officials as "demagogic extremists" and notes that the Supreme Court "has declared that separate educational facilities for the races are inherently unequal."

For a more in-depth look at what the 1957-58 school year was like for the Nine, see Melba Pattillo Beals' account from the Summer 1994 issue of *American Educator* (www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/summer94/beals.htm).

—EDITORS

FALL 2007

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

James C. Hagerty, Press Secretary to the President

September 5, 1957

THE WHITE HOUSE

U. S. Naval Base
Newport, Rhode Island

THE PRESIDENT TODAY SENT THE FOLLOWING TELEGRAM TO THE HONORABLE ORVAL E. FAUBUS, THE GOVERNOR OF ARKANSAS

The Honorable Orval E. Faubus
Governor of Arkansas
Little Rock, Arkansas

Your telegram received requesting my assurance of aid of and cooperation in the course of action you have taken integration recommended by the Little Rock School Board ordered by the United States District Court pursuant to order of the United States Supreme Court.

When I became President, I took an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. The only assurance I can give you is that the Federal Constitution will be upheld by me by all legal means at my command.

There is no basis of fact to the statements you make in your telegram that Federal authorities have been considering taking you or that telephone lines to your Executive Mansion have been cut off by any agency of the Federal Government.

At the request of Judge Davies, the Department of Justice is presently collecting facts as to interference with or failure to comply with the District Court's order. You and other state officials -- as well as the National Guard which, of course, is not uniformed, armed and partially sustained by the Government -- will, I am sure, give full cooperation to the United States District Court.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

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WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

SYMBOLS
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NL=Night Letter
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THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

WIDE TO PROVIDE THE NECESSARY FEDERAL TROOPS WITHIN SEVERAL HOURS. ACTION BY YOU WILL RESTORE PEACE AND ORDER AND COMPLIANCE WITH YOUR PROCLAMATION =
WOODROW WILSON MANN MAYOR OF LITTLEROCK ARKANSAS =

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NLE Date 3/28/79

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White House

No. 217

Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Military Operations

SITUATION REPORT: ARKANSAS

131700 - 141700 Eastern Standard Time February 1958

1. Events at Central High School

a. Central High School opened at 0830 hours, Central Standard Time, 14 February 1958 and closed at 1530 hours, Central Standard Time. Eight Negro students arrived and departed in private vehicles. Minnie Brown (colored student) is in suspended status.

b. There was no significant change in attendance at Central High School.

2. Dispositions

a. During school hours

(1) Central High School

One Platoon, Task Force, 153d Infantry

(2) Camp Robinson

One Platoon, Task Force, 153d Infantry (30 minute alert)

One Company (-), Task Force, 153d Infantry (60 minute alert)

Balance of Task Force, 153d Infantry

b. During all other hours - Camp Robinson

One Platoon, Task Force, 153d Infantry (30 minute alert)

One Company (-), Task Force, 153d Infantry (60 minute alert)

Balance of Task Force, 153d Infantry

3. Items of Significant Interest

a. Ernest Green (colored student) reported to school officials on 13 February 1958 that his locker had been damaged. (This is in addition to the previous report of three damaged lockers on 13 February 1958.)

b. At 1250 hours, Central Standard Time, 14 February 1958, Ernest Green (colored student) reported that his locker had been damaged beyond use, and that all his books had been stolen.

c. The original three-day suspension of Minnie Brown of 6 February has been increased to two weeks. The two-week suspension is not in addition to the original three days as previously reported.

d. The three white boys, who were suspended for a minimum of three days on 30 January 1958 for starting a fire in Central High School, have been permitted to return to school.



Home Library Research Quick Links Education Museum Visitors Center Information

Little Rock School Integration Crisis

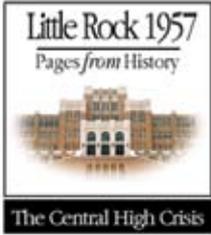
On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education that segregated schools are "inherently unequal." In September 1957, as a result of that ruling, nine African-American students enrolled at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. The ensuing struggle between segregationists and integrationists, the State of Arkansas and the federal government, President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus has become known in modern American history as the "Little Rock Crisis." The crisis gained attention worldwide. When Governor Faubus ordered the Arkansas National Guard to surround Central High School to keep the nine students from entering the school, President Eisenhower ordered the 101st Airborne Division into Little Rock to insure the safety of the "Little Rock Nine" and that the rulings of the Supreme Court were upheld. The manuscript holdings of the Eisenhower Library contain a large amount of documentation on this historic test of the Brown vs. Topeka ruling and school integration.

Atoms for Peace
Civil Rights - Brown vs. Board of Education
Civil Rights Act of 1957
Civil Rights - Little Rock School Integration

Above, the Eisenhower Center archives include links to letters and telegrams exchanged by President Eisenhower, Governor Faubus, and Mayor Mann, as well as official documents such as the military situation report at right (images courtesy of the Eisenhower Center).



At left, historic headlines reveal the showdown between President Eisenhower and Governor Faubus (courtesy of the Arkansas Gazette). Below left, an angry mob follows Elizabeth Eckford (one of the Nine); below center, troops guard Central High; and below far right, Ernest Green accepts his diploma. Opposite, excerpts from Little Rock lesson plans and handouts featured on the National Park Service Web site (reprinted with permission).



HISTORIC FRONT PAGES FROM THE Arkansas Democrat and Arkansas Gazette

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A Senior Year, A Civil Right

When the Civil Rights Movement began, Ernest Green was just a teenager. Like most African Americans in the South his age, he attended a segregated high school. His life, though, changed dramatically when he decided to help integrate a white one.

Green was one of the Little Rock Nine. Fifty years later, he remembers the federal troops escorting him to class, the name-calling, and the determination it took to get through his senior year. Today, Green is managing director of public finance for Lehman Brothers, a global investment banking firm. Green recently sat down with American Educator to share his thoughts on that pivotal time.

—EDITORS

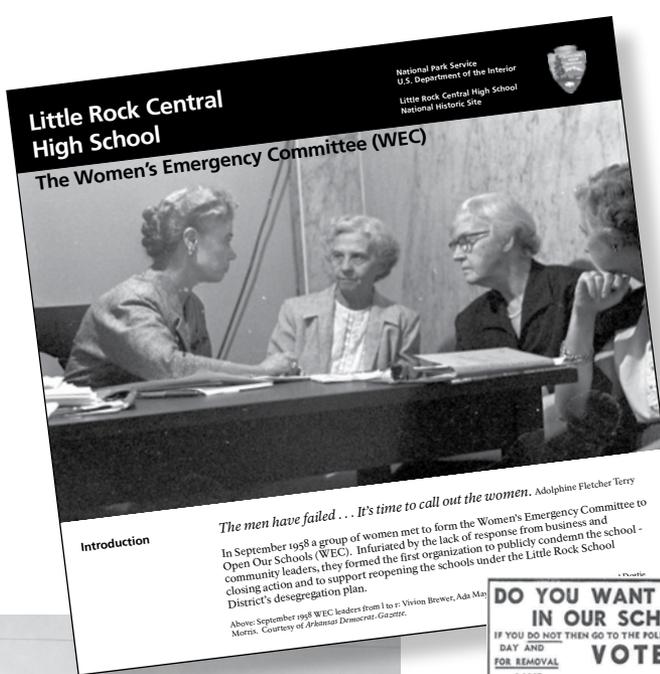
In the spring of 1957, students at Horace Mann High School—the segregated school I attended—were asked to sign up if they were interested in transferring to Central High School the next year. Well, I signed the sheet of paper. I was aware that the *Brown* decision represented a fundamental change occurring in the South. It meant expanded opportunities, better jobs. I

was aware of the Montgomery bus boycott and the role that Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King played. And I was taking a course in Negro history in 11th grade at Horace Mann. We talked about slave insurrections, protests. We talked about Jackie Robinson breaking into baseball. So I had some consciousness that things didn't have to be the way they were. The other thing that always struck me was that change was only going to occur if the African-American community was willing to step forward, that it wasn't going to be handed to you. And I saw Central High School as an educational institution. They had more courses, more reference books, more science labs than we had at Horace Mann. I saw this as an enhancement for my own personal education.

The first day we went to school with the phalanx of paratroopers surrounding us, the morning of the 25th, I felt absolutely exhilarated. This was the first time I could remember that the U.S. government was supporting the interests of African Americans. I felt protected. Initially, the most avid of the segre-

gationists boycotted class and that really was a breath of fresh air. There were students who attempted to speak to us and befriend us. A few tried to eat lunch with us. They came to the table and introduced themselves. But as the soldiers were withdrawn, the segregationists—I guess they figured that we weren't going to leave—began to trickle back into the school. That's when the harassment and the intimidation towards us, as well as towards white students who tried to befriend us, increased—and it increased significantly.

Our lockers were continually broken into. I'm sure the Little Rock school board spent thousands of dollars replacing our books. They



Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site
National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior

The Fourteenth Amendment Lesson #7

Grade Level: 9-12

Objective: To analyze the historical meaning of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and how it is used today.

Ties to Arkansas Civics: (full year) 1.4-, 1.5-, 3.6-, 4.1-, 5.2-, 5.3-, 6.1.; (one semester) 1.4-, 1.5-, 3.1-, 3.4-, 4.1-, 6.2.

Ties to American Government and Civics: NSS-C.9-12.1, NSS-C.9-12.2, NSS-C.9-12.5

"While the Union survived the Civil War, the Constitution did not. In its place arose a new, more promising basis for justice and equality, the Fourteenth Amendment." —Justice Thurgood Marshall

A Historical Perspective:

Three major amendments to the U.S. Constitution were added at the end of the Civil War – the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments – otherwise known as the Civil War Amendments (1868). The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery and the Fifteenth Amendment gave African American men the right to vote. However, the most relevant to the civil rights movement was the Fourteenth Amendment.

The Fourteenth Amendment was passed to stop states from unfairly discriminating against citizens who were once enslaved as citizens of "equal protection under the law." This could not be any unreasonable any minority groups in the U.S. Constitution. It is cited more often than any other amendment in modern

Use of Representatives on the passage of the proposition to amend the U.S. Constitution, January Harper's Weekly (volume 9, no. 425, 1865, Feb. 18). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Arkansas. He was white, Dr. Robert L. Wixom. I spent Saturdays at his house being tutored. I wouldn't have gotten through the course without his help.

There was some apprehension on the part of the school about my going to the graduation ceremony. There were some threats. Some individuals in Little Rock had indicated that they would harm me if I showed up. And of course I was laser focused on going because of the toil and tribulations we went through that year. So there were 600-plus students graduating with me. They went through the list of students alphabetically. When they got to my name there was this silence: No one clapped except my family. As I walked across the stage I thought to myself that I really didn't need anyone to clap. The moment, the achievement was recognition enough.

It turned out that Dr. King attended my graduation. I didn't know he was coming and didn't know he was in the audience. He sat with my family. We spoke briefly at the end of the ceremony. I was honored that he appeared.



© BETTMANN/CORBIS

I'm proud to have been part of the Nine. Fifty years later to see your name in a history book or have a teacher come up to you and say they use *Eyes on the Prize* (a documentary on the civil rights struggle) as a teaching tool for young people, it makes you feel good. What Little Rock represents is trying to be prepared to take advantage of a moment. It's about us pursuing what most people would think an admirable goal: a decent education.

AVID

(Continued from page 35)

District, remembers how AP teachers initially resisted having the program's students placed in their classes. "They felt they were not ready," she says.

At first, AP teacher Michelle LaFontaine was skeptical. The 20-year veteran teacher recalls that when the program began at Edison, she doubted that AVID students could handle college-prep material and that their analytical skills would be strong enough. After all, history is more than the memorization of facts and dates. Students must put historical events in context and understand the complexities of human nature.

In fact, AVID students are not weaker than the other students, La Fontaine says. Some of them, she says, work harder and are more organized. She requires her students to keep a binder, which AVID students already have. And she says AVID students benefit greatly from Johnston's help because as an English teacher, Johnston can hone their writing skills, crucial for any student of history.

LaFontaine says her AP U.S. History class requires a lot more homework than the regular history class at Edison, maybe eight to 10 hours a week. But the heavier load has not stopped AVID students from rising to the challenge. LaFontaine recalls that last year, one AVID student transferred into her AP class three weeks into the fall semester, even though she'd be starting behind. LaFontaine asked

AP teachers emphasize that they do not alter their teaching to accommodate AVID students. "I've got my standards," says Terry Byers, an AP economics teacher at Edison. "They've got to come up to that."



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the student why she wanted to take the class. "I really think I can do it," the student told her. She had seen her AVID peers doing the work and she wanted to try it, too. LaFontaine says the student did fine. "She learned a lot more history than she would have had she stayed in a regular class."

AP teachers emphasize that they do not alter their teaching to accommodate AVID students. "I've got my standards," says Terry Byers, an AP economics teacher at Edison. "They've got to come up to that."

And they do, thanks to a good dose of positive peer pressure. Typically, it's not cool for kids to be smart, but in AVID "they get on each other's case if they don't get their work done," Johnston says. Such encouragement has helped AVID students surpass teachers' expectations. "Some of the kids that have passed the AP test are surprising in that I would not have pegged them," Byers says. "They weren't at the top of their class."

Still, getting AVID students to do well on AP tests is no small task. While the number of students in the district taking AP classes has increased, due to AVID, from 228 in 1995 to 1,822 in 2006, only 344 students (11.4 percent) earned a 3, 4, or 5 on AP exams, scores that earn them college credit. Increasing scores is "one thing we do have to work on," Johnston says. But even if they don't get at least a 3, "the rigor that they had to go through to prepare for that test will better prepare them for college. Just having gone through the process is an achievement in and of itself."

Research supports Johnston's claim that students are better off having taken challenging courses, even if they

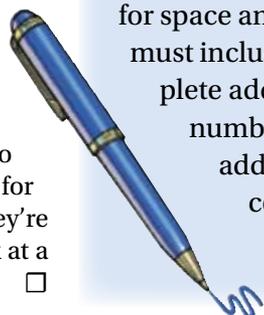
don't achieve top grades in those classes. In fact, *Answers in the Toolbox* and *The Toolbox Revisited* (see p. 29) found that high school curriculum is more important for college completion than either standardized test scores or GPA. What this means is that it's better for students to take rigorous courses and do average work in them than to take regular courses and do well. In other words, it's better for a high school junior to take pre-calculus and earn a C than to take a lower-level math, such as Algebra II, and earn a B. Ultimately, it's fine for kids to struggle in AP courses; it's that very struggle that will better prepare them for college (Adelman, 2007).

"You Can't Be a Follower All Your Life"

After all, there's more to AVID than high test scores. Just ask Cesar Moran. A 2006 graduate of Edison, Cesar enrolled in AVID as a sophomore and is now at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Twice a week he returns to Edison to work as an AVID tutor. If not for the program, Cesar says he probably would not have enrolled in college. But staying in AVID was tough. At one point, he wanted to quit.

Cesar told Edison's AVID coordinator at the time, Rudy Martinez, that he was dropping the program. Martinez remembers the conversation like it was yesterday. Cesar, he says, was friends with two brothers who initially asked him to join them in AVID. But in their junior year, the brothers didn't want to take AP classes for fear of earning low grades that would make them ineligible to play on the basketball team. In Texas, if students don't pass, they don't play. When the brothers dropped AVID, Cesar wanted to leave, too. "You can't be a follower all your life," Martinez told him. "You can do better than this."

After his talk with Martinez, Cesar says he thought to himself, "How am I going to get into college?" He didn't know. So he decided to stay in AVID. As for his friends who dropped out, they're not in college, he says. They work at a warehouse doing manual labor. □



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The numbers are staggering.

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The AFT, in cooperation with the Child Labor Coalition, has created a valuable resource that brings this hidden problem to light.

It has designed a Web site, www.ourownbackyard.org,

where students can learn more about this issue,

review its historical development, assess alternatives for addressing the problem, and recommend solutions.

America's children must learn that exploitative employment practices such as child labor violate international law. We hope you will work with your students to help them make their own decisions about the appropriate roles of government, citizens, and businesses in protecting America's child farmworkers. They need our help. Through education, we can provide it.

The poster features a large photograph of a young boy in a field, wearing a dark tank top and shorts, holding a bundle of harvested crops. The title 'in our own backyard' is written in a large, bold, sans-serif font, with 'in' and 'our' in a smaller size above 'OWN'. Below the title, the subtitle reads 'THE HIDDEN PROBLEM OF CHILD FARMWORKERS IN AMERICA'. On the left side of the poster, there is a quote from Sen. Tom Harkin: '“You can be ten years old, subject to insecticides and pesticides and everything else. They can work you ten hours a day, seven days a week. You have no protections. And that is **LEGAL** in America today and it’s unconscionable.”' Below the quote is a small inset photo of a child sitting on the ground. At the bottom left of the poster is the AFT logo and the text 'A Union of Professionals'. At the bottom right is the website address 'www.ourownbackyard.org'. Small text at the bottom center reads: 'A PROJECT OF THE PROFESSIONALS DEPARTMENT OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IN WASHINGTON, DC. COOPERATED BY AFT, LABORING CLASS REPRESENTATIVE - PARTICIPATING WITH THE HOUSE LABOR POLICY UNIT'.



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