Dennis Littky

Director and Co-Founder
Metropolitan Regional and Career Technical Center

Co-Director and Co-Founder
The Big Picture Company

Nominated by

Robert Burkhardt

Dennis Littky
Director and Co-Founder, Metropolitan Regional and Career Technical Center
Co-Director and Co-Founder, The Big Picture Company

Dennis is director and cofounder of the Metropolitan Regional and Career Technical Center ("The Met") in Providence, Rhode Island, and codirector and cofounder of The Big Picture Company, a non-profit education reform organization that creates and supports small, personalized public high schools that work in tandem with their communities. Dennis' work in establishing small learning communities across America has been inspirational and exemplary, and is my primary basis for nominating him. Recently The Met was named one of eighteen national finalists for the Innovations In American Government Award, sponsored by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. The $100,000 prize winner will be announced in July.

Dennis has been at the forefront of innovative leadership in middle and secondary education for more than 35 years, as reported in *The New York Times, The Boston Globe, Newsweek, Fortune* and numerous other publications. He was the subject of the 1992 NBC-TV movie *A Town Torn Apart*, based on the book *Doc* by Susan Kammeraad-Campbell, which chronicled his 13-year tenure as principal of Thayer Junior/Senior High School in Winchester, NH. He was named New Hampshire's Principal of the Year and was runner up for National Principal of the Year. He holds a double Ph.D. in education and psychology from the University of Michigan, has served as a senior fellow at Brown University's Annenberg Institute, and in 2002 was awarded the Harold W. McGraw, Jr. prize in education.

Submitted by: Robert Burkhardt

College of Liberal Studies
Received

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University of Oklahoma

To: Brock Prize Selection Committee

From: Robert Burkhardt

Subject: Nomination

Date: June 28, 2005

1. **The Nominee:** Dennis Littky

Dennis Littky is director and cofounder of the Metropolitan Regional and Career Technical Center ("The Met") in Providence, Rhode Island, and codirector and cofounder of The Big Picture Company, a non-profit education reform organization that creates and supports small, personalized public high schools that work in tandem with their communities. In April of 2005, The Met was named one of eighteen national finalists for the "Innovations in Better Government" Award, sponsored by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Dennis' work in establishing award-winning, small learning communities across America has been inspirational and exemplary, and is my primary basis for nominating him.

He has been at the forefront of innovative leadership in middle and secondary education for more than 35 years, as reported in *The New York Times, The Boston Globe, Newsweek, Fortune* and numerous other publications. . *Fast Company Magazine* named Dennis 4th among the top 50 "innovators" of 2004. In September of 2004, Dennis' book, *The Big Picture: Education is Everyone's Business,* written with Samantha Grabelle, was published by ASCD Press as a featured book and mailed to its 96,000 members. It went on to win the Association of Educational Publishers' 2005 Distinguished Achievement for Excellence in Educational Publishing Award.

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Brown University's Annenberg Institute, and in 2002 was awarded the Harold W. McGraw, Jr. prize in education.

2. The Context: Dropouts up...Graduates down...Resegregation rising

Three disturbing truths threaten American secondary education today: an unacceptable dropout rate, a diminished graduation rate for students of color, and the resegregation of our public schools.

> **Dropouts:** "This coming September, about 3.5 million young people in America will begin the 8th grade. Over the succeeding four years, more than 1 million of them will drop out—an average of 3,500 each school day. Another 1.5 million will muddle through with a collection of credits that fail to prepare them for college, work, or citizenship." Education Week, April 2, 2003
>
> **Graduation rates:** "The national graduation rate for the class of 1998 was 71%. For white students the rate was 78%, while it was 56% for African-American students and 54% for Latino students...Far fewer students are graduating high school than we may have believed and far fewer than we would wish. The graduation rates are shockingly low for African-American and Latino students nationwide." (High School Graduation Rates in the Unites States, Jay P. Greene, November 2001) Even more alarming, according to the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, "only 51% of all black students and 52% of all Hispanic students graduate, and only 20% of all black students and 16% of all Hispanic students leave high school college ready."
>
> **Resegregation:** "At the beginning of the twenty-first century, American public schools are now twelve years into the process of continuous resegregation. The desegregation of black students, which increased continuously from the 1950s to the late 1980s, has now receded to levels not seen in three decades...The date show the emergence of a substantial group of American schools that are virtually all non-white, which we call apartheid schools." A Multiracial Society With Segregatred School: Are We Losing The Dream?, Gary Orfield et al, January 2003

3. The Response: Small High Schools

One of the most promising national responses to the issues raised above is what I label the Small Schools Movement. Across America, in small towns and large cities, parents and educators are creating small high schools that prepare all of their students for college, work and citizenship. By combining rigor and relationships, these schools have figured out how to emphasize academics while integrating personal growth.

The "movement" is real. By way of example, fifty-seven new small high schools will open in New York City in September of this year. The Renaissance 2010 project in Chicago intends to create 100 new small high schools in that city by the end of this decade. Superintendent Roy Romer in Los Angeles has recently advocated small high schools as a means to address critical issue in our nation's largest school district. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has invested more than $700 million to promote the growth of small high schools. And the research findings are compelling.

"...Research has repeatedly found small schools to be superior to large schools on most measures and equal to them on the rest. This holds true for both elementary and secondary students of all ability levels and in all kinds of settings." School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance, Kathleen Cotton, May 1996

Kathleen Cotton reviewed over 103 studies concerned with school size and its impact on such things as student performance, attitude, extracurricular participation, attendance, etc. Her major findings include:

> Student attendance is better in small schools than in large ones
>
> Academic achievement in small schools is at least equal—and often superior—to that of large schools.
>
> Student attitudes toward school in general and toward particular school subjects are more positive in small schools
>
> Student social behavior—as measured by truancy, discipline problems, violence, theft, substance abuse, and gang participation—is more positive in small schools

Levels of extracurricular participation are much higher and more varied in small schools than large ones, and students in small schools derive greater satisfaction from their extracurricular participation

A small percentage of students drop out of small schools

Students have a greater sense of belonging in small schools

Students in small schools take more of the responsibility for their own learning

Small schools have a higher rate of parent involvement

Teacher attitudes toward their work and their administrators are more positive in small schools than in large ones

Poor students and those of racial and ethnic minorities are more adversely affected—academically, attitudinally, and behaviorally—by attending large schools than are other students. Poor and minority students continue to be concentrated in large schools

The research is abundantly clear: small schools are an effective means of ameliorating American education.

4. The Case for the 2006 Brock Prize

At the most recent summit meeting of our nation's Governors, Bill Gates flatly declared: "American high schools are obsolete. By obsolete, I don't just mean that our high schools are broken, flawed and underfunded...By obsolete, I mean that our high schools—even when they are working exactly as designed—cannot teach our kids what they need to know today." Gates described his solution by painting a picture of The Met with its poor, minority population and exceptionally high graduation and college placement rates: "These are the kind of results you can get when you design a high school to prepare every student for college."

At the center of the small schools movement are Dennis Littky and his team of dedicated teachers who have created The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center in Providence, Rhode Island, known as "The Met."

The Met opened its doors in September 1996, and rapidly achieved national prominence (see accompanying materials). In 2000 the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation asked Dennis and Elliot Washor, both codirectors of the educational nonprofit The Big Picture Company, to replicate The Met's success across America. So far, they have started 30 schools nation-wide in Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Oakland, Sacramento, San Diego, and Indianapolis, with 20 more scheduled to open by 2008.

Thousands of visitors have come to The Met from all over the world to see what Dennis, the staff and students have achieved, and to take ideas with them back to their own schools and school districts. The 1,100 site visitors who came last year ('04-'05) included two 40-person delegations of principals from The Netherlands, groups of educators from Australia and Israel (including the mayor of Bat Yam), and a 100-person conference, which attracted teachers and administrators from all over the US and Iceland.

The Met has also been influencing Rhode Island schools statewide. In 2003 the Board of Regents issued new high school regulations modeled directly after The Met design. They required each school to submit an enactment plan by May of 2004 which would incorporate The Met's hallmark components: an advisory system, internships, individual learning plans, senior thesis projects, exhibitions and portfolios. This past year, high schools across Rhode Island began taking its cues from The Met as their enactment plans were implemented. Another sign of Rhode Island's approval for The Met: state representatives tapped Littky in June of 2005 to start a new Met school in Newport for the following year.

Journal articles and books have been written about The Met to help educators replicate its design. In the autumn of 2004 Dennis Littky and Samantha Grabelle published THE BIG PICTURE: EDUCATION IS EVERONE'S BUSNIESS (ASCD Press), with the final chapter, "Making It Happen," dedicated to those looking to revamp their own schools. In 2002 Eliot Levine completed his post-doctoral work with his study of The Met, entitled ONE KID AT A TIME: BIG LESSONS FROM SMALL SCHOOLS (Teachers College Press). This book was recently translated into Korean. Several other journals and books have featured The Met, including Tom Toch's *High Schools on a Human*

School (Beacon Press), which devoted an entire chapter to the school.

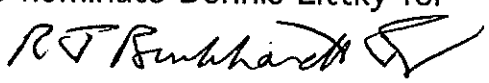
Rhode Island's School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) consistently ranks The Met among the state's top high schools. With one of the state's highest graduation rates (95%), The Met tops other Providence high schools by 40 percentage points (54%). The Met leads the state in parent involvement, school climate, quality of instruction, and teacher availability (for both academic and personal issues). (Infoworks! 2005)

During the past five years The Met has enjoyed 100% college acceptance for its graduating seniors, with an 80% matriculation record. Seventy-five per cent are the first in their families to go to college, and 75% of Met alumni who go on to post-secondary education have graduated or are still enrolled. These statistics, which well exceed the national average for urban schools, are due in part to The Met's unique College/Transition program, which helps students apply to college and then supports them once they are enrolled. In a letter to the state legislature in June, 2004, Rhode Island Commissioner of Education Peter McWalters wrote: "No comprehensive high school in Providence or the state, nor even Providence's exam-entry "college prep" high school, can boast this [The Met's] universal college acceptance at a comparable array of colleges."

In the autumn of 2005 The Met will have over 700 students, including 41% Hispanic, 31% African American, 24% Caucasian and 4% Asian, Native American or multiracial. Between 65% and 81% qualify for the free/reduced federal lunch program.

The work Dennis Littky has done to help shape and inspire the growth of small high schools in America resounds beyond the borders of Rhode Island.

Unacceptable numbers of dropouts and a declining graduation rate may reflect students' intuitive awareness that America's high schools aren't providing the kind of education that augurs success in the twenty-first century. Add to this the ruinous resegregation in schools that threatens our social fabric. Small high schools may not be the only response, but they are certainly one of the most effective, and their visibility is growing. Awarding the 2006 Brock prize to an imaginative, inspirational, indefatigable small schools practitioner will send a clear message of endorsement and hope. For these reasons and many more, I am honored to nominate Dennis Littky for the Brock Prize in International Education.



Dr. Dennis Littky

Co-Director, The Big Picture Company
Director, The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center
Director, Principal Residency Network

As a community organizer, education reformer and principal of three innovative schools, Dr. Dennis Littky has spent the last thirty years working to fundamentally change and improve American public education. At the local and national levels, Littky has helped to launch a movement to educate "one student at a time." In 1996, Littky was one of two founding principals of the award-winning Met Center high school in Providence, RI, which was named one of the top 18 finalists of Harvard Ash Institute's prestigious "Innovations in Better Government" awards for 2005. In 2003, Littky was recognized as a leader in the movement to create smaller, more personalized schools and awarded the Harold W. McGraw Jr. Prize in Education. In September of 2004, his book, *The Big Picture: Education is Everyone's Business*, written with Samantha Grabelle, was published by ASCD Press and mailed to their 96,000 members. In February 2005, *Fast Company Magazine* named Littky one of the top 50 "innovators" of 2004.

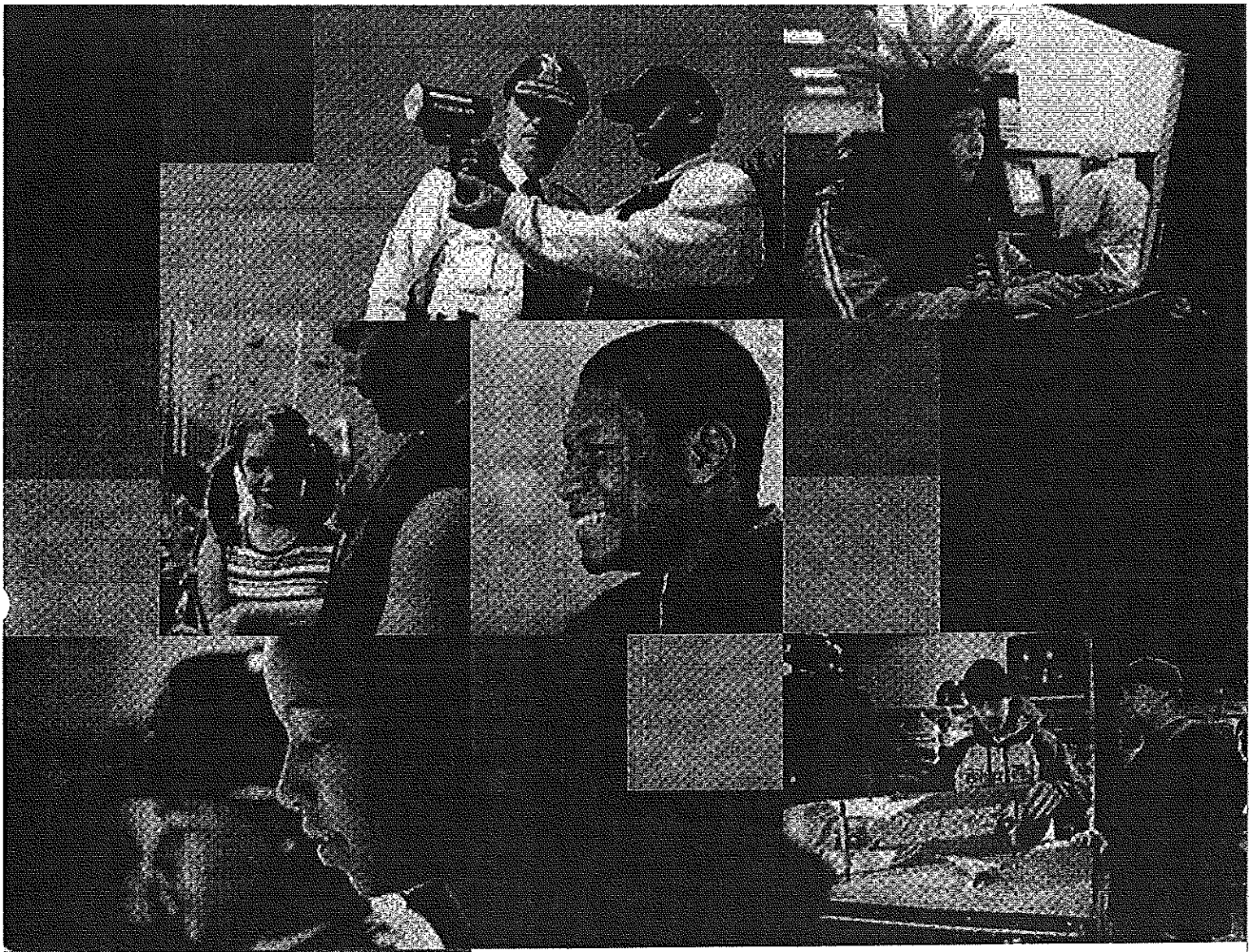
As co-director of The Big Picture Company, Littky is working to implement the successful Met model around the country with the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. There is now a network of 20 Big Picture Schools nationally – in Chicago, Detroit, Denver, Providence, Federal Way (WA), and Oakland, Sacramento, and El Dorado (CA) – with over 40 more schools planned to open by 2008. In addition, Littky and Big Picture were asked to lead the Gates Foundation's Alternative High School Initiative, for youth at risk of "falling through the cracks" of the present system, most notably high school dropouts. Through the Initiative, Littky is working with national Youth Development organizations that are creating a total of 168 diploma-granting high schools over the next five years. It is the strength of the Met's design – particularly its powerful integration of personalization, academic vigor and real world learning – that led to Gates' selection of Big Picture for this highly influential role.

Littky's educational philosophy begins with asking "what is best for kids?" and designing small school environments that exemplify the answer. With personalized learning plans, true family engagement, authentic projects in real-world settings, and portfolio-based assessments, the Met has seen 98% of its graduates accepted to college. Most of these students are the first in their families to attend college. Littky is also committed to mentoring a new generation of visionary school leaders and has expanded his Principal Residency Network to include aspiring and veteran principal teams in Rhode Island, Boston, New Hampshire and Vermont.

Before starting the Met, Dennis served for 13 years (1981–1994) as principal of Thayer Junior/ Senior High School in Winchester, New Hampshire. The school was selected as the first member of Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools. In 1993, Littky received New Hampshire's Principal of the Year Award and was runner-up for the National Principal of the Year.

In 1989, Contemporary Books published *Doc: the Story of Dr. Littky and his Fight for a Better School* about Littky's work at Thayer. A review of the book explained, "Littky was and is a controversial figure because of his innovative ideas, his commitment to community participation, and the clarity and consistency of his values.... If there were more like him, American education would not be in the mess it is.... Dennis Littky has affected the lives of children in ways that "Blue Ribbon" panels and reports never will. If American education is to improve, it needs more and more Littkys."

Before his work at Thayer, Dennis founded and spent six years as the principal of the Shoreham-Wading River Middle School from 1972 to 1978. Leonard Krasner, in his book Environmental Design and Human Behavior (Pergamon Press), said, "Shoreham-Wading River Middle School may well be the most innovative use of designed environment in a school setting since John Dewey's Lab School."



Welcome to...

The MET
The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center

A personalized public high school serving Rhode Island students

2003 – 2004

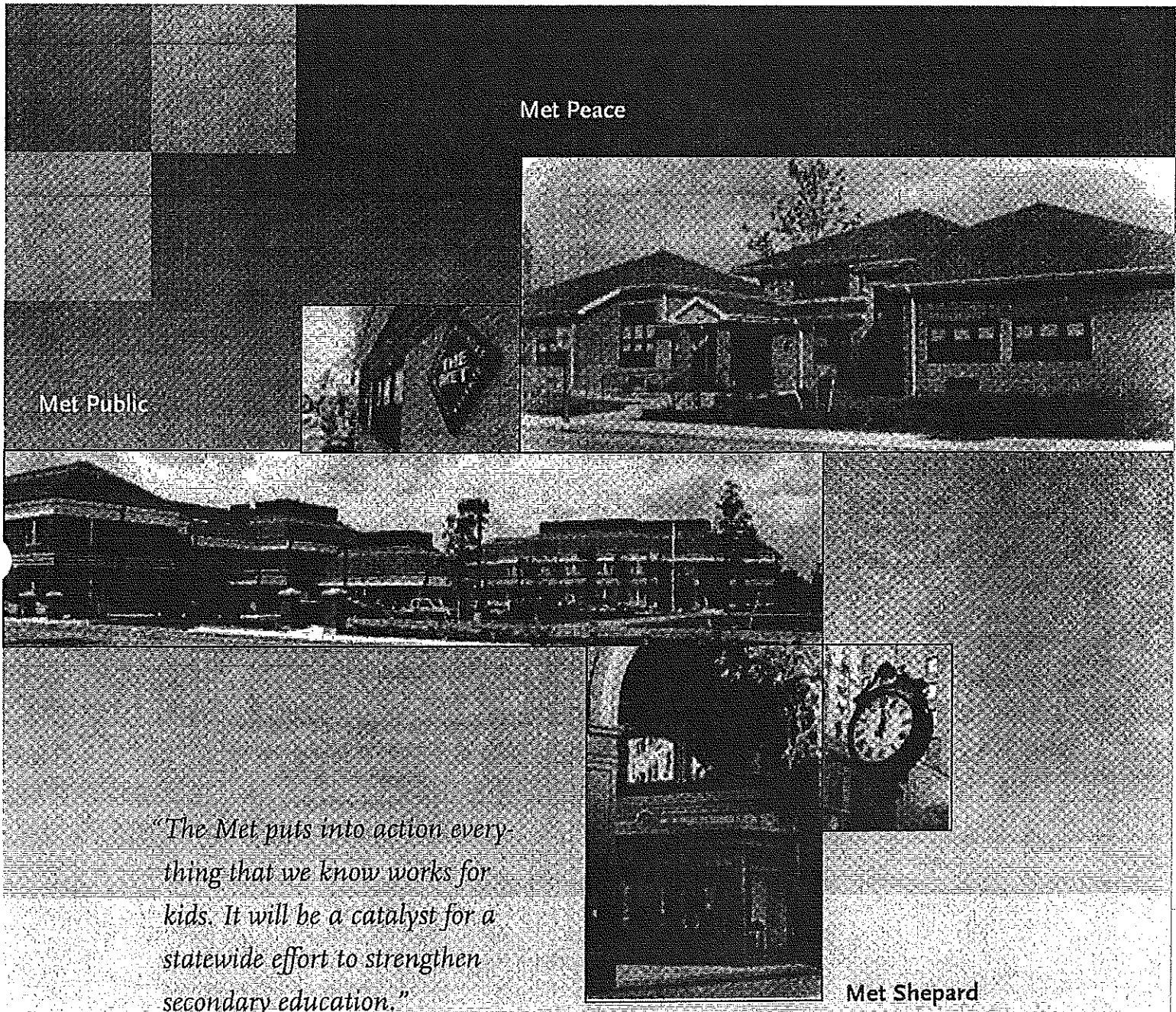
A Big Picture School

The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met) began in September 1996 as a bold new school, with a student-teacher ratio of 15:1, high standards, and strong family engagement. By 2005 **The Met** will house 110 students at each of its six small schools throughout Providence. In addition to its learning centers, **The Met** now has and a state-of-the-art athletic facility, a performance center, a culinary kitchen, a technology center, and a school-based health center.

At The Met, each student works with an advisor, a parent or guardian, and a workplace mentor to design a personalized curriculum based on the student's interests. Students work at internships in community businesses and organizations two days each week, learning academic skills through real-world problem solving.

The Met aims to empower students to take charge of their learning, gaining the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve success beyond high school, and to become life-long learners.

The Met has seen nearly every graduate accepted to college, since the first class graduated in 2000. Collectively, our graduates have earned over a million dollars in scholarships and financial aid. In 2002, we began a longitudinal study of our graduates and created an alumni office to support them as they pursue higher education and other career paths.



"The Met puts into action everything that we know works for kids. It will be a catalyst for a statewide effort to strengthen secondary education."

Peter McWalters
RI Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

The Met Philosophy

A good school is small and personalized; has passionate, hard-working teachers; is led by strong leaders; engages a diverse community; and provides real-world learning experiences. **The Met** is a great school that believes in the following principles:

Small Schools:
The intimate scale reinforces meaningful everyday connections with advisors, mentors, and peers.

Personalized Education, One Student at a Time:
The curriculum is individualized for each student, based around his/her needs and interests.

Family Engagement, One Family at a Time:
Families are directly involved in making curriculum and assessment decisions and contributing to the school every day.

Real World Learning:
Learning is centered around real work, in context, with significance outside of school. Adult mentors connect kids to their interests and the world of work.

Authentic Assessment:
Student assessment is customized, while holding each student to high standards. Students demonstrate their work in a real-world context.

Building a Community, One Student at a Time:
The school culture is founded on respect for individuality and diversity. Students and staff support and learn from one another.

Education is Everyone's Business:
The school breaks down barriers between school and community, serving the community while giving the whole community responsibility for education.

Culture for Change:
The Met philosophy remains flexible, embracing change and responding to the needs of students and the community.

The Met Learning Goals

A Learning Plan Team designs the curriculum of each student in response to his/her interests. To ensure that these Learning Plans prepare students to succeed in college and life beyond, The Met has defined five academically-applied Learning Goals that each student must meet in order to graduate. These goals represent the skills and qualities the school believes are crucial to post-graduate life.

Empirical Reasoning

"How do I prove it?"
This goal is to think like a scientist, for example:

- What idea do I want to test?
- What has other research shown?
- What is my hypothesis?
- How will I present my results?

Quantitative Reasoning

"How do I measure or represent it?"
This goal is to think like a mathematician, for example:

- How can I use numbers to evaluate my hypothesis?
- What numerical information can I collect about this?
- How can I measure its shape or structure?
- What predictions can I make?

Communication

"How do I take in and express information?"
This goal is to be a great communicator, for example:

- How can I write about it?
- Who can I listen to about it?
- How can I speak about it?
- How can technology help me to express it?

Social Reasoning

"What do other people have to say about this?"
This goal is to think like an historian or anthropologist, for example:

- How do diverse communities view this?
- What is the history of this?
- What are the ethical questions behind this?
- What can I contribute to this?

Personal Qualities

"What do I bring to this process?"
This goal is to be the best you can be, for example:

- How can I demonstrate respect?
- How can I look out for my health and well-being?
- How can I better manage my time?
- How can I take on more of a leadership role?

LTIs — Learning Through Internships

Unlike traditional internships which train students for specific jobs, the purpose of an LTI is to help students achieve **The Met** Learning Goals. LTIs give students the opportunity to work closely with an adult mentor whose interests are similar to their own. They allow students to do meaningful work with real-world consequences.

More than 800 companies and organizations have participated in the Learning Through Internship (LTI) program.

Since 1996, Met students have worked with more than 1,000 adults in the community.

Facts About The Met

How do students learn if there are no classes?

"You're learning through projects that interest you so it's fun."
Chris, Met graduate, now a student at Brown University

Rather than traditional classes, the learning at The Met comes from individual student's interests. We thread the learning goals through every experience. Students learn through doing real-world projects generated through their internship experiences. Back at school, advisors and others help students build their skills and learn what they need to complete their real work.

How do you know how you're doing with no tests or grades?

"Everybody is looking at you...your parents, advisor, the principal, even visitors. You have to do a good job."
Kelly, Met student

Every student gives a public exhibition of her work each quarter for her parents, advisor, mentor and others. The advisor writes a narrative to explain what has improved and what she needs to work on. This process provides a clearer understanding of a student's strengths and where she needs improvement.

"We use the world as our classroom."
Jason, Met graduate

"I was up until two in the morning doing work and no one assigned homework."
Christian, Met graduate, now a student at Johnson & Wales University

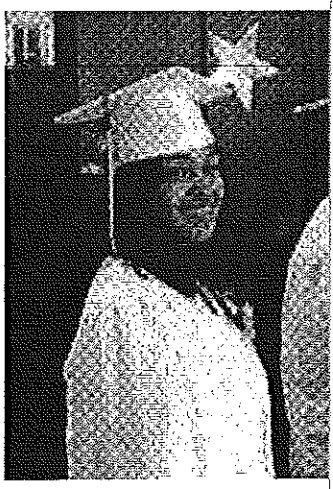
Do teachers assign homework?

The work at home comes from students working on their projects independently. Students work during school, at night and on weekends. Guided by their advisor, they research, write, attend workshops, take college courses, and seek other resources to help them build the skills they need to attain their goals.

Don't you go on lots of trips?

Beyond their LTI's, Met students are exposed to the world through travel, career exploration and outdoor experiences. They are challenged to develop communication, teamwork, planning and leadership skills while enhancing self-esteem.

Graduation and College



The Met is a college preparatory school that believes all students should have the opportunity to pursue education beyond high school. All **Met** students are required to apply to college and they and their families are provided with support throughout the application process.

"...my daughter's future is brighter for having known you..."

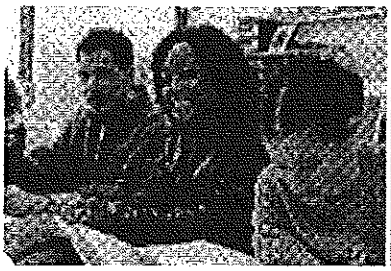
Note to an advisor from a graduate's parent

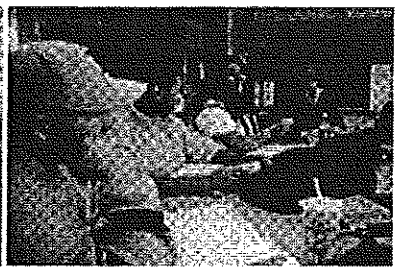
Met graduates have enrolled in colleges and universities across the country, including:

Anna Maria College
Arthur Angelo School
Beliot College
Bennington College
Brown University
Community College of Rhode Island
Concordia College
Curry College
Dean College
Florida International University
International Yacht Restoration School
Johnson and Wales University
Katherine Gibbs Schools
New England Institute of Technology
Northeastern University
Pine Manor College
Rhode Island College
Rhode Island School of Design
Rochester Institute of Technology
Roger Williams University
Salve Regina University
Santa Cruz Community College
Sarah Lawrence College
Sawyer School
School of Visual Arts
Springfield College
Temple University
University of Rhode Island
Vermont College

Advisories and the School Community

Each advisory is a "home-base" for roughly fifteen students who develop a strong sense of trust and teamwork, and who support each other throughout high school. One advisor is the manager of a student's learning for the years that he or she is at **The Met.**





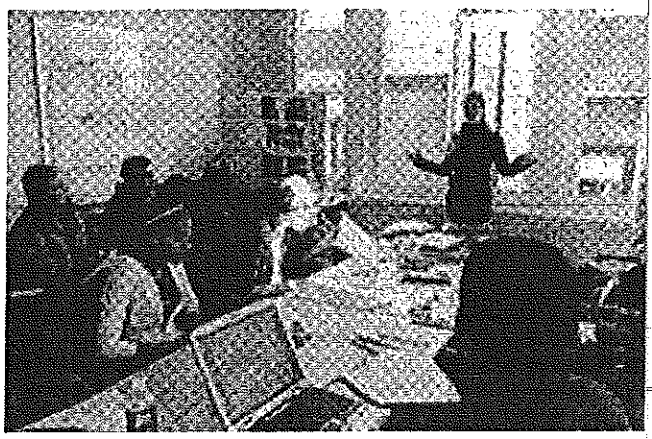
In 2002-2003 The Met had a 2% dropout rate as compared to 28% for all Providence public schools.

According to a state survey, in 2001-02:

- 94% of our parents strongly agree that Met teachers "care about my teen", as compared to 39% of parents at other public schools in Providence.
- 98% of our parents strongly agree that they feel welcome at the school, as compared to 47% of parents at other public schools in Providence.
- 94% of our parents strongly agree that The Met views parents as "important partners", as compared to 36% of parents at other public schools in Providence.
- 77% of Met parents strongly agree that The Met is a safe place, as compared to 33% of parents at other public schools in Providence.

Demographics 2002-03:

- 52% females, 48% males
- 40% Hispanic, 30% African-American, 26% white, 1% Asian, 1% other
- Over 60% qualified for free and reduced lunch
- 75% lived in Providence, 25% lived in other towns and cities across the state
- 34% lived in homes where English is a second language
- The Met had a 93% attendance rate compared to 89% for all Providence public schools



Family Engagement — We Enroll Families

Parents and other family members with a stake in a child's education play a unique role in the life of **The Met**. As early as the application process, parents make a choice for their student to attend **The Met**.

They write an essay about why they want their child to go to the school, attend an informational meeting with their child to make sure the school is a good match for the family, and sign an agreement with the school to support their child's learning. Then they attend Learning Plan Team meetings, exhibitions, and whole-school events. In essence, the parent enrolls in the school as well as the child. That is why we say, "We enroll families."

Whole-school events are an important way to build a strong school community. **The Met** goes far beyond the typical "assemblies," "open houses" and "parent conference nights," and regularly bring the entire school community together to learn and celebrate.

Met family events include:

- Orientation Nights
- Learning Plan Trainings
- Exhibition Trainings
- Family Skills and Talents Fairs
- International Nights
- End of the Year Celebrations

The Met's Family Nights program provides evening opportunities for **Met** families and ocommunity members to learn together. Family Night classes include English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Children's Literacy, Computer Basics, and Spanish for English Speakers.

Travel Opportunities for all Met Students

Travel immerses students in real-world situations, broadens their perspectives, fosters their growth, and promotes their self-confidence.

With the help of scholarships, students at The Met have:

- traveled to hundreds of places across the country and the world
- spoken at national conferences
- established contacts in developing countries
- participated in non-violence and civil rights awareness travel programs

Met students have traveled to almost all 50 states and the following countries:

Botswana
Canada
China
Costa Rica
Dominican Republic
Italy
Ireland
Japan
Korea
Scotland
South Africa
Venezuela
Zimbabwe

Technological Resources at The Met

The Met has rich technological resources and provides approximately one computer for every two students. All Met computers are networked and have access to the internet. Big Picture Online is an interactive website that allows students, advisors, parents and mentors to communicate and use learning tools through the internet. **The Met's** website can be accessed via www.metcenter.org.

the MET
The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center

"...my favorite high school in the whole country."

Tom Vander Ark, Executive Director of Education, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announcing the $3.5 million award to Met founders, The Big Picture Company, to create Met-like schools in 12 other U.S. cities.

The Providence Journal, September 7, 2000

Met Shepard
80 Washington Street
Providence, RI 02903
401-277-5046

Met Peace
362 Dexter Street
Providence, RI 02907
401-752-3400

The Met Public – Equality
325 Public Street
Providence, RI 02905
401-752-2600

www.metcenter.org

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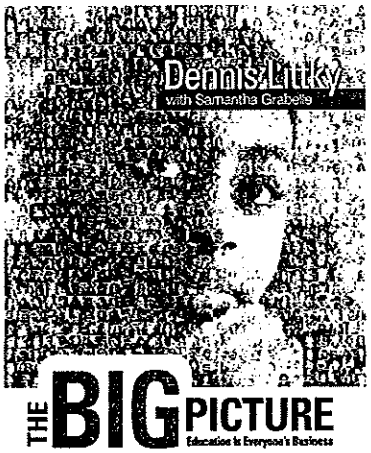
Photos by Cally Wolk and Juan Huertas



Introduction to
The Big Picture: Education is Everyone's Business
By Deborah Meier

Reformers have been fiddling for a century or more with how to improve on a paradigm of schooling that's derived from another age with a very different purpose. Otherwise thousands of years of human history suggest the schoolhouse as we know it is an absurd way to raise the young-contrary to everything else we know about what's normal to being human. For example, we know that doing and talking are what most successful people are very good at-where they truly show their stuff. And we know that reading and writing are important but they are mostly what a very small and specialized group of people is primarily good at. Yet we persist in a form of schooling that measures "achievement" largely in the latter terms, not the former (and sometimes just by written tests.)

Dennis Littky has been gradually taking on the unmentionable. Suppose we just turned the whole thing upside down, and went back to the oldest and most traditional idea around: let kids learn mostly in the settings in which real people do interesting work. Let novices learn from masters. Then let's create a part-time community for kids where they can use these experiences of what the real thing is all about to grow from - where they can learn about being a member of a peer group, as well as reflect upon what is happening out there in their work site, and hone up on skills and concepts that they are growing to see will be critical to their futures.

Some people have or hear about such dreams and then sigh and say, "Can't be done". When Dennis told me what he was up to in Providence nearly ten years ago, I gasped. But I knew that he could do it. He had the talent, courage and smarts - and energy - to offer the world a different model entirely. And we sure needed a new idea!

I had taken a few bold steps at Central Park East Secondary School, so I thought. And I actually had, but I knew that I was beating my head against a very tough wall in trying to make my model work for a whole set of kids who deserved a better fit for who they were, and what society needed of them. Dennis took a few more bold steps, and invented something wholly new, but rooted in something wholly old. And it fits.

It's customary for reformers these days to say things like "this is our last chance." Of course that's nonsense. As long as there are kids, there will be more chances. But it sure is the right time and place for us to attend to what Dennis has accomplished if we are in any way -which is open to question- serious about the idea that "all children can learn" to new and higher standards. I add the last phrase, because it's critical. All kids are always learning; but what? But it's also critical that "new and higher" not be thought of only in traditional 14th century academic terms. Even the aristocratic elite didn't send all their sons into the clergy or into academia - yet the schools we have seem often invented on the assumption that we were all meant to be scholastics or monks!

Dennis is an intellectual, but he is also a kid who loves to play with ideas or satiate his curiosity about how old ideas can be put together in new and different ways ("out of the box" as they say). He can then easily repackage ideas in ways that are more palatable to skeptical publics - parents, local school boards, legislators, and, in the end, always, to the real kids.

He's a master kid-person; but one of those rare ones whose love of being with kids is absolutely on par with the pleasure he gets from adult company, and his capacity to operate in almost every domain. He's a joy-monger; full of tricks, including tricks for turning something seemingly impossible into something down-to-earth possible.

For over thirty years he has led the way. He started his career in the 60's in Ocean Hill Brownsville, an African American community in Brooklyn, where he became a community leader in the district, training parents to get involved in their schools. Then he set up a model teacher-training program at Stony Brook University on Long Island, where he first met his long-time friend and co-thinker, Elliot Washor. At the age of 27, Dennis became the first principal of a new model middle school, Shoreham-Wading River on Long Island. Shoreham became a national "State of the Art School" and one of the subjects of the book, Four Successful Schools for Young Adolescents by Joan Lipsitz. Well-known

psychologist, Leonard Krasner once wrote of Shoreham that it "may well be the most innovative use of designed environment in a school setting since John Dewey's Lab School."
After Shoreham, Dennis took to the woods of New Hampshire to think and tinker, and ended up as principal of his local small rural high school. In a few years he turned Thayer Junior/Senior High School and the town around, and got ordinary rural kids excited about being educated in ways none of them had ever imagined. The dropout rate at Thayer during Dennis' tenure went from 20% to 1%. College matriculation skyrocketed from 10% to 55%. Despite these successes, a conservative contingent of the community tried to have Dennis fired for his innovative, unorthodox approach. With the support of the majority of the community, Dennis never wavered. In 1993, Dennis was a National Principal of the Year finalist and was honored as the New Hampshire Principal of the Year for his dedication. This was written about in a book called Doc, and later made into a compelling NBC TV movie in 1992 called "A Town Torn Apart."
It was while Dennis was at Thayer that we became friends and supporters of each others' work. Both of our schools were among the earliest members of Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools. Together, Dennis, Ted and myself became a working team: Dennis in a rural school, me in an urban school, and Ted as the philosopher of the group. All three of us came together at Brown University's Annenberg Institute for Educational Reform in 1994, and have continued to challenge each other to this day. We talk incessantly about how to make the world more receptive to our vision of schooling, and how to have a bigger influence on the needs of kids and schools today.
After Dennis left Thayer he spent some time as part of Annenberg's think-tank. But it didn't take long when the lure to be back with into the thick of action led him to his next adventure. He and Elliot Washor launched The Big Picture Company to take their big ideas for education out into the world and prove how commonsensical they really are.
But Dennis is a school man. And he couldn't resist. So he latched on to the state of Rhode Island's plan for a new vocational education school and turned it into something wholly different, but utterly consistent with the best of intentions behind voc. ed. He and Elliot started the first of their six little Met schools in Providence in 1996. Small, intimate and without a single teacher or class. Truly. There are plenty of adults, and lots of learning, and a whole city at its feet to learn from, but otherwise The Met isn't a school at all in the usual sense of the word. And all the kids come to school every day, eager and ready - including many kids whose past attendance records were laughable and whose achievement –at least as we usually measure it--was minimal. And they learn, learn, work, and work. And they virtually all graduate and go onto, yes, college. Nearly all apply to college, 98% get accepted although 75% of the students come from families where they are the first to continue past high school.
Now everyone is interested—this far out idea has become "in.". But the question now is: just because it can be done in Providence, with the two buddies close at hand, does that mean it can flourish elsewhere in other hands? Dennis thinks yes. And now I take whatever he thinks very seriously. He might be right. Oakland, Detroit, Chicago, Denver, Seattle and Sacramento have already launched Big Picture schools. A lot of people have a lot at stake in believing him, including the Gates Foundation who has put millions of dollars behind their faith that this can work all over the country. And I have a big stake in believing he can do this elsewhere because I have yet to see another approach that works for as many of the so-called "losers" and "at-risks" as The Met's does. The design is so infused with respect for the kinds of values – like of rigorous work as well as citizenship - that we desperately need today. Dennis' own workaholic energy, his love for a job well done and never less than well done, is part of what it's all about. He's a dyed-in-the wool practitioner, steeped in theory and making it up as he goes. It's intriguing that in 2002, monolithic textbook publisher, McGraw-Hill, the "learning is not about textbooks" champion, awarded Dennis their prestigious Harold W. McGraw Jr. Prize in Education.
There isn't a part of the job that Dennis hasn't tackled, from running successful schools in a suburban, a rural, and now urban settings, to worrying about the bathrooms, the architecture, the food, the kids' families, grandmas, staff morale, the climate in the state capitol, whose up to what downtown, and how to get the press to cover a good story. He does and thinks about it all. His longtime partnership with Elliot Washor is one of those great stories of a successful working alliance, that makes them both have a far wider outreach than either could have had alone. Take everything Dennis says here in this book as gospel truth and put it to good use, because the important thing is not just this or that idea of his - it's

the whole ball of wax, or whatever expression you like best. He has hold of a Big Idea that can transform the lives of millions of children, and maybe the nation as well. Oh, I know, I'm sounding a bit overboard; but it is one of a small core of important work being done in this nation that offers us real hope. So we need to pay heed.

Currently the co-principal of Mission Hill, a K-12 public school in Boston, Deborah has spent forty years in urban public education. She began as a kindergarten teacher and has since founded and directed a network of public elementary and secondary schools in East Harlem (Central Park East schools). She has written The Power of Their Ideas and In Schools We Trust to describe the work, helped found the Coalition of Essential Schools, and written and spoken extensively about how schooling can support democracy and equity. Her many awards include a MacArthur Prize Fellowship.

The Big Picture

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one student at a time

THE BIG PICTURE: IN FOCUS

WHO:

- The Big Picture Company is a non-profit organization dedicated to a fundamental redesign of public schooling in America.
- Big Picture's mission is to catalyze vital changes in public education by generating and sustaining innovative, personalized schools that work in concert with the real world of their greater community.
- Big Picture builds and supports break-through public schools and coordinates a cadre of youth development organizations establishing alternative high schools for at-risk youth nationwide.

WHAT:

- Big Picture is now a network of 24 small, personalized high schools across the country, with an additional 26 slated to open by 2008.
- Big Picture Schools are community centric, engaging family and community members through social services and outreach programs that strengthen the community while intensifying the educational experience for students.
- Located in underserved, urban areas, Big Picture Schools are cohesive learning communities of no more than 150 students.
- A rigorous, highly personalized curriculum combines demanding academic work with real-world experiential and inquiry-driven learning.
- Students, many of whom have managed to squeak by unnoticed through middle school, become active, accountable players in their education; teachers, parents, and professional mentors help design a challenging course of study, and school-based learning is infused with real-world work two full days a week in community organizations, agencies and businesses.
- Big Picture was selected by the Gates Foundation to lead its Alternative High School Initiative for youth at risk of "falling through the cracks" of the present system – most notably high school dropouts. Initiative partners include the Black Alliance for Education Options, Communities in Schools in Georgia, Diploma Plus, National Association of Street Schools, See Forever/Maya Angelou, and YouthBuild USA. The Initiative will establish 78 diploma-granting high schools nationwide over the next four years.

WHY:

- The urban American public high school is in crisis: some 3,500 eighth through twelfth graders drop out of the system *every school day*, making them 400% more likely to be unemployed as adults than college graduates.
- Now more than ever, a satisfying and productive adult life depends on a successful education. The Department of Labor predicts that 70% of the fastest growing jobs will require education beyond high school.
- Nationwide, roughly half of all Hispanic and African-American students graduate from high school and only one in seven of those who do graduate are considered equipped for college.
- Big, impersonal high schools are easy hiding places that define success in terms that are irrelevant to many students' lives. Big Picture Schools challenge students to define their own success and achieve it.
- At Big Picture's flagship high school, The Met, 97% of graduates have applied to college, 100% were accepted and 75% have gone to college or a technical training program immediately after high school – an additional 5% enroll some time later.
- 75% of Met students who have gone to college/certification program are either still there or have completed their degree/certification. Nearly 10% more currently participate in AmeriCorps, apprenticeship programs or the Armed Forces.
- These are exceptional numbers considering that more than 80% of Met students are eligible for free or

Co-Directors:
Dennis Littky, Ph.D.
Elliot Washor, Ed.D.

Board members:
Ronald A. Wolk
Chairman
Founding Editor & Publisher, Education Week & Teacher Magazine

Stanley Goldstein
Retired Chairman & CEO, CVS Corporation

Seth Kurn
Executive Vice President New England Institute of Technology

Deborah Meier
Principal, Mission Hill Elementary School, Boston

Warren Simmons, Ph.D.
Executive Director Annenberg Institute

Theodore Sizer, Ph.D.
Chairman, Coalition of Essential Schools

reduced lunch, 34% live in homes where English is a second language, and 75% are the first in their families to attend college.

- The Met enjoys a 95% attendance rate.
- The Met experiences a mere 3% dropout rate.
- 80% of Met students graduate with college credit.

WHEN:

- Founded in Providence in 1996, Big Picture has grown in eight years from a staff of five individuals working on the experimental design and support of one school to a network of 70 dedicated professionals committed to opening 20 additional schools over the next four years while continuing to manage the network – via technology, site-based coaching and fundraising support – as a whole.

WHERE:

- Big Picture is based in Providence, RI, as is its flagship high school, The Met, which has grown to a cluster of six small schools.
- In the past three years, new Big Picture schools have opened in Chicago, Detroit, Denver, Indianapolis, and Oakland, Sacramento, San Diego, and El Dorado (CA). Additional Big Picture Schools are scheduled to open in 2005 in New Orleans, Camden, NJ and Bloomfield, CT. Negotiations with additional districts throughout the nation are ongoing.

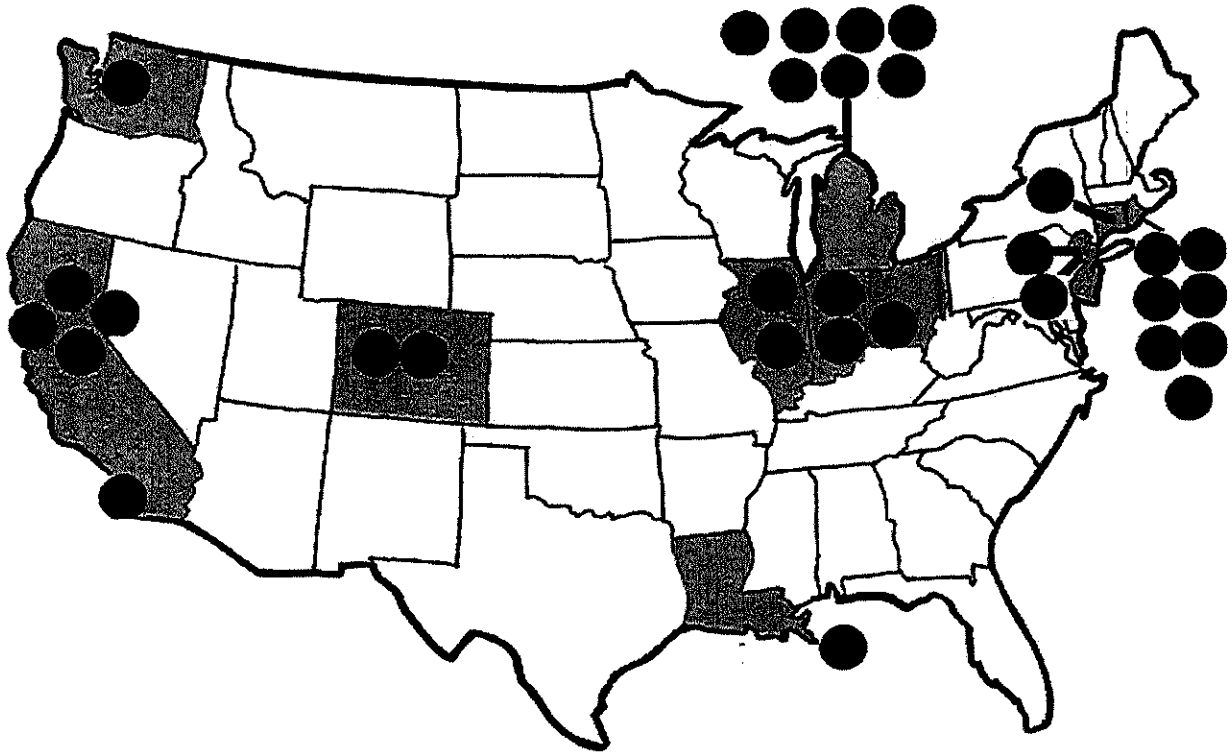
HOW:

Distinguishing elements of the Big Picture model are as follows:

- An individualized learning plan is carefully engineered and managed to meet rigorous educational standards, which are uniquely and intricately approached through personal interests;
- An academically integrated internship takes students out into the community to do real work around their learning plans in closely accountable relationships with professional mentors;
- A 4-year advisory, a group of no more than 15 students who stay with the same teacher while in school, precludes anonymity and pushes students consistently toward higher standards of achievement;
- Quarterly exhibitions – dissertation-style defenses before a panel of teachers, parents, mentors and peers – take the place of traditional tests;
- Strong partnerships with families and community organizations elevate individual and collective achievement to relevant and exhilarating new heights;
- Heavy emphasis on the recruitment, training and support of principals and advisors moves the model forward while consistently reinforcing a culture of passionate, lifelong learning.

* To date, The Met is the only Big Picture School to have completed a full four-year cycle. Statistics at other Big Picture Schools are currently comparable.

Big Picture Schools



1-6 The Met Center (Providence, RI)

7 CVS Highlander Charter School (Providence, RI)

8-10 University Preparatory Academy - Middle School (Detroit, MI)

11-12 University Preparatory Academy - High School (Detroit, MI)

13 The Big Picture High School @ Williams (Chicago, IL)

14 Chicago Big Picture High School @ Back of the Yards (Chicago, IL)

18 Skyview Big Picture High School (Denver, CO)

19 MetWest (Oakland, CA)

20 Met Sacramento (Sacramento, CA)

21 Shenandoah High School (El Dorado, CA)

22 San Diego Met (San Diego, CA)

TYBO Schools

(hold your mouse over "TYBO Schools" to learn more)

15 Indianapolis Metropolitan Career Academy #1 (Indianapolis, IN)

16 Indianapolis Metropolitan Career Academy #2 (Indianapolis, IN)

17 Skyland Community High School (Denver, CO)

To Open in 2005-06

23 The Big Picture High School (Bloomfield, CT)

24 MetEast High School (Camden, NJ)

25 New Orleans, LA

26 Highline, WA

27 Detroit, MI

To Open in 2006-07

28 West Sacramento, CA

29 Camden, NJ

30 Cincinnatti, OH

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The Providence Journal

September 25, 2002

Top of his class

A maverick educator in Providence wins mainstream recognition in New York.

by Michael Corkery

Journal photo / Frieda Squires

DENNIS LITTKY, with pictures of the Met Center's first graduates, brought one of his former students with him to New York to accept an award last night from McGraw-Hill, one of the nation's largest publishing corporations.

Dennis Littky has always done things a little differently. The head of an educational nonprofit company and co-founder of Providence's Met School, he walks around his office wearing a multicolored cap. Littky asks not to be photographed in front of a blackboard because he says that would give the impression of the old style of teaching that he has spent 30 years trying to change. And he insists that when he receives a national education award at a ceremony in New York City, one of his former students must join him at the podium. It might seem curious that a man who has made a career bucking the establishment is being honored by one of the nation's largest publishing corporations, McGraw-Hill. But Littky says that he relishes the Harold W. McGraw Jr. Prize in Education for that very reason.

"It adds credibility to our work," says Littky. "A big textbook company recognizing a school that is student-based is a big plus." Littky, 58, was one of three educators from around the country who was honored last night at an awards ceremony at the New York Public Library. Recognized as a leader in the movement to create smaller, more personalized schools, Littky received the $25,000 award that in past years has gone to such notables as former First Lady Barbara Bush and U.S. Sen. Claiborne Pell. It was only eight years ago that Littky and others began raising eyebrows in Rhode Island by arguing that schools should be based on the individual needs of children, not on a standard curriculum. In 1996, he was one of the founding principals of the Met Center High School in Providence, where students learn out of the classroom and in the community. The school also stresses the need to create close relationships between students and teachers.

According to the Met Center's records, the approach seems to be working. Nearly every graduate of the school is accepted to college and more than 75 percent of them are the first in their families to do so. One of the school's first graduates, Misty Wilson, a resident of South Providence and Brown University junior, accompanied Littky at the awards ceremony last night. Littky said that the event's organizers expressed some concern because they have never had a student address the black-tie crowd. But Littky insisted. It's one of his rules never to speak anywhere without allowing a student to accompany him.

"When I speak about the school, who knows about it best?" he says. "The students."

Littky began his career as a principal at age 27. He founded the Shoreham-Wading River Middle School, in New York, in 1972 and then went on to become principal of Thayer Junior/Senior High School in Winchester, N.H. He's no stranger to publicity. His work has been featured in two books and an NBC television movie, called A Town Torn Apart, which depicted Littky's struggle to alter the teaching methods at the New Hampshire school.

The popularity of the Met School -- which is now housed in the Shepard Building in downtown Providence and a renovated building on Peace Street in the city's West End -- continues to grow. The campus is expanding into four new buildings in South Providence this fall.

And the Big Picture Company, the nonprofit group that Littky helped establish, is setting up schools based on the Met School model across the country, from Oakland, Calif., to Washington state.

While his stature expands nationally, Littky is proud of his accomplishments locally. He cited a recent study by the Rhode Island Board of Regents. The study calls for smaller high schools and student advisories, where a group of students are paired with an individual teacher who follows them through their high school career. Littky says the Met school has espoused these ideas for years. "They are saying kids shouldn't just be tested, they should do relevant work," he says.

Also awarded the McGraw Prize last night were: Libia Socorro Gil, the superintendent of Chula Vista Elementary School District, who is credited with improving students' performance in this large California district, and Eric Smith, the superintendent of the Anne Arundel County Schools, who is recognized for shrinking the gaps between minority and white students and improving reading and math assessments for all children, as superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenberg Schools in North Carolina.

Littky says he has found a great deal of support in Rhode Island. The state supports the Met school, while the Big Picture Company relies largely on private grant money. Littky wants to use his $25,000 award to renovate his cabin in New Hampshire so he can hold teacher retreats there.

He plans to stay in Providence, even as his work reaches farther across the country.

"I have no plans of going anywhere," he says. "There's an enormous amount of work to be done."

School Board
News

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GUEST VIEWPOINT/ Dennis Littky

Test Scores alone don't measure a school's success

Every year under the No Child Left Behind system, you are given two or three words of evaluation for each school, like "making insufficient progress," or if you're lucky, "moderately" or "high performing." Think about it. Three words to summarize a school, and we believe it.

NCLB is so confusing that it's hard to comprehend all of the nuances and factors that go into the final score.

Standardized test designers never intended for them to be used as sole measures of a student's or school's performance. Yet, we give these tests enormous weight, when many factors like demographics or dropout rates could skew your scores.

So what is the alternative? If you want to really understand your schools, use many ways of assessing them.

The Met School, a public high school in Providence, R.I., looks at several measures of success. This school is the model for our education reform group, The Big Picture Company, which has started 24 schools in cities around the country, including Chicago, Detroit, Denver, Indianapolis, Sacramento, Oakland, and San Diego.

The Met has a diverse student population, and 82 percent qualify for the free or reduced-price federal lunch program. Students often enter the school with skills well below grade level, and many speak English as their second language. The Met scores above other schools with similar demographics on the state's mandatory math and English tests, even if these scores aren't always great.

"As we know, testing data strongly correlates to the student's socioeconomic status. But the data doesn't reflect that," says Stanley Goldstein, chairman of The Met School Board of Directors and former founding CEO of CVS Pharmacy.

At the Met School, we look at some of the following factors to get a clearer picture of how we are doing:

•**Attendance data** -- This tells you how engaging the school is. If students are involved in their work and are known by their teachers, they come to school.

•**Dropout data** -- Another measure of the attention paid to students, this data will often reflect two other important pieces: Is the work relevant? Are the students known well by their teachers?

If your school has a high dropout rate, your test scores might be higher because the weaker students are gone, whereas the school with the

lower dropout rate (although better at retaining students) will most likely have lower test scores. Which do you want?

•**College data** -- The U.S. Department of Labor just released a study saying that seven out of 10 jobs today require a college degree. So shouldn't it be a goal for every high school graduate to be admitted to college or at least have the choice to enroll? What percentage enroll in college and how many stay and complete their degrees?

In its annual "State Report Card," the Rhode Island Department of Education reports the above data as well as the results of mandatory statewide testing and School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) Surveys, which are the culmination of thousands of intensive surveys of parents, students, and teachers at each school.

SALT should be a model for other states. The following are examples of some of the other data Rhode Island collects that could help you learn more about your school:

•**Teacher availability** -- Surveys pose the question to students, "Can you talk to your teachers about academic problems? About personal problems?"

The results in Rhode Island range from 8 percent to 50 percent for the first question and from 21 to 64 percent on the second. What does it mean if your school scores poorly on these measures?

• School safety -- Do you care about the perceived safety of your school? Students should be asked whether they have been bullied in the last year and whether they think illegal drugs are easy to get at school.

•**Parent involvement** -- You have an obligation to parents. Do you want to know if they feel involved in the school? How many times do teachers call them? How often do they come to school? How well does the teacher know their child?

•**Class/ethnic diversity** -- Is your school diverse? Rich? Poor? Predominantly African American, Caucasian, Latino, or Asian? Make sure the data is broken down by race and by class (those who qualify for federal free or reduced-price lunches and those who do not) so you can study the trends. Does the school look good because a small number of students take the SATs? Who takes Advanced Placement classes?

The Met School puts a lot of emphasis on these categories, so we pay close attention to our SALT Survey results. Last year, The Met ranked first in parent involvement, school climate, and quality of instruction. It had the lowest percentage of students who reported being bullied and the highest percentage who said they could talk to teachers about problems, both academic and personal.

This year, standardized test scores for Met students have gone up dramatically in math and reading. "It seems as though all of our data is more connected than we had originally thought," Goldstein says. "It looks like The Met's success in the SALT data predicted a strong academic culture which is now being reflected in state testing scores."

A school board should decide what pieces of data are important and insist that relevant information be collected. Creating a context with which to view the data is also crucial.

Know the skill levels of students as they come in to high school, so you will have a benchmark when they are tested later.

Otherwise, you could make changes in a school because you think students are making "insufficient progress" when, in fact, they entered high school with low skills and have greatly improved. Or, your scores could be skewed by having the poorest youths or a disproportionate number requiring special education.

Look at the research. Many studies set out the traits of "high-performing" high schools. These often include a common focus, high expectations, mutual respect between teachers and students, a personalized learning program for each student, authentic performance assessments, and in-depth learning. If you agree these criteria are important, have your

superintendent look for ways to measure them.

Consider setting up teams to visit the school. There is nothing better than seeing the workings of a school for yourself to complement what the data tells you. Schools cannot change for your visit, so it will be real.

Pick teachers and kids at random. How do students feel about their work, their teachers, and their principal? Are the teachers happy to work there? Do they meet and work together? How are they growing?

Observe classrooms and walk around the school between classes. Are teachers and students talking to each other? Is there an attitude of respect in the school? Take a look at student work. Is there depth? Are students proud of their work?

Be clear about what measures you think are important and then get lots of data to find out if you are succeeding or not. Don't be irresponsible by depending on only one test for the answers.

Dennis Littky is director of The Met School and co-director of The Big Picture Coompany. He also is the author (with Samantha Grabelle) of the recently published book, The Big Picture: Education is Everyone's Business *(ASCD Press).*

The Big Picture

"Education is everyone's business"

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San Francisco Chronicle

Thursday, December 2, 2004

Big Picture Schooling in a garage

Joan Ryan

Clarence Wells stands hunched over the 1954 Volvo racing car he's been working on for more than a year. He's 16 years old and wearing a knit cap over his dreadlocks and blue coveralls with the name Oscar stitched over the front pocket, a hand-me-down from the guy who used to deliver the garage's laundry.

Last year, when Wells showed up at Gallant Racing Supply in Oakland, he didn't know how to change a spark plug. But over the last year, he has rebuilt the classic Volvo piece by piece. Scraping off rust. Repainting. Installing a transmission, rear axle, brakes, master cylinder. He has cut and molded metal panels for the insides of the two doors. He has mounted the tachometer and ignition system and wired the dashboard gauges.

"We teach him as he goes along," says Dan Gallant, who owns and runs the garage with his wife, Karen. "We tell him to read the instruction manuals and come to us with questions."

The Gallants have never had children. Their lives for the past 30 years have been building and maintaining race cars, the two of them working side by side, day in and day out, like a farm couple from another era. Then in September 2003, a 15-year-old kid called. He was looking for an internship. The Gallants never envisioned their cluttered, cavernous

Clarence Wells, left, a student at MetWest, is under the guidance of garage owner Dan Gallant, right.

Twice a week, MetWest students don't go to school

garage on East 12th Street as a classroom, but that is what it has become for Wells and a classmate from MetWest High School, an unusual public school of 102 students a few blocks away.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, every student at MetWest reports to an internship instead of school. They work in veterinarians' offices and hospitals, nonprofits and day care centers. They find internships that match their interests, then use their workplace experience as the foundation for research projects. One student studied parvovirus in dogs. Another researched the role of play in the cognitive development of preschoolers.

Wells wrote mathematical formulas to figure out gear ratios and tire sizes and to calculate proper weight distribution in cars. He had never much liked math. But he found himself honing his math skills every day through trial and error and the no-nonsense direction of Karen and Dan Gallant.

"I don't know if I want to do this for a living," Wells says of auto mechanics. He has also interned at a television station. "But it's gotten me interested in electrical engineering and physics."

MetWest is one of 26 schools across the country opened during the past seven years by a nonprofit organization called Big Picture

Schools, funded in large part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Big Picture Schools is the brainchild of an unconventional educator named Dennis Littky and his colleague Elliot Washor. Littky was the subject of a 1989 book, "Doc," and a 1992 television movie called "A Town Torn Apart," both about his dramatic transformation of a failing school in a New Hampshire mill town.

"High schools are not working," Littky said during a recent visit to MetWest, which occupies part of the first floor of the Oakland Unified School District's administrative building, across from Laney College. (The students use the Laney College library and gym and frequently take science and math classes there.) "Urban high schools are way not working. Yet people think the answer is to keep doing the same thing, only more of it."

Littky lives in Providence, R.I., home of the first Big Picture high school. His concept is a radical one and thus requires a leap of faith for some parents. There are no formal classes, tests or grades. The students are grouped in 17-member "advisories" that stay together for all four years with a teacher, or adviser. They learn not so much by sitting and listening, but by doing and discussing. The school days are lively, the relationships intimate. Every student has his or her own educational plan with individual goals, all based on the student's strengths and passions.

"The most common word we hear about high school is 'boring,' " Littky said. "What you have to do is engage them, then push them like crazy to learn."

Advisers assess effort and progress through presentations of the students' research projects, which must incorporate critical thinking about aspects of math, history, literature and science. In other words, Littky's goal is to provide an actual education, not the appearance of one.

"Look at any high school kid's transcript, and what's on the transcript and what they really know are two different things," he said. "That's the farce of high school. Somebody did a study in which they gave kids a test in September that they had gotten A's on in June. They all flunked. Didn't remember a thing. But on their transcripts, they had A's in that subject."

Despite the nonprofit's refusal to teach to the standardized tests, Big Picture students score well enough to go on to college. At Littky's Providence school, more than 90 percent of the seniors are accepted to colleges. MetWest has not been around long enough to have seniors, but last year, in its second year of operation, the school registered the third highest Academic Performance Index (API) score among all Oakland public high schools.

Clarence Wells applied to MetWest at the urging of his godparents, who have been raising him since his mother died of kidney failure last year. His father died of a stroke when he was 7. His godparents steered him to MetWest to keep him out of the huge, impersonal public high schools. Wells says he misses "the dances and big-high-school stuff," but he says he has learned more about organization, thinking and problem-solving in the garage than in any classroom. Littky hears this all the time.

"Schools are set up to isolate kids from adults," Littky said. And urban kids with working parents or absent parents are in particular need of interacting with smart, caring adults outside the home. "We have kids do internships not to find a job but to find something they love and to find adults who love it, too."

Each student has a mentor at his or her internship, someone who is vetted by the school and has agreed to work closely with the student. The mentor is responsible for honing the important skills that students don't learn in a classroom -- taking direction, taking responsibility for specific tasks, speaking and behaving in a businesslike manner. They also become resources and role models.

"Being a mentor is very labor intensive," Dan Gallant says, watching Wells from across the garage. Wells and his classmate will be the Gallants' crew when the Volvo makes it maiden race next spring at Sears Point.

"We've never done anything like this before," Gallant says of mentoring the two boys. "But when you run into kids doing the right thing instead of getting into trouble, I think it's part of our job as a community to support that."

The Big Picture

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"Education is everyone's business"

THE TIMES OF INDIA
Powered by Indiatimes

Cool's the rule at Bill Gates' schools

December 18, 2004

LOS ANGELES: Dressed in pyjamas to celebrate the last day of term, the Californian teenagers were a little overexcited as they redecorated their school last Friday with spraypaint cans paid for by Bill Gates, the richest man in the world.

"This is so cool," enthused Xavier Williams, 17. "They never would allow us to do this in my old school. This is a little wild."

His friend Alexandra Greene, 16, agreed. "It's so different from any other school around here. Kids never get bored. We don't have time," she said, bouncing off to watch a film in the school hall.

Indeed, teachers' unions and educational traditionalists say the Met school, where there are no set lessons, blackboards or even a head teacher's study, may be just a little too different.

Some fear that children hold too much sway at the Met and 25 other schools in the Big Picture organisation. Critics regard the burgeoning "back to village school" movement it exemplifies as the biggest threat to standards since 1960s reformers killed off a national curriculum.

The revolution is being funded by Microsoft founder Gates, who has declared war on America's urban "kids' factories".

Big Picture schools, by contrast, have no more than 150 pupils.

The Met is a free urban high school which receives money from both Gates and the public purse. Its pupils are drawn by lottery from among the smart as well as the socially disadvantaged.

Instead of hour-long lessons before blackboards, pupils sit in circles of desks, working on academic projects they have selected themselves.

The Sunday Times

Los Angeles Times

MONDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2004

DISPATCH FROM PROVIDENCE, R.I.

Tests Are History at This High School

The Met may not have required classes, but all its seniors get accepted to college. Its success catches the attention of education reformers.

By ELIZABETH MEHREN
Times Staff Writer

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — When she wanted to be a detective, Carleen Mylers studied criminal justice and took a job as an investigator. When she thought she might become a lawyer, she worked in family court. Now that she has an internship in a local middle school, people are asking if she plans to go into teaching.

No, Mylers says. What she is actually doing is spying, using her observations as fodder for a novel.

"I look at the kids who are always reading, walking around with a book in their hands," Mylers said. "I know my novel will have a character like that."

For Mylers, 17, the diverse workplace experience is part of her curriculum at the Met School — a thriving public high school here that caters to a largely poor and minority student population.

The 9-year-old Met School defies convention, with no letter grades, no required classes, and "advisors" instead of teachers who work with the same small group of students for four consecutive years. Instead of taking tests, the 580 students present

Photographs by JOSH REYNOLDS *For The Times*

SPARK OF KNOWLEDGE: *Met students Serri Newton and Vhari Neale work on projects at an industrial arts facility. "The key is loving to learn," said Met founder Dennis Littky*

at a time" approach to learning has caught the attention of educators around the country.

The success of the school also prompted the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to fund a nationwide network of similar schools known as the Big Picture.

Awards of about $15 million made the Big Picture Company "our largest alternative school grantee," said Tom Vander Ark, executive director of education for the Gates Foundation.

"There simply are kids that are wired differently or have had different life experiences. They need schools that are highly individualized and highly supportive," Vander Ark said. "The Met certainly is both. We take people there just to blow apart their preconceptions of how a school ought to work."

Among the 18 Big Picture campuses established in the last two years are schools in Oakland, San Diego, Sacramento and rural El Dorado, Calif. Dennis Littky, founder of the Met School and co-director of the Big Picture Company, said a school in Santa Monica also was under discussion. The conventional U.S. high school, Littky said, is little more than "an early 20th century assembly line."

"The word most kids use when they talk about high school is 'boring,' " Littky said. "What a shame."

Littky began formulating his ideas about redesigning American high schools while serving as a fellow at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. It was there that Rhode Island Education Commissioner Peter McWalters approached Littky about setting up a new school for grades nine to 12. The formal name of the school was to be the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, but McWalters told Littky he wanted a college preparatory school, not a vocational training facility.

"I thought, this is my chance," Littky said. "I've always wanted to work with the poor, and with kids who are thought of as underdogs. I wanted to do something different, something that would be best for the kids."

MOTIVATED: *Carleen Mylers with classmates. The 17-year-old, who is writing a novel, says it's "definitely cool" to be smart at the Met.*

The result was a team approach in which parents, advisors and students were equal partners. Students learn not from textbooks or lesson plans but from individualized, real-world experience: internships that take them to a workplace at least two days a week. The school focuses on writing, including a 75-page autobiography that every student must complete as a senior project.

The Met, where more than 80% of students qualify for federal meal subsidies, has the highest student retention level (98%) and the highest college placement level of any high school in the state. The campus functions with the same $11,000-per-student allocation that Rhode Island authorizes for every high school, McWalters said.

Among five classes that have graduated, 75% have some kind of college degree or certificate or are still in school.

"I am not sure [the Met] is a panacea. Right now, to me, it is an alternative," McWalters said. Even in a "data-driven, results-oriented era," he said, "there is still this kind of 'there has got to be something wrong' kind of reaction when you talk about the Met."

Indeed, the school ended up on a national watch list after faring poorly last year on standardized tests required under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Met students did better this year, and the school came off the list.

For Littky, the low test scores were almost a reverse badge of honor. He started the Met by recruiting middle school students who were faring so poorly that they were likely not to attend high school at all. Met students now are selected by lottery.

The student body is about 40% Latino, 30% African American, 26% white and 4% other ethnicities.

"I believe that there is not one set of subject matter that all human beings need to know," Littky said. "There is so much knowledge out there. The key is loving to learn, finding knowledge and then applying that knowledge.

"I am fighting standardized tests," he said. "And I am fighting No Child Left Behind."

Littky, 60, intended to work with autistic children when he earned a double doctorate in psychology and education at the University of Michigan.

But in 1969, he began working with a program to promote parental involvement in schools in Brooklyn, N.Y. At 27, he became principal of a middle school on Long Island, where he immediately ran into trouble with parents who did not like the project-

oriented innovations he was proposing.

He took the same pragmatic philosophy to his next job as principal of a small school in a New Hampshire mill town that was in danger of closing. Littky turned the school around, but his nontraditional methods so enraged a group of parents that they had him fired. Littky went to court and won his job back. The experience became the basis for a 1992 television movie called "A Town Torn Apart."

While working in New Hampshire, Littky attended a lecture by Theodore Sizer, then a Brown University professor and a longtime critic of conventional educational methods. The two became friends, as well as collaborators in Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools, a loose grouping of the leaders of about 1,500 schools who agreed to follow Sizer's educational principles.

"Instead of saying: 'This is what school is; how do we rearrange it to do better?' Dennis said: 'How do you capture these kids that most people think are already lost?' " Sizer said.

Along with workplace internships, Sizer said, Littky incorporated the premise that "adults would be on these kids' cases all the time, because if you are not on their cases, they will drift away."

At a recent Met School "check-in" session, the students in Rebecca Siddons' advisory group gave status reports on their projects.

One student talked about a weekend workshop on eating disorders that she ran for fifth- through eighth-grade girls. Another described his progress in trying to help a Spanish-speaking family buy a house. An aspiring musician crowed that the radio station he was launching finally made it onto the air.

"Most college admissions officers are blown away when they hear these kids tell their stories," said Siddons, adding that Met students were not hampered by a lack of traditional markers, such as grade points or course requirements.

"The War of 1812 is not part of the curriculum here," she said. "This school is based on the idea that skills are more important than content, and that students can learn what they need to know when they need to know it."

After working in a state program to prevent child abuse, for example, Mylers decided she wanted to learn about psychology. She got Bs in two courses at a community college — in Spanish and criminology.

The daughter of a carpenter and a day-care provider, Mylers is applying to half a dozen colleges, including Amherst College, her "reach" school. She hopes to finish her novel in the spring, and says that coaching middle school students helps improve her own writing.

She said that learning through her interests motivated her to pursue subjects she might never have explored otherwise. She also said it was "definitely cool" to be smart at the Met.

"This school started out as an experiment," she said. "And now it is turning into the future."

NEW TACK: *Shawn Gooding, 16, works on a sailboat during an internship at a yacht school. Students at the Met School learn not from textbooks, but from real world experience.*

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"Education is everyone's business"

The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center

Chandelle Wilson
Met '03
RISD '07

2003 Gates Millennium Scholar

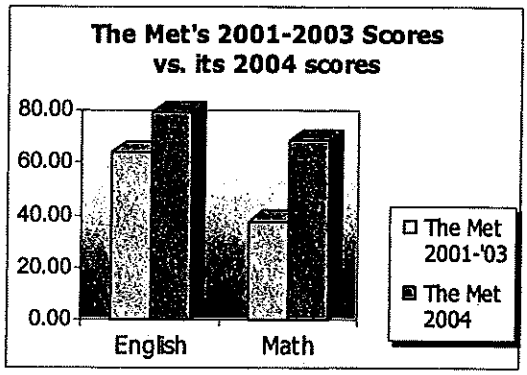
"I went to The Met because I saw my sister turn her life around just by coming here. It was the best decision I ever made."

The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, "The Met," will be entering its tenth year in the fiscal year, 2005-2006, and will be at full capacity. This is the last year of large student increases and corresponding large budget increases. The six separate buildings of The Met allow the schools to be small and personalized and prepare its 700 students for collegiate and professional success.

STATE REPORT CARD

Data taken from Rhode Island's state report card, *Information Works! 2004:*

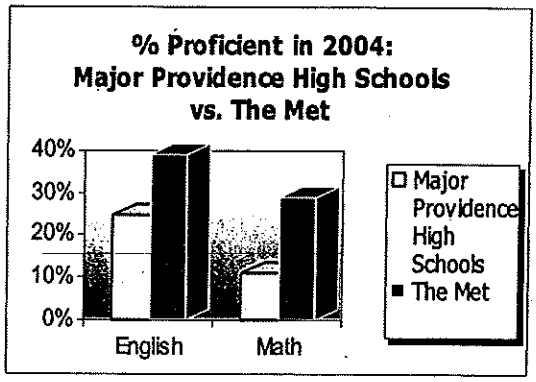
State Testing Data, 2004



• The Met's **math** scores jumped from a three-year average of **38 to 68, a 79% increase.** The Met's **English/Language Arts** scores rose from a three-year average of **64 to 79, a 23% increase.**

• The Met **exceeded** the ***No Child Left Behind*** **goals** set for **Rhode Island** in **2007.**

• The Met is an **"improving"** school and scored just shy of being named a **"high performing"** school (3 points in English/Language Arts and 6 points in Math).



• On average, The Met had **18% more students proficient** in **math** and **14% more students proficient** in **English/Language Arts** than the three largest **Providence** high schools.

94.2% Graduation Rate (one of the highest in the state)
The **state average** is **81.3%** and the **Providence average** is **57%** for the city's three largest high schools

93.3% Attendance Rate (one of the highest in the state)
The **state average** is **89.5%** and the **Providence average** is **77%** for the city's three largest high schools

Gina Rodriguez

The Met '03, Brown University '08

For her Senior Thesis Project at The Met, Gina traveled to Cuba and made a documentary on political organizing. Now she is a freshman at Brown, studying developing countries with a focus on Latin America.

"What really motivates students is being interested in what they are learning. At The Met, everybody is so engaged in their work that they will stay late to finish a project or go home and continue working or even come in on weekends. Everything becomes your own. You really push yourself and set high standards for success."

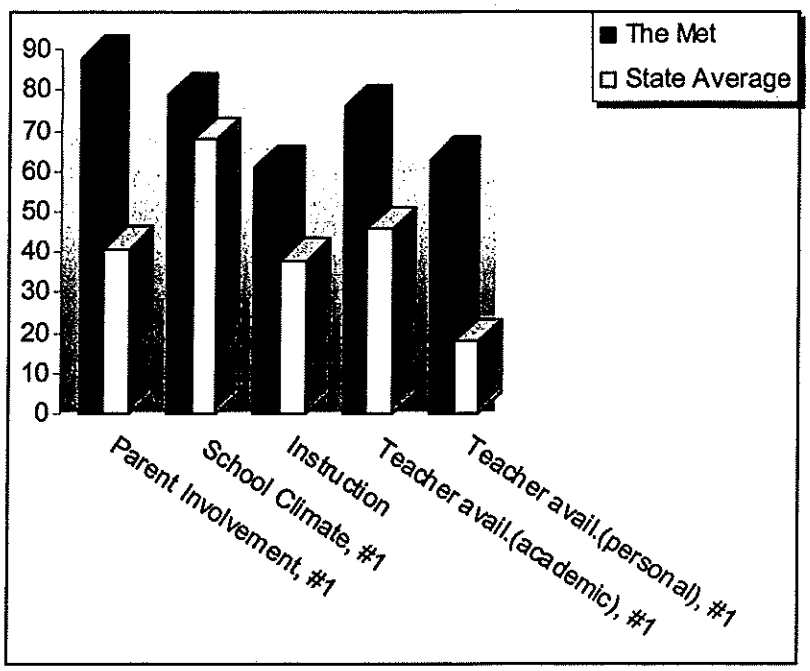
College Acceptances include...

Antioch College
Beloit College
Benedict College
Bennet College
Bennington College
Brown University
Community College of RI
Concordia College
Dean College
Emerson College
Hampshire College
Howard University
College of the Holy Cross
Johnson & Wales University
Mount Holyoke College
New England Institute of Technology
New York University
Northeastern University
Oberlin College
Parsons School of Design
Providence College
Reed College
Rhode Island College
Rhode Island School of Design
Roger Williams University
Salve Regina University
Sarah Lawrence College
Tufts University
University of Chicago
University of Rhode Island

State SALT Surveys, 2004 & 2005

Rhode Island's School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) Surveys

For the past five years, The Met has consistently ranked among the state's top high schools in attendance, graduation rates, parent involvement, school climate, and quality of instruction.



#1 in the state **Parent Involvement**[1]
•The Met: **88** State Average: **41**
Measures how involved parents feel in the school and how comfortable they are with teachers and school environment

#1 in the state **School Climate**
•The Met: **79** State Average: **68**
Measures school safety, respect between teachers and students, student behavior in class

#3 in the state **Instruction**
•The Met: **61** State Average: **38**
Measures teachers' skills and support from school

#1 in the state **Teacher Availability (academic)**[2]
•The Met: **76%** High School State Average: **46%**
% of students who feel they can talk to a teacher about academic issues

#1 in the state **Teacher Availability (personal)**
•The Met: **63%** High School State Average: **18%**
% of students who feel they can talk to a teacher about personal or family problems

#2 in the state **Drugs**
•The Met: **15%** High School State Average: **30%**
*Second **lowest** percentage of students reporting that someone tried to sell them drugs in school (only second to the RI School for the Deaf)*

[1] This is the most recently published data on parent involvement, school climate, and instruction (from 2004), highest score possible = 100
[2] Teacher and drug availability data are from a section of SALT Surveys just released in February, 2005

"Most [Met] graduates have multiple acceptances, many at competitive private colleges, state higher education institutions, nationally recognized art and design schools as well as Ivy League schools."
Letter from RIDE to the state legislature, June 2004

COLLEGE DATA

"No comprehensive high school in Providence or the state, nor even Providence's exam-entry "college prep" high school, can boast this [The Met's] universal college acceptance at a comparable array of colleges for all enrolled students." Letter from RIDE to the RI legislature, June 2004

The following data tracks all Met graduates of the past five years:

- »» **100% College Acceptance, 80% College Enrollment[3]**
- »» **75% are the first in their families to go to college**
- »» **75% of Met alumni who have gone on to post-secondary education have either graduated or are still enrolled**

According to the national average, 50% of all college students drop out, while only 6% of students from the lowest socioeconomic quartile graduate with a 4 year degree.

»» For three of the past four years, a Met graduate has won the prestigious and highly competitive **Gates Millennium Scholarship** (full tuition for six years of higher education)

Eric Oliveras
The Met '00, Anna Maria College '04

As a Met student, Eric painted a mural at the school's Peace Street campus and then studied art and criminal justice in college. After graduating, he returned to The Met as a literacy specialist.
"This school gave me opportunities and experiences people dream of having. I came back to The Met to help other students have the same chance."

The Student Body

As of fall 2005, The Met will have over 700 students from Providence (75%) and the rest of Rhode Island (25%), including Barrington, Bristol, Central Falls, Chepachet, Coventry, Cranston, Cumberland, East Providence, Foster, Hope, Johnston, Lincoln, Middletown, Narragansett, Newport, North Providence, North Smithfield, Pascoag, Pawtucket, Saunderstown, Tiverton, Wakefield, Warren, Warwick, Westerly, and Woonsocket.

For the 2004-2005 school year, **41.5% of students are Hispanic, 31% are African-American, 24% are Caucasian and 3.5% are Asian, Native American or multi-racial. Of all Met students, 65% qualify for the free/reduced federal lunch program.**

"I was told that I was a 'no good kid' and that I would never find a good job or get into college.... As a freshman at The Met, I have taken college courses and completed all the requirements, something I never would have been able to do if it weren't for this wonderful high school.... This school is like a second home to me."
Hannah Van Meter, Met '07

"The freshman class entered The Met with hostility towards each other, the staff and to education in general. Now this same group is actively involved in learning, passionate about what they are doing, supportive of each other, respectful and grateful to their teachers and excited about pursuing a college education."
Ellen and Uri Bar-Zemer, parents

[3] in college or post-secondary education

>>HOW SMART PEOPLE WORK<<

FAST COMPANY

By John A. Byrne, Lucas Conley, Keith H. Hammonds, David Lidsky, Micheal Prospero, Diana Ransom, Danielle Sacks, Chuck Salter, Anjani Sarma, Ryan Underwood, and Jennifer Vilaga **March, 2005**

The FAST 50

Rule Breakers, Trendsetters, and Dreamers You simply Have to Get to Know
Our Fourth Annual Competition

Fast is a state of mind. If you're fast, you don't accept the status quo. You plan for your moment to shine and when it comes -*pow!* - run for daylight and don't look back. Being fast is taking on an impossible task and bit by bit making it work. It's imagining a better world (or even one that smells like chocolate). **Here are the winners of Fast Company's fourth annual global readers' challenge --** every one of them an innovator, dreamer, and doer. Just what did you accomplish in 2004?

PEAK PERFORMERS

Smartly executed great ideas made 2004 a very good year

1 Good Boy!
President,
The Iams Co.
Dayton, Ohio

2 Putting Towns on the Map
President and CEO
The Boxton Co.
Fort Worth, Texas

3 Don't Just Call Them Time Shares
CEO
Exclusive Resorts LLC
Denver, Colorado

4 A School for Us

Cofounder and codirector
The Big Picture Co.
Providence, Rhode Island

"The main thing," Dennis Littky says, "is to not be boring." Littky, an education pioneer since the 1960s, makes that dictum real at the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center in Providence, Rhode Island. At "the Met," which Littky cofounded in 1996, high-school students – many of them from poor families and with previously spotty academic records – don't have textbooks, tests, or grades. Instead, they get intimate classes based on personalized learning plans. And they spend two days a week out of the classroom entirely on community work projects. The result: Every one of the Met's 53 graduates in 2004 was accepted to college, and 75% have actually enrolled. Now, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Littky's coordinating an effort to seed parts of the Met's model in 122 schools over the next four years.
2005 FAST 50 WINNER

5 Calling the Tune
Founder and CEO
Sonicbids Corp.
Boston, Massachusetts

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"Education is everyone's business"

HARVARD UNIVERSITY JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

The Innovations in American Government Awards

THE COUNCIL FOR Excellence IN GOVERNMENT

For Immediate Release

April 20, 2005

Contact: Daniel Paepke
(202) 530-3261
dpaepke@excelgov.org

THE MET SCHOOL IS A FINALIST FOR GOVERNMENT "OSCAR"

Providence High School Defies Dropout Trends, is Eligible for $100,000 Prize

(CAMBRIDGE, MA) – The Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center in Providence, RI -- the first urban public high school to build an individualized curriculum around each student's needs -- has been named one of 18 finalists for the prestigious Innovations in American Government Award. Often referred to as the "Oscars" of government, the Innovations Award is a program of the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and is administered in partnership with the Council for Excellence in Government. The Center is now eligible to win a $100,000 grand prize.

"This unique network of six small high schools are redefining what education should look like, by asking first and foremost: what is best for the child?" said Gowher Rizvi, Director of the Ash Institute. "It is the first urban public high school to build an individualized curriculum around each student's needs and interests, incorporating tailored academic work, mentored internships and real-world project work. It develops each student's curriculum around his/her individual needs and interests instead of on national standards that presumes that all students learn in the same way."

With a network of 24 small schools based on its design, the Met's hallmarks include authentic assessment, parent and community engagement, and a ground-breaking college transition program. School-based learning is combined with internships with adult mentors in the community who share interests. Local businesses, organizations and government offices provide students opportunities to learn the skills they need for success in the real world. The program has one of Rhode Island's lowest dropout rates and leads the state in instruction quality, parent involvement and school climate. All of the school's seniors have been accepted to college, and after five years, 75% have graduated or are still enrolled.

"The Met is unique in that it educates one student at a time," said Patricia McGinnis, President and CEO of the Council for Excellence in Government. "This is an effort that truly values students, families, communities and education."

The Met was one of more than 1,000 applicants for the 2005 Innovations in American Government Award. Each of the 18 finalists will deliver a public presentation before the National Selection Committee at Harvard University on May 11, 2005. The Committee is chaired by David R. Gergen of the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard and includes former Maryland Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, former San Diego Mayor Susan Golding, former White House Deputy Chief of Staff Maria Echaveste and former Congressman William Clinger. For more information about the presentations and how to view them on the Internet, please visit **www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu**.

-more-

After a full day of presentations, the committee will select five winners of the Innovations in American Government Award and one winner of the Fannie Mae Foundation Innovations in American Government Award in Affordable Housing, a special award made possible by the Fannie Mae Foundation. The winners will be announced on July 27, 2005 at the 2005 Excellence in Government Conference, in Washington, DC. Each winning program will receive a $100,000 grant to encourage replication of its innovation in other jurisdictions.

The Innovations in American Government Awards program, now in its 18th year, is a program of the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. The award is administered in partnership with the Council for Excellence in Government.

The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government fosters excellence in government around the world in order to generate and strengthen democracy. Through its awards program, research, publications, curriculum support, and global network, the Institute champions critical milestones in creative and effective governance and democratic practice.

The Council for Excellence in Government is a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose mission is to improve government performance by strengthening results-oriented management and creative leadership in the public sector, and to build understanding by focusing public discussion on government's role and responsibilities.

Additional information about the Met can be found at **www.metcenter.org**.

For more information on the Innovations in American Government program and this year's finalists, please visit www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu or www.excelgov.org.

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