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INSIDE

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For next year's budget, rethink the "one-per-school" rule.

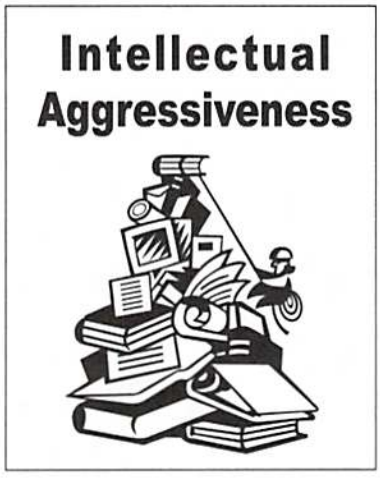
"Grit" and the New Character Education

Researchers study how certain performance traits may help students learn

BY LAURA PAPPANO

On a recent Monday, students in Jeff Thielman's advisory at Cristo Rey Boston High School crowded into his crimson-walled office to take a test. These juniors, like their schoolmates, answered questions aimed not at measuring academic skills but at something that has captured educators' attention lately: their grit.

The test—the 8-Item Grit Scale, developed by psychologist Angela Lee Duckworth at the University of Pennsylvania—asks respondents how they approach



Teachers in the Long Beach Unified School District use posters like this one to spur discussions about character traits.

goals and handle setbacks and yields a Grit Score (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 as "grittiest"). It aims to assess character traits like resilience, self-control, and persistence—traits that research shows may matter more to academic performance than native intelligence (see "What Is Grit?," p. 3).

The word "grit" risks being overused, but the suggestion that *how* students approach learning may be as critical as *what* they learn is resonating with educators. Consider it a quest for the "new" character education. This is not to dismiss teachings about moral and community values, but to frame, name, and share qualities hidden in plain sight, so-called performance character traits.

The traits are not new and actually seem old-fashioned: hard work, delayed gratification, curiosity, open-mindedness, and perseverance, among others. While educators have long noticed students whose drive—not just brains—determined their success, mounting research and a push from journalist Paul Tough, author of *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), have educators wondering, Can you *learn* grit? And how do you teach it?

Reframing Beliefs

It is one thing, researchers say, to link grit to school performance and another to help students acquire more. "We have some really good research showing the correlation between perseverance and grit and student success—academic grades, graduation rates," says Scott Seider, an assistant professor of education at Boston University and the author of *Character Compass* (Harvard Education Press, 2012). "But there is very, very little research that demonstrates that we can take the level of grit or perseverance that a kid has and increase it."

Yet researchers are intrigued. "Probably, yes," answers Duckworth when asked if you can teach grit. She's not sure yet how but says, "We are literally chalkboarding ideas to see if we can test them out." One thought, she says, "is that kids may have the wrong beliefs [and] have misunderstandings about skill development," beliefs that stand in the way of tapping into performance traits. When students struggle, she says, they may believe they lack ability

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and give up. What if they could instead understand that "feelings of confusion are the hallmark of learning?" What if messing up or taking a long time to write a paper was seen as a normal part of learning, not a sign of failure?

It's an interesting idea. Research shows that how students conceive their abilities in relation to a task can shape the outcome. "Much of intellectual performance is more malleable than we thought," says Geoffrey Cohen, professor of education and psychology at Stanford University. He and colleagues conducted a randomized study in which two groups of seventh-graders were given a structured writing assignment at four stress points during the year (at the beginning of school and on three days when tests were scheduled). Half selected core values from a list and reflected on how the values mattered to them and helped in their lives. Other students wrote about the values but as unconnected to themselves.

The results were stunning. African American students in the first group earned higher grade point averages than their same-race peers in the control group. The effect persisted through middle school. It looks like magic, but David Scott Yeager, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin and a Carnegie Foundation fellow, points out that "a small change can have a big effect, not because the intervention taught you math, but [because] it allowed you to learn the math that you were being taught."

Removing a barrier to success by cueing students to their strengths in a setting where they feel unsure of themselves "sets the tone and changes their trajectory," says Cohen. He cautions that the intervention works, in part, because performance traits don't exist in isolation but in relation to a specific situation. "When we are often at our best, it doesn't depend just on what's inside of us but on being in the right circumstance with people we trust," he says.

Intellectual Virtues

No one is quite sure how to turn grand ideas about character into tools for teachers, but Jason Baehr is trying. Baehr is so convinced these traits have a place in classrooms that he started the Intellectual Virtues and Education Project at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and holds seminars for teachers. He is working on a classroom handbook and is helping to launch a charter school, Intellectual Virtues Academy of Long Beach, to open next fall. Baehr, who uses "intellectual virtues" to label what others might consider performance character traits, says they can be amplified "through repeated action and practice."

Teacher Augustin Vieyra is also using intellectual virtues in his third-grade classroom at Holmes Elementary School in Lakewood, Calif. Posters featuring different virtues like "Intellectual Aggressiveness" along with examples of their use—"Use Evidence to Support Your Ideas"—hang in the classrooms, and each morning his students chant out their promises to practice intellectual virtues as they pursue schoolwork. Vieyra, who grew up in a drug- and violence-ridden neighborhood as the son of industrious Mexican immigrants, has long encouraged grit in his students. Now he has a vocabulary to use.

"I can say, 'Talk to your neighbor and let's be intellectually aggressive about this,'" he says. "It allows me to name it and define it and attach it to their very own struggles or behaviors that might take them away from being successful." It is also helpful when students misbehave, which he interprets as masking a lack of knowledge. He looks through such behaviors to give students the message that "you can fight through this and you can be successful."

This sort of reframing also attracts Peter Deeble, a math teacher at Wilson High School in Long Beach, Calif. He has been frustrated by the cycle in which teachers teach and students learn long enough to take the test and then forget. So this year he recast his lessons. Instead of showing approaches to a geometry problem, he lets students struggle until they uncover the principle themselves. "When I phrase it as, 'Let's be curious about this,'" he says, "[for] those kids on the sidelines with senioritis, it is interesting now. It's not because of the grade that they want to learn. If the question is framed correctly, it spurs something intrinsic inside of them."

Looking for Tools

The quest to inject performance character into classrooms is both optimistic and slippery sounding. Teachers are left to freelance, trying approaches that may or may not yield results. Cohen says some expert teachers naturally foster growth of traits in their students. But Yeager, a former middle school teacher, cautions that "our intuition about how to promote grit and tenacity can be totally off." Research, for example, shows that trying to boost students' self-esteem with words is less effective than asking them to persevere on a hard task.

So what, exactly, *does* work? Seider says his study of three Boston charter schools suggests "a two-part recipe: establishing a common vocabulary around character strengths and then utilizing the vocabulary in very specific instructional moments." If a student is struggling with an essay, he says, a teacher might say, "Let me show you the steps to be really gritty."

It's also important to practice. It may not be possible to actually increase one's grit, but practicing behaviors like persistence may yield gritty results. Just because something is cast as a character "trait," says Duckworth, "doesn't mean it never changes"—or can't be drawn out and amplified. Much as we hide Halloween candy to stop overindulging or lower the room temperature if we struggle to fall asleep, Duckworth suggests we find strategies that allow us to practice character traits such as persisting in the face of difficulty.

What Is Grit?

What is "grit" and where did it come from?

Credit for coining the current usage in education circles goes to University of Pennsylvania psychologist Angela Lee Duckworth, who said in a 2009 TED Talk that her archetype was Mattie Ross, the 14-year-old protagonist of *True Grit*, the 1968 novel by Charles Portis, which has also been made into two movies.

"It is really about this young girl who against all odds pursues a very long-term, almost impossible goal and eventually, eventually—with the emphasis on "eventually"—succeeds in that goal," she says.

For Duckworth, whose research connects noncognitive skills like self-control to school success, "grit" captures something educators recognize but had not named or tried to teach. To help, she's developed tests, including the 8-Item Grit Scale for children, which gets at qualities like diligence, hard work, sustained effort, and the ability to focus on a goal without getting discouraged by setbacks.

Grit, though, is context specific. "By definition," says Duckworth, "you cannot be gritty at everything."

What could those strategies look like? If a student gives up too quickly or lacks self-confidence to persist in math, Baehr suggests the student and teacher might reflect and discuss: "How does that feel? What does it look like? How does it affect me?" Together, he says, they can make a plan to "challenge the idea that [the student] can't figure out problems or is inclined to give up quickly." If he gives up after one try, he can decide that "next week I will try three times before I give up or I will commit to getting help after school from a tutor or one of my friends."

Similarly, a student who struggles to be open-minded toward people who hold alternative political beliefs might decide "to watch [a] presidential debate and say 'what I think are the five strongest points the opposing candidate had in the debate.'" Doing such exercises repeatedly, argues Baehr, "could make the student more and more comfortable" with new ways of behaving.

Baehr emphasizes that the quality of interactions and interventions—not the strategies themselves—matters most. "Human change occurs more readily in the context of caring and trusting relationships," he says.

Practicing Character

At Cristo Rey Boston, Elizabeth Degnan, director of wellness and counseling, thinks they have an ideal vehicle for building performance character. The school, part of a Catholic school network, requires each student to split a full-time entry-level job with three others (60 percent of school revenues come from student paychecks). The work-study program provides students with detailed feedback, and Degnan this year added a 20-minute weekly advisory curriculum focused on 10 traits: openness to growth, self-control, persistence, initiative, teamwork, reliability, curiosity, gratitude, classroom contribution, and active studying.

After Thielman's advisees take the grit test, for example, he leads a lesson on persistence. Students read about how Walt Disney's cartoon ideas were rejected and stolen, how it took 16 years to persuade the author of *Mary Poppins* to let him make a movie of her book. Students are stunned by his struggles (particularly that he resorted to eating dog food). When Thielman, the school's president, seeks a definition of persistence, Estephanie Cayetano, dressed in a black suit and white blouse, has it: "continuing in the face of adversity."

Estephanie knows something about the trait. After a freak childhood accident that lodged a nail in her brain, interrupting her speech development, she "had to push harder to do everything." Her mother, a Honduran immigrant, didn't finish high school; Estephanie plans to go to medical school. Not working toward that goal is unthinkable, she says. "If I gave up now, what's the point of all the effort I have put in up to now?"

It doesn't seem that Estephanie (Grit Score 4.25) needs help with persistence. It's true that researchers don't know if the grit she exhibits now will be there if she faces challenges later. Out of your element "it's hard to be completely confident in your purpose," says Yeager. Understanding how to aid students like Estephanie is a research goal, he says. "How do you help a kid draw an analogy between how they survive in their neighborhood and the grit they would need to survive the complicated bureaucracy of a community college?"

Degnan, though, isn't waiting for studies. She believes reflection plus work experience will let students identify strengths and areas for growth and fortify them against hardships in their homes and neighborhoods. The aim, she says, is to be explicit. "The students may not be aware of how these skills are being developed in themselves."

Is it working? "It's too early to tell," says Thielman, but Estephanie credits discussions about self-control for deciding recently that when people say things she doesn't like she will "look above it." "I wasn't really lacking self-control," she says, "but before, I let a lot of things bother me. Now, I stop and think, 'Is it worth me getting upset?'" ■

Laura Pappano is an education journalist based in New Haven, Conn. She is the author of Inside School Turnarounds: Urgent Hopes, Unfolding Stories *(Harvard Education Press, 2010).*

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Making Charter Schools More Inclusive

Experts debate how to increase enrollments of special education students

BY SARAH CARR

Two years ago, Elizabeth Marcell, the director of intervention services at ReNEW Schools in New Orleans, faced an unenviable challenge. As the charter network worked to open its first two schools in the city, she saw that every special education file she inherited from the schools the network took over failed to comply fully with federal and state laws. Marcell, who wrote her dissertation on charters and special education, knew she had to act quickly. Some people in the charter world "don't understand they are legally obligated to serve students with disabilities," Marcell says. "But I don't think ignorance is going to be a viable answer for much longer."

As charter schools transition from a fringe alternative to a mainstream option in many communities, special education is emerging as their Achilles' heel. Over the last few years, numerous reports have shown that most charters do not enroll as large a proportion of disabled children as do their traditional school counterparts. The gaps are particularly wide when it comes to students with the most challenging needs, such as multiple disabilities and severe autism, who cost much more to educate.

The numbers have come to symbolize a larger ethical and political dilemma for the charter school movement. Charter advocates cannot easily make a case for expansion if they continue to underenroll a segment of children. "If there is a consensus that charters are awesome schools for a select group of kids, the public and politicians will lose interest and move on to the next thing in education," says Chris Wilkens, an assistant professor at SUNY Brockport who specializes in school choice.

The gaps also expose charter schools to lawsuits. In the two cities with the largest share of charter schools, New Orleans and Washington, D.C., civil rights organizations have sued or filed legal complaints in the last two years alleging that charters discriminate against students with special needs, at least partly by denying them admission.

Some charter operators earnestly want to serve all students and even use their flexibility to improve on traditional schools' record of educating disabled children. At some charters, educators like Marcell are responding to the pressure with a fresh sense of urgency: joining cooperatives that essentially function like special education support groups or developing specialties in specific areas. But not all charters are, causing some disability rights advocates to push for more sweeping and prescriptive changes from state policy makers and charter authorizers, including everything from forcing charters to join larger districts (at least for the purposes of special education) to imposing enrollment quotas. They question whether charter schools can effectively police themselves, especially when there is so much financial incentive not to serve students with challenging behaviors and conditions.

"Charters are trying to solve their problems from within on this issue," says Robert A. Garda, a law professor at Loyola University in New Orleans. "They need outside pressure." Despite the publicity surrounding the issue in many cities, Garda says he still encounters charter operators who are very confused about their legal obligations to serve students with disabilities. "They don't even know what they don't know."

An Uneasy Relationship

Numbers tell only a part of the story. Just because a school enrolls a high percentage of students with disabilities, that's no guarantee it is serving them well. So far, no research has compared the success of special needs students at charter schools versus traditional schools. The focus has been on enrollment numbers because they provide concrete evidence of systemic discrepancies.

Last summer the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released the most comprehensive study yet on charter schools and special education. It reported that during the 2009–2010 school year, the percentage of students with disabilities at charter schools across the country was 8.2 percent, compared with 11.2 at traditional schools. In 30 states, charter schools enrolled a smaller percentage of disabled children; in only six states did they enroll a greater share.

Much research, including the GAO report, suggests that charters tend to enroll fewer students with special needs because of district assignment policies, a disconnect between charters and parents, and lack of attention to the law (see "The Reasons Behind Underrepresentation," p. 5). However, a November report from the University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education, which studies school reforms such as charters, posed the question, "Are charter schools underenrolling or underidentifying students with disabilities, or are district-run schools

The Reasons Behind Underrepresentation

A small but growing body of research suggests that there are three main reasons charters enroll a smaller share of children with special needs:

- *By decree:* Charters might be part of a larger school district whose administrators steer children with disabilities away from charter schools as a matter of course, perhaps because they believe traditional schools are better equipped to meet diverse student needs. The authors of the 2012 GAO report wrote that "in some instances, charter schools are not ultimately responsible for making the final placement for students with disabilities."
- *By default:* Charters can also end up with fewer disabled children as a result of their own passivity. Marcell found that relatively few of the New Orleans charter principals she interviewed for her dissertation incorporated disabled students into their planning. Charter school operators sometimes claim parents of children with disabilities do not apply to their schools even though they are welcome. But such research suggests increased planning and outreach could help change that dynamic.
- *Deliberate flouting of the law:* At least some charter schools, it appears, discourage special needs students from applying, refuse to admit them, or encourage them to leave once enrolled. The GAO report cited anecdotal accounts from at least a few charter schools. And a federal lawsuit filed against the Louisiana Department of Education in 2010 described several cases where children with special needs were turned away from charter schools.

overidentifying them?" Indeed, in some cases, charter schools may have lower special education numbers because they manage to give students the instruction they need without identifying them as special needs, charter operators say.

At Dugsi Academy, a charter school in St. Paul, Minn., less than 5 percent of the students received special education services until last year, says Patty McCauley, the assistant director. Most of the students are the children of Somali immigrants, who sometimes refuse services because of the cultural stigma, she says. Although the school has slowly identified more children as disabled, teachers have tried to work around the issue through grouping and individualizing instruction.

For both pragmatic and philosophical reasons, charters have always had an uneasy relationship with special education. Since many of them operate as stand-alone school districts, they often lack the economies of scale that make it easier to serve students with diverse needs. A larger school district, for instance, can hire medical professionals or aides to work across multiple schools with children who have the same disability. Moreover, many charter school leaders are anti-bureaucratic in their orientation: They embrace the model because they believe it to be comparatively free of regulation and red tape. Special education, on the other hand, is one of the most regulated, logistically cumbersome areas in public education.

Its laws and requirements "contrast starkly with the fundamental nature and culture of charter schools and pit regulation against autonomy, procedures against results, rigid bureaucracy against flexibility, and collective action against independence—all in the same school house," Garda wrote in a *North Carolina Law Review* essay last year.

Volunteer Efforts

Many of the charter community's own efforts to improve services for disabled children fall into two broad categories: cooperation and specialization.

A group of Washington, D.C., charter school leaders formed the first special education cooperative for charters more than 14 years ago. Slightly more than half of the city's charters now participate, paying an annual membership fee that provides them with advice on particularly hard cases and professional development, among other services. Monica Lesperance, the cooperative's deputy director, says members routinely ask for help training general education teachers on special education issues, for advice on aligning individual education plans with the curriculum, or for strategies for calming down students who are disruptive in class.

Educators in other cities and states, including Louisiana and New York, have copied that model to varying degrees. The Louisiana Special Education Coop, which opened in 2009, helped Marcell discover all the problems in ReNEW's special education files after the cooperative's leaders performed a paperwork review. In some cases, individualized education plans were missing required information about student grades and attendance. In other cases, teachers had cut-and-pasted the same student plan year after year without bothering to change the dates, much less note progress or setbacks.

Marcell and the rest of ReNEW's special education staff worked during the network's first year to get the paperwork into compliance with state and federal laws while providing the best services they could. Since then, she has used the cooperative—which costs each school $1,500–2,500 for annual membership—for professional development, networking, and advice on particularly complicated cases.

ReNEW, like a growing number of charters, has also tried specializing. In 2011, the network created a small therapeutic center mostly for students with

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severe emotional disorders. Each of the 12 students in the program has been hospitalized multiple times for violent or suicidal behavior. On a recent morning, the staff rejoiced when one student briefly protested being kept in for recess by crying, clenching his fists, and shouting "I don't want to be here!" Two weeks earlier he would have had a complete meltdown and required several hours of recovery time, they said.

With a full-time counselor, regular visits from psychologists, two teachers, and four aides, ReNEW's therapeutic program costs more than $460,000 annually, or about $38,000 per child. That's nearly five times what ReNEW spends on a regular education student. The network pays for the program with a grant from a New Orleans–based organization called the Institute of Mental Hygiene. Through a competitive application process, ReNEW also receives a share of federal money Louisiana sets aside for school districts serving students who cost more than three and a half times the standard per-pupil rate.

Some favor a host of legal and regulatory changes to force charters' hands.

Denver has embraced a similar model for its charters over the last two years as part of an effort to narrow special education enrollment gaps and ensure that disabled children have some school choice. Four of the city's charters now include centers focused on students with specific needs, like autism or emotional disabilities. Over the next three years, the district plans to create additional charter-based centers until they are serving the same percentage of students with severe disabilities as the noncharters, says John Simmons, executive director of student services for Denver Public Schools.

The district has not forced any charter schools to open centers, but volunteers have been fairly easy to find, since the district pays the extra cost. Regardless of whether they host centers, all charter schools contribute to a districtwide fund for students with significant disabilities. Simmons does not believe charters should be coerced into boosting their special education numbers. He worries that medically and emotionally fragile children would end up in schools whose administrators do not want them. "We do a better job through persuasion than mandates," he says.

No Time for Slow Growth

Others believe charter schools can't be trusted to enroll the most challenging students, particularly given the steep costs. They favor a host of legal and regulatory changes that would force charters' hands.

New York took a rare step in the latter direction last summer when the state education department required charter schools to begin serving roughly the same proportion of special needs students as their district's average. Some charter operators vigorously fought the measure. "The proposed targets . . . institutionalize perverse incentives to over-identify students with disabilities and to not move students fully into the general education programs," wrote Eva Moskowitz, the CEO of New York's Success Academy charter network, in a letter to the state's authorizers.

Advocates for increased charter oversight say authorizers would not need quotas if they demanded greater accountability from charters. Applicants for new charter schools should be required to submit more detailed and thoughtful special education plans when they apply for a charter, says Loyola's Garda. Many authorizers make applicants commit to following the mandates of federal law. But he says little effort is made to ensure that prospective school operators know what the law actually calls for.

Authorizers need to show they are willing to shutter charter schools that repeatedly turn away or fail to serve students with disabilities, advocates say. SUNY Brockport's Wilkens knows of only one case, Dove Science Academy in Tulsa, Okla., where a charter has closed solely because of problems with its special education program.

In New Orleans, like most cities, the focus so far has been much more on the carrot than the stick. The city provides an interesting test case, since more than 80 percent of its public school children attend charters. Margaret Lang, former head of intervention services at the state-run Recovery School District, which oversees most of the city's schools, says voluntary programs like the cooperative have helped to a certain extent, though their effect is not easily quantifiable. Nine percent of the Recovery School District's charter school students received special education services, compared with about 6 percent five years ago. Charter leaders now have a much better understanding of their legal responsibilities, she says.

But Lang believes schools might need to be pushed more moving forward. Last spring there were still eight Recovery School District charter schools where fewer than 6 percent of students received special education services—a red flag that they might be turning away students with disabilities, since the district average is closer to 10 percent. She wants district and state officials to monitor charter school special education programs more closely through ongoing site visits and paperwork reviews to ensure that they are obeying the law and working to improve their services.

"I constantly hear that charter schools are going to 'grow into' special education," Lang says. "I'm tired of hearing that. There isn't time for them to grow into it. The kids are here right now." ■

Sarah Carr, a freelance education writer, is the author of Hope Against Hope *(Bloomsbury Press, 2013), which tells the story of the New Orleans schools post-Katrina.*

Preparing for a Multiracial Society

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school. There are now more low-income people living in the suburbs than cities. It's hidden because nobody is talking about it in public. But you can find out about it in a minute if you have some realtors come into a bar and talk about it, or you go to the local playground. School people don't want to talk about it.

What do they say?

What they say is that they are going to try to re-equalize people's education and keep their schools attractive by very strong standards and strong accountability, and if they can get the test scores up, their schools will be in good shape. The problem with that is that, one, they don't tend to get the test scores up, and, two, if they get the test scores up, whites and Asians aren't going to come to their school anyway if it resegregates. If the whites won't come in, you don't have as many people with resources and with strong educational backgrounds and political power to create political and financial support for the schools.

Recent court decisions on school desegregation and affirmative action have limited what can be done to promote equal opportunity. Looking forward, what strategies seem most promising, and what can educators do?

You can't consider an individual's race to desegregate, but you can use neighborhood characteristics, because housing is still so segregated in this country. Berkeley and Louisville, for example, maintain integration by looking at the character of the neighborhood and using that in their student assignment system with pretty good success. You can do affirmative action based on language. You can consider poverty and parent education levels. These won't work as well as considering race, but they can help to maintain diversity in schools. Also, excellent regional magnet schools like those in Hartford and New Haven draw people across boundary lines.

Choice is expanding through charter school laws, but typically there's no transportation or information outreach to different racial groups. A lot of aspects that make choice a way to integrate schools don't exist in many charters. Choice is most equitable when there is a plan for diversity, outreach to make it happen, excellent information, provision for English learners, and good, free transportation to the schools of choice.

What can educators do in suburbs where the population is changing?

School systems in this process of resegregating have to be very active in promoting their quality with their homebuyers. Have brochures, welcome everybody, show them around. You need to have a positive theory about diversity, be proudly diverse, and make people feel good about that. And recruit people to your schools.

But the first thing you should do is think about this early. When a neighborhood goes through racial change, whites aren't shown into it. It's a form of illegal real estate action. It's really hard to address this after 80 percent of the people being shown into your district are nonwhite families.

Also, make sure your staff and administrators are diverse and actually understand the people who are coming into your district. Fewer and fewer whites will be coming in the future, so make sure they have training so they can deal with diverse students and parents. Nothing is worse than having racial incidents. A little fight between students of different races can escalate if nobody knows how to talk about it.

In a country where minorities are increasingly in the majority, what will be the major issues in the future for civil rights advocates and researchers to focus on, particularly in education?

In terms of the future, obviously it's not going to be about who gets into a predominately white society; it's about making the multiracial society work. Integration is not a panacea for education—there are a lot of other things that need to be done—but it is a necessary condition. We need to think about integration among four major racial groups and think more about the values of class diversity. We need to create schools with diverse faculties and administrations that see diversity as a treasure for our society and deal with all students and parents with respect and understanding.

If you do this right, you create a community that everyone wants to live in, that teachers want to teach in, and you create a rich community. It's risky and difficult, but it also has tremendous rewards. ■

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Preparing Schools for a Multiracial Society

*Gary Orfield, 71, has long been a prominent voice for civil rights and equal opportunity in education as codirector of the Civil Rights Project/*Proyecto Derechos Civiles *at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he is also a professor of education, law, political science, and urban planning.* Harvard Education Letter *editor Nancy Walser interviewed him on the eve of the publication of his most recent book,* The Resegregation of Suburban Schools: A Hidden Crisis in American Education *(Harvard Education Press, 2012), coedited with Erica Frankenberg, an assistant professor at Pennsylvania State University.*

What prompted you to found the Civil Rights Project in 1996?

It started 16 years ago at Harvard University after California and Texas abolished affirmative action. We held an emergency meeting in the basement of Gutman Library. Twenty-five college presidents, scholars, and civil rights leaders came on very short notice, and because of what we learned about the lack of basic information on key issues, we started to plan an intellectual think tank, a network of scholars with a broad agenda of trying to figure out what the patterns of racial inequality in the country are and to research the social and legal issues that need to be faced. So far we've completed 500 studies and 17 or 18 books. Our short-term mission is to inform the debate with the richest kind of social science we can find and prepare the country for what is the biggest change in racial composition in our history. In the long term, we want to train young people to carry on this work for many years and help define long-range challenges that haven't even entered our political discourse yet.

How has the landscape of civil rights advocacy research changed since then?

It's become more multiracial. Just this year, the government announced there were more nonwhite births than white births in the U.S. The courts, however, have withdrawn from addressing the issues and undermined civil rights on a scale that was hard to imagine when we started. Now when the Supreme Court takes up an issue, people concerned about civil rights get very nervous. They expect things will be worse. During the Warren Court, it was very different. Now we have an activist conservative Court that is reflexively hostile to minority rights. On the positive side, we don't have much trouble finding people to work for us. We just submitted a brief to the Supreme Court on the *Fisher v. University of Texas* case with help from 440 scholars from 42 states. It's an amazing document on some central issues. Over 20 scholars worked on it for months, for no money. Scholars and students are intensely interested in how we make our multiracial society work. There is a reservoir of goodwill. They know they are living in a different world than older people are.

Which changes in education policy have had the most effect on desegregation or segregation?

The federal government had a huge impact on schools when it enforced the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but the courts have been a major problem, including the Supreme Court's 2007 decision to outlaw most forms of voluntary desegregation. Generally speaking, what I have observed is when the federal government takes the blame, facing up to racial inequalities, educators are willing to make diverse schools work—they liked integrated schools, they don't like resegregated schools. But educators have had very little courage in pursuing desegregation or opposing resegregation or seriously addressing issues such as unequal suspensions and misuse of special education. On the other hand, they aren't getting any guidance or support from the courts, their districts, or their professional associations. So we have these huge changes happening in the country that will have pretty obvious effects, and people are acting as if they don't have to do anything about it.

Your recent book calls resegregation of suburban schools a "hidden crisis." What is happening in the suburbs and why is it a crisis?

Almost all communities that become resegregated go through a transition. They were once white, middle class, or integrated, and then they become segregated by race and later by poverty.

Resegregation is followed by disinvestment and decline, as happened to urban neighborhoods back in the '50s and '60s. Then you have poor communities without resources to tax, and you have all the problems that the central cities have only more so because there aren't as many institutional resources in the suburbs. That's the cycle that's happening in many suburbs, where over half of minority students now attend

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