

**Paul D. Houston, Ed.D.**

Executive Director  
American Association of  
School Administrators (AASA)

Nominated by  
**Krista D. Parent**

## Table of Contents

Bio of Brock Nominee Dr. Paul D. Houston .....	2
Dr. Paul Houston's Letter of Nomination.....	3
Curriculum Vita for Dr. Paul D. Houston.....	6
Books Authored and Edited by Paul D. Houston .....	21
Writing and Award Winning Columns by Paul D. Houston .....	30
Letters of Support from Notable Education Leaders .....	71

## Paul D. Houston

Paul D. Houston served as executive director of the American Association of School Administrators from 1994 to 2008.



Throughout his career, Houston has established himself as one of the leading spokespersons for American public education through his extensive U.S. and international speaking engagements, published articles and books, and media interviews.

Prior to joining AASA, Houston spent 17 years serving as a superintendent of schools in three uniquely different public education systems: Princeton, N.J.; Tucson, Ariz.; and Riverside, Calif. His K-12 education experience also includes serving as an assistant superintendent in Birmingham, Ala., and as a teacher and building administrator in North Carolina and New Jersey. He has also had the pleasure of serving in an adjunct capacity for the University of North Carolina, Harvard University, Brigham Young University and Princeton University.

Houston completed his bachelor's degree at The Ohio State University and received his master's degree at the University of North Carolina. He received a Certificate of Advanced Study from Harvard University and in 1973 he earned a doctorate of education from Harvard.

In 1991, Houston was honored by the Council of Great City Schools for his leadership in urban education when he received the Richard R. Green Leadership Award. In 1997, he was awarded an honorary doctorate of education from Duquesne University. The Hope Foundation honored Houston with the Courageous Leadership Award of 2000. The Horace Mann League presented him with the league's 2001 Outstanding Educator Award, calling him an articulate spokesperson for strong and effective public education. In 2008, Houston received the prestigious American Education Award from AASA.

Houston has published more than 250 articles in professional journals. He co-authored the books *The Spiritual Dimension of Leadership: 8 Key Principles to Leading More Effectively* (2006), *The Board-Savvy Superintendent* (2003) and *Exploding the Myths* (1993). His columns have been collected and published in his books *No Challenge Left Behind: Transforming American Education Through Heart and Soul* (2008), *Outlook and Perspectives on American Education* (2003) and *Articles of Faith & Hope for Public Education* (1996).

Houston is co-editor for a series of books on the Soul of Education Leadership with Corwin Press. To date, books in the series include *Sustaining Professional Learning Communities* (2008), *Spirituality in Educational Leadership* (2007), *Out-of-the-Box Leadership* (2007), and *Engaging EVERY Learner* (2006).

Houston currently serves as executive director emeritus of AASA and president of the Center for Empowered Leadership. He is a consultant, writer and speaker based in Tucson, Ariz. He is committed to advocacy for public education and the children it serves.

**South Lane  
School District 45J3**

455 Adams  
P.O. Box 218 (mailing address)  
Cottage Grove, OR 97424

Phone 541-942-3381  
Fax 541-942-8098  
www.slane.k12.or.us

July 9, 2008



To: Brock Jurors – 2009 Brock International Prize in Education  
From: Dr. Krista D. Parent, 2009 Brock Juror

**Krista Parent**  
Superintendent

**Julle De Pauw**  
Asst Superintendent

**Todd Hamilton**  
Director

**Chris Parra**  
Director

**Tim Rochholz**  
Director

RE: Nomination of Paul D. Houston, Ed.D.

It is with great honor that I nominate Paul D. Houston, Ed.D. for the 2009 Brock International Prize in Education. Dr. Houston has been the Executive Director of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) for the past 14 years, and a public school superintendent for the 17 years prior. He has also been an adjunct professor for the University of North Carolina, Harvard University, Brigham Young University and Princeton University. Dr. Houston has been the chair of the Educational Research Service (ERS) for seven years from 2000-2006.

During his 14 years leading the nation's organization for school executives, Paul has brought respect and credibility to the public school superintendency by moving school leaders into the role of "instructional leaders" and away from the role as mere managers of schools. Paul Houston set about changing the focus of the superintendent position from that of "superintendent of schools" to viewing the position as a "superintendent of learning and education." He has found a way to move school district CEO's across the country to truly lead learning and support the work in districts that results in student success. In Paul's new book No Challenge Left Behind (2008) he states, "The essence of what we must do as leaders is to use our abilities to help our teachers bring forth all that is within them so that they can do the same for children." Paul has been the significant force in changing the way we prepare school leaders and the way they operate to serve our nation's youth.

Paul's life work includes a focus on service to others. He has repeatedly stood up to the simple fixes that have been presented in education over the years and stayed true to his deep belief that learning should be student-centered and that innovation must be encouraged and not stifled. Paul has identified the need to be selfless in the leadership of schools and to cast aside the notion that superintendents should be the center of attention and hold the power. Paul states, ". . . that is the interesting paradox of leadership. Just as you can only truly lead by being willing to serve, you can only truly reach a level of significance by being willing to give it up. As the defenders and shapers, we must risk our significance by acting with a greater sense of urgency." For those that have worked with or spent any time with Paul Houston, they know he put away his significance long ago to ensure powerful learning opportunities for students across the country.

Dr. Houston's writing has been a frequent source of inspiration and motivation for numerous school superintendents and leaders. He has published

more than 200 articles in professional journals and authored or co-authored some of the most compelling books on leading and advocating for quality public schooling from the vantage point of a superintendent. His most current book, *No Challenges Left Behind* (2008) brings together some of Paul's best stories on advocating for public education and the children it serves. Dr. Houston is the coeditor for a series of books on the Soul of Leadership with Corwin Press. Books in this series include *Sustaining Professional Learning Communities* (2008), *Spirituality in Educational Leadership* (2007), *Out-of-the-Box Leadership* (2007), and *Engaging EVERY Learner* (2007). The titles of his books alone tell you about the character and passion of Paul Houston. Paul has been recognized with many awards for his inspirational writing including several award-winning columns – "Finding Our Voice" (2006), "Einstein's Brain" (2005), "Building Fields of Dreams" (2005), "On Becoming a Hope Pusher" (2004), and "A View From the Top" (2004).

Included in Paul Houston's nomination packet are letters of support from some of the most notable faces in education – author Terrance Deal; author and President of the HOPE Foundation, Alan Blankstein; Executive Director of the National School Board's Association, Anne Bryant; Executive Director of CAPSS, Joseph Cirasuolo; Former Secretary of Education, Richard Riley; and Executive Director of Phi Delta Kappan International, William Bushaw to name just a few. The words and phrases these individuals chose to describe Paul's influence on public school leadership include:

- "profoundly influenced several generations of school leaders"
- "has opened the minds and hearts of both current and aspiring school leaders"
- "an intelligent, articulate and courageous advocate for the children of this country"
- "I have never met anyone who is as brilliant and knowledgeable and at the same time as patient and accepting"

When I read the purpose of the Brock Prize, I continue to be convinced that Dr. Paul Houston is most deserving of this prestigious award. Paul has developed, promoted and spent the majority of his career teaching others – through his work and writing – the importance of the superintendent as an instructional leader. Superintendents actually do make a difference in student achievement and Paul Houston knew that and advocated for that focus in the superintendency long before the research documented this finding. Former Secretary of Education, William Bennett, once referred to superintendents and the district administration as "the education blob." Dr. Houston has spent nearly two decades changing this perception and has elevated the importance of the superintendent in improving student achievement and success to being one of the most critical factors for our nation's schools.

Without hesitation, I cannot think of anyone more deserving of the Brock International Prize than Dr. Paul Houston. He has been influential in changing the face of public education across this country in a way that is sustainable and produces positive results. Please carefully consider his nomination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Krista D. Parent". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Dr. Krista D. Parent  
South Lane School District Superintendent  
Adjunct Professor University of Oregon  
Former National Superintendent of the Year

## **PAUL D. HOUSTON**

American Association of School Administrators  
801 N. Quincy Street, Suite 700  
Arlington, VA 22203  
Office: (703) 875-0722  
Fax: (703) 528-2146

---

---

### **EDUCATION**

Doctor of Education Educational Administration Harvard Graduate School of Education Cambridge, Massachusetts	1973
Certificate of Advanced Study Educational Administration Harvard University Cambridge, Massachusetts	1971
Master of Arts in Teaching Elementary Education & Communications University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, North Carolina	1968
Bachelor of Arts English Ohio State University Columbus, Ohio	1966

### **EXPERIENCE**

1994-2008	Executive Director American Association of School Administrators Arlington, Virginia
1991-1994	Superintendent Riverside Unified School District Riverside, California
1986-1991	Superintendent Tucson Unified School District Tucson, Arizona

1977-1986	Superintendent Princeton Regional Schools Princeton, New Jersey
1974-1977	Assistant Superintendent Birmingham City Schools Birmingham, Alabama
1972-1974	Principal Wilson Elementary School Summit City Schools Summit, New Jersey
1970-1972	Graduate Student Harvard University Cambridge, Massachusetts
1971	Supervisor, Bureau of Equal Education Opportunity Massachusetts State Department Boston, Massachusetts
1969-1970	Building Principal Lincoln Elementary School Chapel Hill Public Schools Chapel Hill, North Carolina
1968-1969	Teacher, Grade 6 Chapel Hill Public Schools Chapel Hill, North Carolina
1967-1968	Teacher, Grades 3-6 Durham Public Schools Durham, North Carolina

**PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY  
ASSOCIATION LEADERSHIP**

2000- 2006	Chair, Educational Research Service
1998-2000	Chair, National Policy Board for Educational Administration
1997-1998	Chair, Educational Leaders' Consortium



1996-1997	Vice Chair, Forum of Educational Organization Leaders
1994-1996	President, Horace Mann League
1989-1991	President, Southwest Regional Educational Laboratory Board
1984-1985	President, New Jersey Interscholastic Athletic Association
1983-1984	President, Princeton Rotary Club

## EARLY BACKGROUND

Born in Springfield, Ohio in 1944. Grew up in rural West Virginia, the son of a Methodist Minister. Graduated from Milton High School, Milton, West Virginia.

## PERSONAL

Father of Lisa, Suzanne and Caroline Houston.

## EXPERIENCE

*1967-68 Teacher, Grades 3-6, Durham, North Carolina*

- Developed a teamed, non-graded class for underachieving students.
- Taught a class of gifted children in a school located in a lower middle class area where innovation was a new experience.

*1968-69 Teacher, Grade 6, Chapel Hill, North Carolina*

- Team taught in a newly integrated school located in a poor section of town with a student body that mixed upper middle class university children with poor Black children.
- Responsible for developing a language arts class for non-reading sixth graders and a motivational program for non-achievers.

*1969-70 Building Principal, Lincoln Elementary, Grades 4-6, Chapel Hill, North Carolina*

- Responsibilities involved directing a staff, 66% of whom were new to teaching, in a recently desegregated school as well as managing the site.

1971 *Supervisor, Bureau of Equal Education Opportunity, Massachusetts State Department, Boston, Massachusetts*

- Duties involved working closely with the Commissioner of Education on matters involving the Racial Imbalance Act in Boston by negotiating on state aid, working with press, acting as liaison to Boston School Department, etc.

1972-74 *Principal, Wilson Elementary, Summit, New Jersey*

- Educational leader in a good, but traditional school in Summit, a wealthy suburb of New York City populated by Wall Street commuters.
- Task was to create a more exciting learning environment for children.
- Improvements included teaming, multi-age classes and increased individualization.
- Particular emphasis was placed on development of character, higher-order thinking skills and increased independence.
- Particular management emphasis was on organizational health issues.

1974 *Director of Elementary Schools, Birmingham, Alabama*

- Spent three months in this position before promotion. Duties included overseeing program and principals in 78 elementary schools.

1974-77 *Assistant Superintendent, Program and Staff Development, Birmingham, Alabama*

- Directed division which included federal programs, basic education, general education, instructional television, media resources, staff development and textbooks.
- Major role was to implement a large number of innovations in an urbanized system of over 50,000 students. The system was about 70% Black, 30% White and undergoing the daily traumas associated with an urban system including a recent major desegregation order.

Significant Accomplishments - Birmingham:

- Accrediting the elementary schools (including creation of a library program)
- Building a kindergarten program
- Raising reading achievement in primary grades to national average
- Organizing federal programs to be more effective
- Development of an arts-in-education program
- Development of series of alternative schools
- Providing mini-grant programs for teachers
- Development of extensive staff development program

1977-86 *Superintendent of Schools, Princeton, New Jersey*

- Duties involved leading all facets of a nationally recognized prestigious system of 2500 students in a university community.

Significant Accomplishments - Princeton:

- Development and successful passage of a \$4.3 million bond project for Princeton High School

- Development and successful passage of a \$3.7 million bond project for buildings and grounds improvement, (both were passed by a 5-1 margin)
- A major programmatic review of the high school with attendant recommendations were completed.
- Development of a model for bringing about a coordinated curriculum program K-12.
- Every annual budget was approved by the voters
- Major achievement was the improvement of the system's public image in a town that had begun to lose faith in its public schools and the development of a long range plan that looks to the 21st century

In addition:

- A major reorganization of the administration including the transfer of six school administrators
- The development of a complete staff evaluation and supervision program
- Significant change and improvement in the budget format
- The successful closing of two schools
- The development of a major review of the school system including changes in funding sources and an aggressive program for raising revenues
- Leading a successful fight at the state level to restore lost state aid
- The development of a nationally recognized computer program

*1986-91 Superintendent of Schools, Tucson Unified School District, Tucson, Arizona*

- Duties involved operation of a growing 103 school, 57,000 student system with over 9,000 employees.

Significant Accomplishments - Tucson:

- Developed and implemented TUSD 2000, a strategic long-range plan for educational improvement;
- Created a Business Advisory Council to help improve understanding between the district and the business community;
- Authorized formation of a Management Review Task Force to review TUSD's management procedures and business operations;
- Spearheaded passage of a \$398 million bond election to improve buildings and instructional technology;
- Created Mission SUCCESS, a five-year educational improvement focus.

In addition:

- Put in place a structured staff development program which assembles all classification of employees for a three-day seminar of introspection and sharing;
- Developed new evaluation procedures for administrators and teachers.

*1991-94 Superintendent of Schools, Riverside Unified School District, Riverside, California*

- Duties include leading all facets of a growing 38 school, 34,000 student "edge city"

district with over 3,000 employees.

**Significant Accomplishments - Riverside:**

- The development and implementation of a strategic plan which focuses on improving student achievement and closing the gap between minority and anglo achievement.
- A major accomplishment was the setting of a tone and focus which allowed the district to significantly downsize its budget without major conflict while keeping important initiatives moving.
- Planning was done to anticipate and efficiently manage various crises.

**In addition:**

- Development of an extensive technology plan
- Establishment of a Parent Academy
- The provision of an extensive staff development program
- Development of a public relations program.
- Eight schools have been put on a year-round schedule with a minimum of problems.
- The focus and integration of the Strategic Plan has led to a dramatic decrease in the drop-out rate and an increase in achievement during a time of budget austerity.

*1994-Present Executive Director, American Association of School Administrators  
Arlington, VA*

- Duties include acting as CEO of national professional association for school system leaders and representing the profession as a “voice” for leadership. The association consists of 15,000 members.

**Significant Accomplishments**

- Turned around finances of organization and moved from near bankruptcy to an operation with over \$10,000,000 in assets.
- Significant changes in declining membership base. Membership has increased substantially in the last three years.
- Reestablished AASA as a respected and vital voice on education.
- Revitalized organization from a “status quo” operation to an organization advocating cutting-edge issues.

**RELATED EXPERIENCE**

*1968 Director, University of North Carolina, Micro Teaching Clinic (summer) - Had overall*

management responsibility for a clinic that provided video-tape training experience for beginning teachers.

*1968-70 Adjunct Teacher, University of North Carolina, MAT Program - Worked with university in placement and as supervisor of MAT students and helped plan the program.*

*1971-72 Teaching Fellow, Harvard University - Supervised secondary MAT students in their intern experience in alternative junior high school and held regular seminars with them.*

*1972 and 1973 (summer) Assistant to the Superintendent, Summit, New Jersey - Duties included any assigned by superintendent with most of time devoted to personnel recruiting, and hiring.*

*1976 (summer) Visiting Professor, Brigham Young University - Taught course on Innovations in Elementary Education.*

*1985-89 Visiting Lecturer, Princeton University - Worked with Psychology Department on school related issues.*

*1987-89 Host, "Education Countdown" KGUN - Channel 9 - Monthly public service program on educational issues on ABC affiliate.*

*1993-2005 Co-Host, "Seminar for Superintendents" Harvard University*

## **PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

**Speaker/keynote speaker, panelist, and consulting advisor** to dozens of AASA state affiliates, school districts, corporate and association groups, conferences and conventions each year for over 36 years.

### **Chairman/Board Member/Other Offices**

- Member, Alabama Task Force on Graduation Requirements, 1976
- Member, Visiting Team for Accrediting Birmingham Southern College Education Program, 1976
- Chairman, Education Products Information Exchange, Nat'l Network of Users, 1976-77
- Board of Directors, New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association, 1979-86
- National Advocacy Advisory Committee, Arts, Education and Americans, Sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, 1979-81
- President Mercer County Superintendents' Roundtable 1981-83
- Corresponding Member of Committee on State Associations, AASA, 1982-83
- Chairman, State Task Force on Excellence, NJASA, 1983
- President, Scholarship Senate, AASA, 1983
- Member, National Committee on Future of the High School, ASCD., 1983-84
- Member, Joint Legislative Committee on Goals for Educational Excellence in Arizona, 1987
- Member, Southwest Regional Laboratory Board, 1989-91, 1992, 1994- (Chairman 1989-

91)

- Member, Harvard Graduate School Advisory Panel on Urban Superintendent's Program, 1990-
- Member, AASA Advisory Committee on Urban Schools, 1990-92
- Member, Board of Directors, Horace Mann League, 1990-
- Member, Advisory Committee, California State Superintendent of Instruction, 1992-94
- Member, Trust in Insuring Educators, 1994-
- Member, Advisory Board, National Study of School Evaluation, 1994-
- Board of Directors, Hugh O'Brien Youth Foundation, 1994-
- Member, WingSpread, 1995-1996
- Member, Lightspan Advisory Board, 1995-1997
- Member, Advisory Council on Dependents Education, 1996-1997
- Advisory Board Member, Voyager Expanded Learning, 1996-1997
- Member, NESDEC, 1996-
- Board of Directors, WestEd, 1996-
- Board of Directors, Educational Research Service, Inc, 1996-
- Chairman of the Board, 2001 - 2007
- Advisory Board, ETC (Educational Technology Connectivity)Forum, 1997-
- Advisory Board, ECC Project, U of Arizona, Educational & Community Change, 1997
- Board of Directors, Communities in Schools, 1999-
- Board of Directors, Learning Technology Systems, 1999-2000
- Member, National Advisory Committee, School-Link Network, 2000-
- Member, National Committee, Learning for Life, 2001-
- Board of Directors, Character Education Partnership, 2001-
- Member, 9.11 as History Advisory Board, 2002-
- Member, National Coalition on Asia and International Studies in the Schools, 2002-

#### **Association Memberships**

- American Association of School Administrators, 1970-
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1974-
- Phi Delta Kappa, 1971-
- New Jersey Association of School Administrators, 1977-86
- New Jersey Schoolmasters Club, 1983-86
- Arizona School Administrators, 1986-91
- Council of The Great City Schools, 1986-91
- Tucson Economic Development Corporation, 1989-90
- Association of California School Administrators, 1991-94

#### **AWARDS**

1972	Finis E. Engleman Scholar, American Association of School Administrators
1975	Selected for "Outstanding Young Men of America"
1978	Honored by Birmingham City Council for "Distinguished Service to Children"
1983-84	Elected President of the Princeton Rotary Club
1984	Selected by <i>Executive Educator</i> as one of the "100 Top Executive Educators" in

- North America
- 1985 Multiple selections for "Who's Who in the East, West, American Education, and Who's Who in America"
- 1985 Selected by *Executive Educator* as "Executive Educator of the Month," October
- 1987 Danforth Fellow
- 1989 Invited Participant, International Roundtable on Education Policy, Oxford University, Oxford, England
- 1991 Richard R. Green Leadership Award for Urban Education, Council for Great City Schools
- 1993 Selected by *Executive Educator* as one of the "100 Top Executive Educators" in North America
- 1993 Co-host of the Harvard Superintendents Seminar (1993-2005)
- 1997 Honorary Doctorate of Education from Duquesne University
- 2000 ASBPE 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Editorial Excellence Award 2000
- 2000 Region IV (Texas) Education Service Center Appreciation Award 2000
- 2000 Hope Foundation, The Courageous Leadership Award of 2000
- 2001 Bowling Green State University, Award of Excellence 2001  
Programs in Educational Administration, Supervision and Leadership Series
- 2001 Horace Mann, Outstanding Educator Award
- 2004 ASBPE Annual Editorial Excellence Award – Bronze Award for 2 articles  
*The School Administrator – A View from the Top (Feb 2004),*  
*On Becoming a Hope Pusher (May 2004)*
- 2005 ASBPE Annual Editorial Excellence Award – Silver Award for 2 articles  
*The School Administrator – Building Fields of Dreams (April 2005),*  
*Einstein's Brain (May 2005)*
- 2006 NSPRA Award of Excellence – Distinguished Achievement, Excellence in Writing in the Category of Education Association – *Building Fields of Dreams*
- 2007 NSPRA Award of Merit – *Finding Our Voice (Nov 2006)*
- 2008 Distinguished Service Award, AASA
- 2008 American Education Award, AASA

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

### Princeton:

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Board of Directors, 1977      | Princeton Public Library   |
| Board of Directors, Sec. 1979 | Princeton YMCA   |
| Adm. Board Chairman, 1980-83  | First United Methodist Church  |
| Member                        | Southern New Jersey Methodist Conference;<br>Equitable Salary Commission |
| President, 1983-84            | Princeton Rotary Club  |
| Board Member 1984-85          | Mercer Council on Alcoholism   |
| Board Member 1984-85          | Princeton Council of Family Services                                     |

### Tucson:

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Board Member, 1987      | Tucson YMCA   |
| Board Member, 1987      | Tucson Public Library                                 |
| Board Member, 1987-1990 | Arizona Education Information System - (Arizona State |

Board Member, 1988-90	University)
Board Member, 1990-91	Pima County Arts Council
	Pima County Metropolitan Education Commission

## CONTINUING EDUCATION

- Attend National Conferences by AASA, ASCD, IRA, NSBA, Council of Great City Schools, and Large City Schools Superintendents
- NASE Academy, "Curriculum Renewal" 1974
- AMA. Workshop, "How to Implement Management Performance and Appraisal Systems" 1975
- Harvard University Seminar for Superintendents 1985, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1993
- Various Workshops at State Level on Specific Issues
- British Society of Education Officers Summer Conference 1996, 2000
- International Seminar on Policy - Russia, 1994; Turkey, 1996; People to People, India, 1997; New Zealand/Australia, 1997; Cuba, 1998; South Africa, 1999; China, 2000; Eastern Europe, 2001; Paris, 2002; Southeast Asia, 2002; Italy, 2003; Spain, 2003; Brazil, 2004; Argentina, 2005

## PUBLICATIONS

### *Unpublished (or limited distribution)*

"A Case for Arts-in-Education," *The Educational Interpreter*, Volume 2, Number 2, June 1977

*Handbook on Alternative Schools*, General Assistance Center, University of Alabama, 1977

"Metropolitanization as a Solution to Racial Isolation," unpublished qualifying paper, Harvard University, 1972

"An Eclectic Approach to Change through the Creation of Organizational Health in an Elementary School," unpublished dissertation, Harvard University, 1973

### *Published (State or National distribution)*

## ARTICLES

"What I Should Have Learned in School," article on Leadership Training, published in *The Executive Educator*, April 1980

"Arts: The Surrey Not the Fringe," *Art Education*, December 1980, (reprinted in *Art Issues*, Spring 1981)



"Stalking the School Administrator," *Art Education*, September 1981

"Twenty Questions to Help You Evaluate Your Reading Program," *National Association of Elementary School Principals Communicator*, April 15, 1981 (reprinted in Colorado State ASCD magazine, Fall 1981)

How Do You Rate Your School?" *NASSP Bulletin*, January 1983

"Assimilating the New Technology - Report from the Field," *NJASA Perspective*, Spring 1983

"Planning for Learning in the World of Tomorrow," *Educational Leadership*, September 1983

"Public Education: The Rest of the Story," *The School Administrator*, September 1983

Monograph - Reaction, "Cities in Crises: The Future of Urban Education," College at New Paltz, State University of New York, January 1984

"Harmony from Discord: Beating the Hard Times through Changed Attitudes and Collaboration," *The Choral Journal*, February 1984

"Decline is Not a Four Letter Word," *NJASA Perspective*, Winter 1984

"The Search for Excellence: New Jersey's Public Schools and the National Reports," a report for the New Jersey Association of School Administrators (principal author), *NJASA Perspective*, Spring 1984

"Functional Literacy," *The School Administrator*, May 1984

"The Future is Coming: Involve Your Community in Planning For It," *The School Administrator*, August 1984

"School Bond issues get a boost when taxpayers help set project priorities," *The American School Board Journal*, April 1985

"Boards Must Seize The Reins of School Reform," *The American School Board Journal*, April 1986

"Arts in Public Schools - Excellence, Elitism and Esoterics: Why Johnny Can't Draw," *Design for Arts in Education*, May/June 1986

"Running Schools as a Business - Massacre or Mutuality," with Judith Ferguson, *NASSP Bulletin*, May 1986

Cover Article, "Zen and the Art of School Management," The Executive Educator, October 1990

Chapter, Pennsylvania Academy of Science, *Science Education In This United States: Issues, Crisis and Priorities*, "Issues in Science Education in School Systems - Perspective from an Urban and Suburban Superintendent," with Dr. Louis Hebert, 1991

Monograph, "A View From the Edge," paper for Southwest Regional Lab, 1991

Cover Article, "What's Right With Schools," *The American School Board Journal*, April 1992

Monograph, "The Light of My Darker Brother: A Tribute to Dr. Richard Green," The Metropolitan Center for Educational Research, Development and Training, New York University, May 1992

"Let's Set the Record Straight," *NASSP Bulletin*, October 1992

"Education on the Fault Line," *The Executive Educator*, February 1993

"Wanted: Transformational Leaders," *Thrust for Educational Leadership*, February/March 1993

"An Open Letter to the New Secretary of Education," *The School Administrator*, March 1993

"Be Your Own Spin Doctor," *The Executive Educator*, June 1993

"What's Right With Education: Finding Facts & Fighting Fiction," *Visions*, Summer/Fall 1993

"School Vouchers - The Latest California Joke," *Kappan*, September 1993

"The Religious Right: Beliefs, Goals and Strategies--A Guide for Public School Administrators," Horace Mann League, 1993, Jane Hammond, Paul Houston, Jack McKay

"Telling the Truth About Today's Schools," *Thrust for Educational Leadership*, September 1993

"Exploding the Myths," Interview, *Audio Education*, September 1993

"California's 'Fire Next Time,'" *Education Week*, December 15, 1993

"Drive-By Critics and Silver Bullets," with Joe Schneider, *Kappan*, June 1994

"A Premature Post-mortem," Interview, *The World*, July 1994

"Making Watches or Making Music," *Kappan*, October 1994

- "Education Reform and *BSA's* Role," Interview, *Pro Speak*, November 1994
- "Knowing About and Addressing Quality are Two Different Things," *Quality Network News*, November/December 1994
- "School Reform Through a Wide-angle Lens," DAEDALUS, *Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, March 1995
- "Crusade for Children," *Journal for a Just and Caring Education*, July 1995
- "Dear Congress: Can the Ties, Save the Children," *Education Week*, September 13, 1995
- Forward, *Leadership in Whole Language: The Principal's Role*, Bob Wortman and Myna Matlin, Stenhouse Publications, 1995
- "Transforming Education: A Commitment to Children and Community," *Fortune*, special advertising section, October 30, 1995
- "The Blab Meets the Blob," *Education Week*, April 24, 1996
- "From Horace Mann to the Contrarians: Celebrating the Common School in Uncertain Times," *The School Administrator*, May 1996
- "Designing Learning Systems for the System Century," *Fortune*, special advertising section, May 13, 1996
- Forward, *The American School Superintendent*, Gene R. Carter and William G. Cunningham, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, California, 1997
- "Administrator Accessibility: Invite the Wolf for Coffee," *School Planning & Management*, January 1997
- "The Roles of Superintendents and School Boards in Engaging the Public with the Public Schools," with Anne Bryant, *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 1997
- "Raising the Caution Flag on the Standards Movement," *Education Week*, June 4, 1997
- "Child Advocacy: An Essential Part of School Leadership," *The School Administrator*, May 1997
- "Testing, Testiness, and a Test of Will," *Education Week*, February 25, 1998
- "Engage the Public in Public Schools," with Anne Bryant, *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 1998
- "The ABC's of Administrative," *Education Week*, June 3, 1998

- "Candles in the Wind," *Education Week*, April 14, 1999
- "Balancing Paradox," *Association Management*, June 2000
- "Superintendents for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: It's Not Just a Job, It's a Calling," *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 2001
- "A Reform Both Parties Can Endorse", *Education Week*, February 21, 2001
- "Intelligent Redesign," *Education Week*, June 15, 2005
- "NCLB – Dreams and Nightmares," *Kappan*, February 2005
- "Barking Up the Right Tree," *Kappan*, September 2006
- "The Seven Deadly Sins of No Child Left Behind," *Kappan*, June 2007
- "Isn't It Amazing?" *Education Week*, July 23, 2007
- "Toward the 'Highly Qualified' Principal," *Education Week*, Dec. 12, 2007  
(with Joseph Aguerreberere and Gerald Tirozzi)
- "Look at the Job as CEO of Nation's Future," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 13, 2008

**AASA ARTICLES: Over 170 articles**

*The School Administrator: Dr. Houston's Outlooks and Perspectives (Monthly Column)*  
*Leadership News (Monthly publication)*

**BOOKS:**

*Exploding the Myths: Another Round in the Education Debate*, Joe Schneider and Paul D. Houston, American Association of Educational Service Agencies, Arlington, Virginia, 1993

*Articles of Faith and Hope for Public Education*, Paul D. Houston, American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, Virginia, 1997

*The Board-Savvy Superintendent*, Paul D. Houston and Doug Eadie, American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, Virginia, 2002

*Outlook and Perspectives on American Education*, Paul D. Houston, American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, Virginia, 2003

*The Spiritual Dimension of Leadership: 8 Key Principles to Leading More Effectively*, Paul D. Houston and Stephen L. Sokolow, Arlington, Virginia, 2006

*The Soul of Educational Leadership Series: Engaging EVERY Learner, Out- of- the- Box Leadership, Spirituality in Educational Leadership, Sustaining Professional Learning Communities*, edited by Alan M. Blankstein and Paul D. Houston, Corwin Press, 2006, 2007, 2008

*No Challenge Left Behind: Transforming American Education Through Heart and Soul*, Paul D. Houston, Corwin Press, 2008

**RADIO/TELEVISION APPEARANCES:**

Frequent guest on Newstalk Television, America's Talking, C-Span, MSNBC, WYRE Radio, and PBS. Appearances include: NBC's Nightly News, the CBS Evening News, ABC World News Tonight, Voice of America, the CBS Morning Show, Viewpoint on NBC4, NewsTalk on News Channel 8, Black Entertainment TV, Dutch Public TV, Canadian TV, French TV, Japanese TV, ABC Radio News, CBS Radio, NPR, Fox News, and CNN.

## **No Challenge Left Behind** **Transforming American Education Through Heart and Soul**

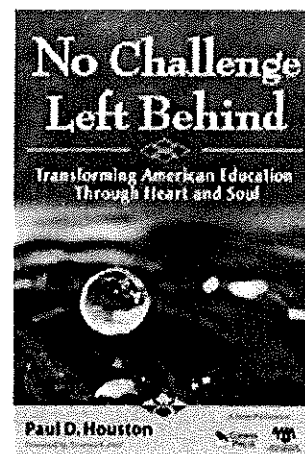
Authored by:

**Paul D. Houston** 

American Association of School  
Administrators (AASA)

Foreword by Terrence E. Deal

Published In Association With the American Association of School Administrators



### **Description:**

*"A brilliant distillation of the best thinking from one of the great minds in our field. This funny, uplifting page-turner inspires profound 'aha' moments necessary for being a 'hope-pusher' internally while effectively advocating for children in the larger community." — Alan M. Blankstein, President HOPE Foundation*

*"Paul Houston thinks like a man of action and acts like a man of thought. His writings are packed with the wisdom, grace, and innovation that have made him one of the true leaders in American public education today." — Daniel H. Pink, Author *A Whole New Mind**

*"This book translates the real issues in public education into sublime teachings for life." — Anne L. Bryant, Executive Director National School Boards Association*

*"Paul Houston is a crusader for American public education. His fresh ideas provide answers to some of the toughest challenges our schools and school leaders face today." — Richard Riley, Former U.S. Secretary of Education*

*"In these timeless essays, Houston opens our minds with his powerful thoughts, touches our hearts with his understanding and passion, and invites us to see public schools and the children we serve in a new light." — Gail Connelly, Executive Director National Association of Elementary School Principals*

*"Paul Houston's extensive knowledge of the issues facing today's busy school administrators is unparalleled. This collection is indeed a testament to Houston's legacy and his deep love for and commitment to public education." — Gerald N. Tirozzi, Executive Director National Association of Secondary School Principals*

***A collection of influential, insightful, and inspiring articles from an educational leadership expert!*** In this resource, retiring executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, former superintendent, and best-selling author Paul D. Houston examines the growing complexity of the educational process and the challenge of transforming learning into an engaging, meaningful—and even joyful—experience.

Houston offers enlightening perspectives on global competition, the widening economic gulf between social classes, the explosion of information, and a landscape of competing expectations. This provocative book views education as "soul work" touching the deepest part of the human spirit and covers:

- What it means to be a leader
- The challenges of transforming public education
- How leaders can champion learning and education
- Lessons from the field

## **The Spiritual Dimension of Leadership 8 Key Principles to Leading More Effectively**

Authored by:

Paul D. Houston

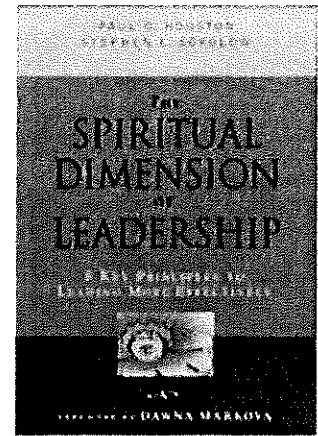


American Association of School  
Administrators (AASA)  
Center for Empowered Leadership

Stephen L. Sokolow



Foreword by Dawna Markova



---

### **Description:**

*"In this book, Paul Houston and Steve Sokolow sow seeds of wisdom that offer hope and sound guiding principles for America's educational leaders."*

-Richard W. Riley, former U.S. Secretary of Education and former Governor of South Carolina

*"This book fills a troubling void in the leadership literature by highlighting the vital spiritual side of a leader's role."*

-Terrence E. Deal, Author *Leading With Soul* and *Reframing the Path to School Leadership*

*"Houston and Sokolow focus on how leaders can remain true to their core beliefs and still lead successful organizations. This should be required reading for all leaders and prospective leaders." - Vincent L. Ferrandino, Executive Director National Association of Elementary School Principals*

*"I can't imagine a more timely and important book for educators."*

-Margaret J. Wheatley, Author, *Leadership and the New Science*

*"Houston and Sokolow have done an extraordinary job of looking beyond the traditional view of leadership to incorporate a spiritual dimension." - Dr. Gerald N. Tirozzi, Executive Director National Association of Secondary School Principals*

*"The Spiritual Dimension of Leadership reminds us that the job of leadership is complex, but the actions we take can be very simple and yet have a big impact."*

-Anne L. Bryant, Executive Director National School Boards Association

***Infuse your leadership practice—and your life—with greater purpose and wisdom!***

This book illuminates many of the core values, beliefs, and principles that can guide, sustain, and inspire leaders during difficult times. These values and principles have underlying spiritual roots. The more aware of them you are, and the more you express them in leadership practice, the more effective you become.

Paul D. Houston, Executive Director of the American Association of School Administrators, and Stephen L. Sokolow, a founding partner and Executive Director of the Center for Empowered Leadership, offer the following eight key leadership principles to help you become a more enlightened leader:

- Intention
- Attention
- Unique gifts and talents
- Gratitude
- Unique life lessons
- Holistic perspective
- Openness
- Trust

Reap the many rewards of practicing these principles and journey down a path of awareness and insight that will empower you and those you lead to create the best possible future for our children.



## **Sustaining Professional Learning Communities**

Edited by:

Alan M. Blankstein



The HOPE Foundation, Bloomington, IN

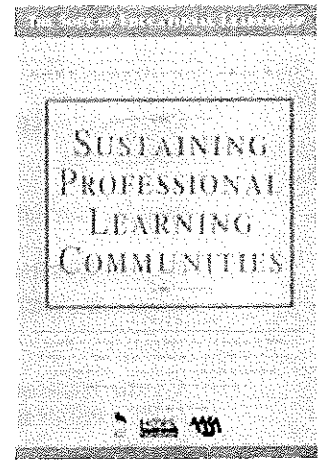
Paul D. Houston



American Association of School  
Administrators (AASA)

Robert W. Cole

Educational Consultant, Edu-Data,  
Louisville, KY



A Joint Publication With the American Association of School Administrators

A Joint Publication With the HOPE Foundation

**Series:**

The Soul of Educational Leadership Series

---

### **Description:**

*"This resource brings together an incredible blend of leading educational thinkers. Their diverse experiences, perspectives, and wisdom will stimulate in leaders the 'deep work' of the heart, mind, and soul essential for creating schools that continuously improve teaching, learning, and relationships in ways that benefit all members of the school community." — Dennis Sparks, Emeritus Executive Director National Staff Development Council*

*A concise volume packed with research and innovative ideas from today's key thinkers!*

Professional learning communities have become a significant factor in improving instructional effectiveness and student achievement. In the third volume of *The Soul of Educational Leadership* series, educators and leaders will discover key concepts and strategies for sustaining the critically important work of these communities.

Contributions from Shirley M. Hord, Maurice J. Elias, Karen Seashore Louis, Andy Hargreaves, Stephanie A. Hirsh, and other nationally known educators highlight:

- Leadership teams and a collaborative culture
- The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
- Multiple approaches for supporting social-emotional learning in schools
- Leadership, real-world challenges, and moral choices

A thought-provoking collection from educational visionaries, *Sustaining Professional Learning Communities* is essential reading for all school leaders committed to strengthening learning environments.

## **Out-of-the-Box Leadership**

Edited by:

Paul D. Houston



American Association of School  
Administrators (AASA)  
The HOPE Foundation, Bloomington, IN

Alan M. Blankstein



Robert W. Cole

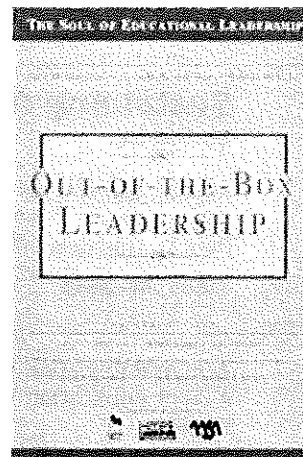
Educational Consultant, Edu-Data,  
Louisville, KY

A Joint Publication With the HOPE Foundation

A Joint Publication With the American Association of School Administrators

**Series:**

The Soul of Educational Leadership Series



---

### **Description:**

*Develop a leadership style that inspires an entire school community to achieve high goals!*

In this second volume of *The Soul of Educational Leadership* series, editors Paul D. Houston, Alan M. Blankstein, and Robert W. Cole offer creative perspectives on the challenges of reframing leadership practice. Presenting key strategies from leadership experts such as Thomas Sergiovanni and Dennis Sparks, this compact resource combines research, reflective exercises, and day-to-day school leadership procedures for motivating students and providing meaningful cultural change in school communities.

An ideal handbook for principals, assistant principals, superintendents, and district administrators, this copublication with AASA and the HOPE Foundation discusses:

- Developing high-quality leadership
- Inspiring transformative leadership
- Embracing leadership alternatives
- Evaluating current school reform practices
- Meeting the challenges in leadership roles

*Out-of-the-Box Leadership* is the perfect guide to help administrators rethink, reshape, and strengthen their leadership styles and provide confident, focused direction that will help build real success for students and all members of the school community.

## **Spirituality in Educational Leadership**

Edited by:

Paul D. Houston



American Association of School  
Administrators (AASA)  
The HOPE Foundation, Bloomington, IN

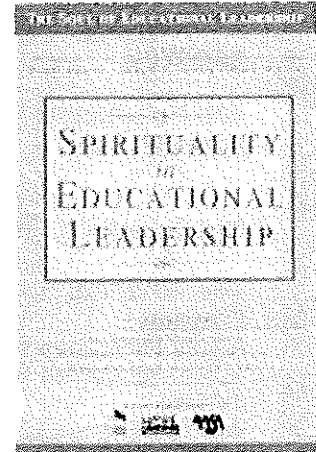
Alan M. Blankstein



Robert W. Cole

Educational Consultant, Edu-Data,  
Louisville, KY

A Joint Publication With the HOPE Foundation and the American Association of  
School Administrators



A Joint Publication With the American Association of School Administrators  
and the HOPE Foundation

**Series:**

The Soul of Educational Leadership Series

---

### **Description:**

*"A useful book for those who want to find balance in their lives and add a dimension of spirituality to their leadership." — Kenneth Killian, Assistant Professor Vanguard University of Southern California*

*"The information is approachable, nonthreatening, and personal. The authors discuss their own past roles as educational leaders, providing instant credibility." —Jennifer Baadsgaard, Assistant Principal Roosevelt High School, San Antonio, TX*

***Revitalize your leadership and help shape a better future for the students you serve!***

This fourth volume of *The Soul of Educational Leadership* series offers key strategies for identifying the moral and ethical dimensions of school leadership practice. With thought-provoking contributions from top leadership figures like Terrence E. Deal, Dawna Markova, and Scott Thompson, this enlightening resource combines research with innovative ideas for practice and emphasizes:

- Spirituality within a life-sustaining context
- The role of spirituality in empowering leaders as agents for transformative change
- A moral obligation to create safe and supportive learning spaces for students

## Engaging EVERY Learner

Edited by:

Alan M. Blankstein



The HOPE Foundation, Bloomington, IN

Robert W. Cole

Educational Consultant, Edu-Data,  
Louisville, KY

Paul D. Houston



American Association of School  
Administrators (AASA)

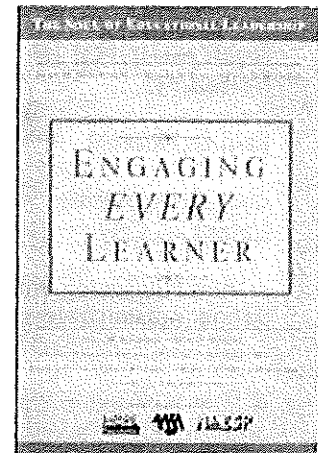
A Joint Publication With the National Association of Elementary School Principals

A Joint Publication With the American Association of School Administrators

A Joint Publication With the HOPE Foundation

**Series:**

The Soul of Educational Leadership Series



---

### Description:

*Join today's most insightful thinkers as they explore the heart, mind, and soul of educational leadership!*

This concise volume offers educational leaders key concepts and strategies for framing discussions about closing the equity gap and ensuring high achievement for all learners. As the first volume in *The Soul of Educational Leadership* series, this unique collection presents:

- Pedro A. Noguera and Alan M. Blankstein on essential questions and themes
- Delores B. Lindsey and Randall B. Lindsey on culturally proficient equity audits
- Antoinette Mitchell on the knowledge base for teaching diverse learners in big-city schools
- Stephen Peters on how to capture, inspire, and teach every learner
- Thomas R. Guskey on rethinking the work of Benjamin S. Bloom
- Karen J. Pittman and Merita Irby on readiness for college, work, and life
- Alan Boyle on helping failing schools to turn around
- Richard Farson on the paradoxes of risk, challenge, failure, and innovation

Pioneering educators and series editors Alan M. Blankstein, Robert W. Cole, and Paul D. Houston offer thought-provoking ideas applicable to all schools, districts, and learning communities and include a complete index for browsing and easy reference.

**Outlook and Perspectives on American Education**  
Co-published with: **The American Association of School Administrators**

**Paul D. Houston**



"...this book puts his columns in one efficient place they can refer to when looking for inspirational messages to share with an audience."— AASA

Drawing upon his life and professional experiences, AASA Executive Director Paul Houston reflects upon important issues in education. Having first appeared as columns within *School Administrator* magazine, Houston's insights are organized around six chapters: "On Being a Leader", "Putting Kids First", "The Value of Public Education", "Transforming School Reform", "Seeing America Through a Distant Mirror", and "At the Movies". Steeped in his passions, theories, and extensive travels through the heart and soul of American education as we've moved from the last millennium into this one, Houston's philosophical and practical advice on how educators might improve their work and make the world a better place for our children will interest and inspire educators everywhere.

**Table of Contents:** INTRODUCTION • PART I: ON BEING A LEADER • PART II: PUTTING KIDS FIRST • PART III: THE VALUE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION • PART IV: TRANSFORMING SCHOOL REFORM • PART V: SEEING AMERICA THROUGH A DISTANT MIRROR • PART VI: AT THE MOVIES • ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SCARECROWEDUCATION

November 2003 • 140 pp

About the Author

**Paul D. Houston**, who has served as executive director of the American Association of School Administrators since 1994, has established himself as one of the leading spokespersons for American education through his extensive speaking engagements, published articles and books, and his regular appearances on national radio and television. He worked in schools in North Carolina, New Jersey, and Alabama prior to serving as superintendent of schools in Princeton, New Jersey; Tucson, Arizona; and Riverside, California.

## **The Board-Savvy Superintendent**

*Paul D. Houston and Doug Eadie*

"Relying on the authors' hands-on experience with public and nonprofit boards, the text presents detailed, practical, and tested guidance on what works. It spotlights gaining skills and knowledge to achieve board know-how, addresses ways to build an enduring partnership, and details how to help the board produce high-impact management."— E-Bulletin



*The Board-Savvy Superintendent's* hard-hitting, no-nonsense, advice on school board leadership capitalizes on Houston and Eadie's hands-on experience working with hundreds of boards and superintendents over the past quarter-century. It is a practical, survive-and-thrive book that will help school district leaders--board members, superintendents, and senior administrators--learn to work together successfully in leading their districts in these extraordinarily challenging times.

Filled with detailed, thoroughly tested guidance on how to acquire the skills and knowledge that make up board savvyness, it also addresses how to develop the school board's capacity to produce truly high-impact governance, and how to build a strong, enduring, productive board-superintendent working partnership. The authors take a fresh look at the process of governing, going well beyond the old-fashioned, control-focused "policy governance" approach. Rather than being preoccupied with developing a static structure of policies to distinguish the board's role from the superintendent's, the book describes how the board and superintendent can creatively work together in making decisions about such critical governing "products" as values, vision, mission, and strategic change initiatives.

School district leaders will appreciate *The Board-Savvy Superintendent's* close look at the "gold standard" for board involvement in school affairs: leading strategic change. The authors go well beyond the conventional long-range planning approach of merely projecting everything a school district is doing for some arbitrary period of 3 or 5 years, which has generated tons of paper and little important change to provide the reader with detailed, practical guidance on engaging school boards creatively and proactively in a much more selective, vision-driven process that actually results in the implementation of strategic change: the Strategic Change Portfolio.

**Paul D. Houston**, who has served as executive director of the American Association of School Administrators since 1994, has established himself as one of the leading spokespersons for American education through his extensive speaking engagements, published articles and books, and his regular appearances on national radio and television. He worked in schools in North Carolina, New Jersey, and Alabama prior to serving as superintendent of schools in Princeton, New Jersey; Tuscon, Arizona; and Riverside, California.

**Table of Contents: FOREWORD • PREFACE • Chapter 1: The Board-Savvy Superintendent In a Nutshell • Chapter 2: Updating Your Board's Governing Design • Chapter 3: Involving Your Board in Leading Strategic Change • Chapter 4: Keeping The Board-Superintendent Partnership Healthy • Chapter 5: Keeping Up With Your Reading**

SCARECROWEDUCATION December 2002 \* 104 pp

## Writing by Paul D. Houston

### Award-Winning Columns

- **“Finding Our Voice”** (published in *The School Administrator*, Nov. 2006) - This column received an Award of Merit in the writing category in the National School Public Relations Association’s 2007 Publications and Electronic Media Contest
- **“On Becoming a Hope Pusher”** (published in *The School Administrator*, May 2004) - This column received a bronze award in 2005 from the American Society of Business Publication Editors, Central-Southeast Region.
- **“A View From the Top”** (published in *The School Administrator*, Feb 2004) - This column received a bronze award in 2005 from the American Society of Business Publication Editors, Central-Southeast Region.
- **“Einstein’s Brain”** (published in *The School Administrator*, May 2005) - This column received a Silver Award in 2006 from the American Society of Business Publication Editors, Central-Southeast Region.
- **“Building Fields of Dreams”** (published in *The School Administrator*, April 2005) - This column received a Silver Award in 2006 from the American Society of Business Publication Editors, Central-Southeast Region. It also received an Excellence in Writing award in the National School Public Relations Association’s 2006 Publications and Electronic Media Contest.

### Additional Columns

- **“Intelligent Redesign”** (*Education Week*, June 15, 2005)
- **“NCLB: Dreams and Nightmares”** (*Kappan*, Feb. 2005)
- **“Barking Up the Right Tree”** (*Kappan*, Sept. 2006)
- **“The Seven Deadly Sins of No Child Left Behind”** (*Kappan*, June 2007)
- **“Superintendents for the 21st Century: It's Not Just a Job, It's a Calling”** (*Kappan*, Feb. 2001)

*Reprinted from the April 2005 issue of The School Administrator.*

## **Building Fields of Dreams**

*By Paul D. Houston*

I never can visit Iowa without thinking of one of my movie favorites, "Field of Dreams." Last summer, as I was flying into Des Moines, I was looking out of the window enjoying the lush landscape of varied hues of green, some so deep they seemed blue. I kept hearing the words of Shoeless Joe Jackson asking the Kevin Costner character, Ray Kinsella, if the baseball field he was standing in was heaven. Ray replied, "No, this is Iowa."

Iowans like that line too and you see it posted on T-shirts and mugs. Coming from a state that promoted itself as "Almost Heaven, West Virginia," I understand the pride involved. Flying in on that summer evening, it was also easy to see why Shoeless Joe was confused.

But I can never think of "Field of Dreams" without thinking about the work we do. The movie is filled with the themes that I believe make being an educator so powerful — dreams, hopes, redemption, connection and perseverance. It was a movie that made us feel good by reminding us of what is best about ourselves. There are times when educators need to remind themselves of the power of their work.

### **Dark to Light**

It is difficult to reconcile the work of educational leaders as strictly a management issue. So much of what we do deals with the aspirations and dreams of the people we serve. You can't manage dreams; you have to pump them up and let them soar. Deepak Chopra said leaders are the symbolic soul of the groups they lead. But for leaders to "thrive on chaos" they must understand the underlying order, which has a spiritual basis. He pointed out that choosing to lead is "choosing to step out of the darkness." By implication, stepping out of darkness puts us under the lights.

Like many across the world I grew up a fan of John F. Kennedy and the magic he sprinkled on America as its leader. I was particularly taken by his espousing and modeling the line from Hemingway about the need to "exhibit grace under pressure." That is the gold standard for a leader to pursue — an "amazing grace" that allows everyone around you to be better than he or she thinks possible. Leaders must not only exhibit grace, they must dispense it.

But getting back to Ray Kinsella. You recall he was working in the cornfield, minding his own business, when a voice whispers to him, "If you build it, he will come." It's mysterious and unnerving. Yet when you think about it, haven't we all been called to the work that we are doing? Our jobs aren't to raise some corn and make a profit. And while it is blasphemy in today's world of assessment and accountability, it isn't to raise test scores and make AYP either. Our mission is to build it.



Sometimes we get lost in trying to figure out the “it.” You remember Ray needed awhile to figure out that it was a baseball field in the middle of his cornfield. But it wasn’t really about the field, it was about the opportunity for redemption, first for Shoeless Joe and his teammates, but ultimately for Ray and his relationship with his father. We all share the need to make things over.

And what an act of faith it was for Ray. By plowing under his corn, he gave up the profits he needed to keep his farm and support his family, and he lost the good opinion of his extended family and neighbors. They thought he was crazy. Have you ever done anything crazy because you were called to do it? Isn’t that what leadership often entails? But we must remember Ray did it because he was serving a larger purpose — he was preparing a way, making things ready. It wasn’t the field, it was the action to take place on it — a chance to play catch once more with his dad.

### **Healing Others**

Building anything requires vision, planning and effort. But it moves quickly from the practical to the spiritual — to build something you also must have faith and you must believe. You have to see it real before it happens.

But building the field just led to the next mission: “Go the distance.” For Ray that meant a trip across country. For most of us, it means staying the course, making commitments and keeping them. Leaders must persevere before they can prevail. Leading isn’t just finding the right path. It means staying on it. This requires courage to face the dangers and resilience to recover from the blows.

The final mission given to Ray was to “Ease his pain.” Leadership is at its core the art of “healership.” But leaders don’t do the healing. They create the conditions for the people to heal themselves. But first we must do no harm. Sadly, in many organizations we have leaders inflicting pain, rather than easing it.

Ultimately, Ray discovers that while he thought he was doing all these things for others, it was really for himself. In building and going the distance, he was really easing his own pain. The reality is that whatever we do to others, we do to ourselves and whatever we do for others, we do for ourselves. That is the secret perk and peril of being a leader.

As Ray grapples with how he will hold onto his farm, he is urged by his daughter to keep it because people will pay to come and visit. James Earl Jones tells Ray they will come and pay because it is money they have but peace they lack. Touching a field of dreams offers the peace they need. Ultimately, our task is to offer a chance for peace to others, and peace is only possible when dreams are there.

At the end of the movie Ray asks his father if there is a heaven and his father tells him, “Yes, it’s the place where dreams come true.” The real calling and the real payoff for school leaders is that we can create heaven on earth by helping children’s dreams come true. That offers us amazing grace.

*Reprinted from the February 2004 issue of The School Administrator*

### **A View From the Top**

*By Paul D. Houston*

There is a Randy Newman song called "It's Lonely at the Top." Listening to that song always reminds me of how it felt in the years I spent in the superintendency. I once said that superintendents make the Maytag repairman look like a party animal. The very nature of the job is one of splendid isolation.

It always has been curious to me to see how so many extroverted, gregarious folks should happen to choose a profession that cuts them off from the very essence of their humanity. It is lonely at the top.

When you think about it, very few jobs are done singly. Most people work with others and have peers who share job descriptions and responsibility. The irony of the superintendency is that while it is carried out by a person whose job most others don't understand or even care about, its effectiveness is totally dependent upon what others do. A large problem occurs when a gap exists between the leader and those being led.

#### **Showing Empathy**

I was once talking with a group of teachers and they complained that I couldn't possibly understand their issues because it had been so long since I had been in a classroom. I acknowledged they had a point, but I went on to suggest to them that at least I had been in a classroom at one time in my life; they had never been a superintendent and couldn't possibly understand things from my perspective.

The lesson here for leaders is that you can only see the world clearly when looking through another's eyes. It is the old adage that to understand someone you have to walk in his shoes. Superintendents have to be willing to spend most of their days trying on other folks' loafers and looking out through others' eyes. Only then can you begin to lead others by demonstrating to them you are capable of understanding their needs. People will only entrust their hearts to you when they feel they can trust you with them. If a leader wants to be trusted, then he or she must demonstrate empathy.

I always have been fascinated with mountain climbers—not that I would ever want to be one myself. But you have to be curious about a mentality that drives someone to spend days of struggle at risk of life and limb to climb a mountain that could easily be flown over in several seconds.

We all have seen pictures of the lone climber who mounts that one last step to the summit and surveys a landscape that stretches below in all directions. That climber knows how truly lonely it can be at the top, but she also understands how magnificent the scenery can be. And she knows the view was made possible by the test. It is only through testing that any of us can feel the sense of accomplishment.

Leadership is about taking the risk to enjoy the rewards. Not everyone is willing to do

that, but that is what makes a leader a leader. And it is good to remember that while the photo opportunity is of the lonely climber who got to the summit, he or she didn't get there alone. Mountains are scaled by teams.

I often have joked that I have a real problem crossing bridges. I get very "white knuckled" when I have to drive across a bridge. My friends tell me I have a phobia about it. I beg to differ. Phobias are irrational fears, and there is nothing irrational about being afraid to cross a bridge because bridges take you from what you know to what you don't know. They take you from a place of comfort to a place of possible discomfort. Yet that is what education is about and that is what leadership is about—building bridges and escorting people across them to unknown territory.

Albert Einstein once said teachers are messengers from the past and escorts to the future. And so are leaders. Leaders open new worlds to people and they understand that exploration is a lonely business. But bridges are built by crews and exploration is typically undertaken by expeditions.

#### **Group Solidarity**

The thing we have to keep in mind is that while our work is lonely, it is a mutually dependent activity. While we know that no one really knows or understands our work, our task is to create a sense of mutuality and an understanding that all things are connected. And to do that we must be connected.

A recent series of TV commercials for AARP focused on individuals doing something of great impact. One featured a housewife calling the President and talking him into fixing Social Security and another showed a lady bringing in a group of CEOs to fix the health care crisis. The tag line was, "If we could do it alone, we wouldn't need AARP." I have used that thought in encouraging folks to belong to AASA, but it is also a powerful idea for any leader. If we could do it alone, we wouldn't need each other.

It sometimes can be a lonely world and there is little doubt we have chosen a lonely profession. But that doesn't mean we have to be alone. We have to use our humanity to connect to those we work with. And we have to be grateful for the gift we have been given to be leaders.

We can make the world a better place. That is a powerful mission. So it is lonely at the top, but that is where you get the best view.

*Reprinted from the May 2004 issue of The School Administrator*

### **On Becoming a Hope Pusher**

*By Paul D. Houston*

When my children were young, one of them asked me, "Daddy, what does a superintendent do?"

Tough call. I started talking about all the responsibilities that I had — taking care of the buildings, hiring the principals and teachers, and making sure the classrooms have books and materials. Her cute little eyes started glazing over.

Then I mentioned calling school off for snow days and that registered big time. As my kids got older they weren't so happy to be the superintendent's kids because of that. It seems I never closed school often enough as far as they were concerned, and they had to hear about it from their friends. Being the superintendent's kid was the kid equivalent of having leprosy.

Now, as I was explaining to my child what I did, I was technically right but really quite wrong. It wasn't about the stuff of the work that was important. It was about the relationships and the hopes and dreams that I instilled in others. That was my true vocation.

### **Liberating Others**

Leading is always people work. And educational leadership is even more people centered than other callings. I am always amazed that as leaders we are constantly trying to figure out what structures and frames we can create to make an organization move where we feel it should go. If we thought about it, we would soon realize that since we are really talking about people you can't structure and frame the human spirit. You can't even contain it. Nor should you.

This has become particularly obvious as superintendents have struggled to find the right course on implementing No Child Left Behind. While the emphasis on accountability and achievement is appropriate, superintendents must find ways of preserving the humanity of those engaged in the learning process. It is important to count how well kids are doing, but it is even more important to make sure that what we are doing to them counts where it counts — in their long-term success and in their human spirit.

Leadership is about liberation. It is about taking lids off, turning lights on and getting out of the way. Leaders have to be the source of possibility in their organizations — "hope pushers" if you will. Certainly you have to help your people chart the course for their own liberation, but being a leader of people is part inspiration, part cheerleader and part referee. You make the future possible. You support their getting there, and occasionally you provide the adult supervision to sort out the bumps and collisions that are inevitable in a human organization.

I have been struck lately in conversations with school leaders how often the term “hope” turns up. It seems more precious than a unanimous school board. One of my staffers mentioned the other day that on a recent visit to Europe she had heard a commentator say the difference between America and Europe was that Europeans didn’t believe they could change anything and yet they were hopeful. Americans believe they can change everything and yet they are hopeless. Now I don’t know how true that is, but what I do know is that hope is rooted in the belief that you can change things, that you can make the world a better place.

I enjoy engaging school leaders in the question of why they entered the profession. Almost without exception they say because they believed they could make a difference. That is hope at its core — making a difference, making things better. Making the world a kinder and gentler place to dream dreams and pursue possibilities.

In a recent discussion with John Goodlad, we were talking about the superintendency and John posited that superintendents must be the intellectual leaders in their community. By that he meant that they needed to be the most curious and most thoughtful folks around. They should read widely, have multiple interests, and be willing to look behind the obvious and then share that urge to learn with others.

I agreed with John, but I added that they also needed to be the moral leaders in their community. By that I didn’t mean they should be leading the singing of “Bless Be the Tie that Binds.” But they do need to understand that there is a tie that binds their people to each other and the leader’s job is to make sure that tie is maintained and strengthened. The strands that create that tie are made up of hope and maybe even dreams.

### **Beyond Optimism**

Optimism and hope differ. I seem to be one of those people who possess natural optimism. No matter how much horse manure is around, I am always looking for the pony. But frankly, optimists can get on your nerves. We can be annoying. We’re always humming, “The sun will come up tomorrow,” but we rarely consider the possibility of sunburn. More than optimism is needed. Optimists can have their hearts broken because they think the world is more benign than it sometimes is. It is necessary for a leader to move beyond optimism to hope.

Optimists think things will get better. People of hope know they will get better, perhaps not quickly or easily, but they know it will happen because while the world is not always benign — it is always good. And goodness always will win out in the end. So, in addition to being intellectual leaders and moral leaders, we have to be hopeful leaders, not so much for ourselves but for those around us. We have to know that even if the sun comes up tomorrow all covered with clouds, that its warmth and light is still available and certainly preferable to the darkness of the night.

So when your child or grandchild asks you what you do — say that you are a source of light and possibility to others. Not a bad calling.

*Reprinted from the May 2005 issue of The School Administrator*

### **Einstein's Brain**

*By Paul D. Houston*

On April 16, 1955, Albert Einstein died of heart failure in Princeton, N.J. Given the heart he had, it is hard to imagine it failing, but sometimes the physical lets the metaphysical down.

What I have always found interesting was that when doctors performed an autopsy on Einstein, shortly thereafter they discovered his brain was missing. Apparently it was removed during the autopsy so it could be studied and was misplaced. I'll leave it to you to think about the irony of that.

As we know, Einstein is considered the great genius of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and some scientist thought that by examining his brain we might learn the secret to his intelligence. Now I am confident we are all grateful that Einstein died before they removed his brain for study. If he were living in our current era, with our obsession for data, someone might have come up with the bright idea of removing his brain so we could weigh it, even if he were still using it.

In education, it's long-standing joke that we pull up the trees to see if the roots are growing, so measuring someone's brain doesn't seem like a far leap.

### **Measuring Imagination**

From what I understand, when doctors examined Einstein's brain, they found it quite ordinary. It wasn't much larger or more developed in any significant way than most people's brains. It was just a brain like yours or mine. Yet what it accomplished was quite extraordinary. Einstein once said: "If one studies too zealously, one easily loses his pants." I suspect the doctor who removed the brain came to understand the wisdom of that thought.

Einstein also said that "imagination is more important than knowledge." I wonder what he would have thought of current education reform efforts. Certainly we are putting a premium on knowledge, particularly discreet bits of knowledge—but what about imagination? We can't measure imagination. Einstein pointed out that "it would be possible to describe everything scientifically, but it would make no sense; it would be without meaning, as if you described a Beethoven symphony as a variation of wave pressure."

Not everything that can be measured matters. Certainly our emphasis on rigor would have puzzled him. He offered that "teaching should be such that what is offered is perceived as a valuable gift and not a hard duty."

It strikes me that much of Einstein's genius came from his ability to look at the universe and see it differently—with imagination. In the lexicon of brain research, you might say

that he was a “lateral thinker.” He made unusual connections and was able to take immense complexity and make sense of it. For example, his explanation of his theory of relativity is a classic: “When you sit with a nice girl for two hours, it seems like two minutes. When you sit on a hot stove for two minutes, it seems like two hours. That is relativity.”

While Einstein is remembered for his scientific and mathematical genius, it was his insights into the human condition that always struck me. He once observed that “only two things are infinite—the universe and human stupidity—and I’m not sure about the former.” He was referring to humans’ penchant for war. Einstein was deeply opposed and spoke out against it with power. He once said: “He who joyfully marches to music in rank and file has already earned my contempt. He has been given a large brain by mistake; since for him the spinal cord would suffice. ... It is my conviction that killing under the cloak of war is nothing but an act of murder.”

Of course, it must be remembered that he fled Germany before the Nazis assumed power and later saw the work of his theories create the basis for the nuclear age. So he had convictions about war that were profoundly held. He offered that he didn’t know with what “weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.”

### **Battles and Wars**

I suspect most of us have a higher tolerance for war than Einstein, but then again none of us are Einsteins, are we?

As I was thinking about him, I found myself thinking about the Vietnam War, a time when our nation’s collective brain seemed to have been removed. The fact that my brain jumped from Einstein to Vietnam either makes me a lateral thinker or a random one.

Specifically I was reminded of the Tet offensive, which took place toward the end of the war. What some of us remember is that it was the turning point that convinced most Americans it was time to end the war and come home. What is so interesting is that, militarily, the Tet offensive waged by the Communist insurgents was a miserable failure for them. The Americans and their allies won that battle decisively—with a significant kill ratio in favor of our troops. Yet the fact the enemy could mount such an operation and was willing to do so and to take the losses they took disheartened us and led to our wanting the war to cease. It was a classic case of winning the battle and losing the war.

As we work on education reform, we must guard against the possibility of winning the battle and losing the war. We can raise test scores without increasing intelligence. As we gather data and examine our students’ brains, we must not fail to consider the human cost involved and to understand that we are educating more than brains—we are also educating their hearts.

Einstein once said “there are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.” Our children are first and

foremost miracles and deserve so much more than merely having their brains measured and weighed. We also must see their hearts don't fail them, and that will take imagination from all of us.



*Reprinted from the November 2006 issue of The School Administrator*

## **Finding Our Voice**

*By Paul D. Houston*

My daughter Suzanne has wanted to be an actress since high school. She was in every school play, majored in drama in college, taught drama after college, did summer theatre and dinner theatre and finally put herself on the line and went to New York City to pursue her dream.

But before she acted, she sang. In fact, as a small child she had this BIG Broadway voice and she would sing along to the car radio and you would have thought some large lady was singing in the backseat instead of a diminutive 5-year-old. She boomed it so that when she sang, "the sun will come out tomorrow" you believed it!

She was lucky to go to school in Princeton, N.J., which has an amazing vocal music program that starts in kindergarten and just gets better and better as the kids get older. But a funny thing happened with Suzanne. As she got older, her voice got better but it got smaller. As she was trained to sing "properly" and learned to blend her voice with others as part of an ensemble, she let go of her BIG voice. As her harmony improved, her individual talent was smothered. She still had a beautiful singing voice, but it just wasn't so special anymore and "tomorrow" sounded a long way off.

Recently, I was in New York and Suzanne suggested we go to see "Mamma Mia" because her current vocal coach was one of the stars. We did and were able to go backstage after the show for a guided tour by the coach and star. As we were walking on the stage, Suzanne's coach talked about her work with Suzanne and how proud she was that Suzanne had had to learn to "belt" (which is "Broadway speak" for having that BIG voice).

The coach asked me if I had heard her use that newly acquired voice and at first I said no, but then I realized I had — when she was 5. I mentioned she sang that way when she was young but hadn't for a long time. The coach said that Suzanne had had to find her "natural voice," which was the BIG one and that school had taught her how to sing properly but not naturally. The coach then told us about her own journey as a singer and that she had finally found a way back to her own voice.

### **A Voice Inside**

What a powerful lesson for us all. Shouldn't education be about helping children find their own natural gifts? Shouldn't we help them find their own "voice?" Shouldn't we do that for ourselves? How many of us use our "natural voice" as leaders? How many of us have the confidence and courage to lead in our own voice? Are we willing to write and speak in our own voice? Do we act from our own voice — that one that we know leads us to truth in action?

We all have that small, still voice inside us that acts as a guide. Do we listen to that voice? Would we have as much chaos with out-of-control politics or out-of-the-mind reform if we had more leaders using their own voices? Shouldn't we be speaking more about reforms that don't make sense, which come from "reformers" who know nothing about teaching and learning? Shouldn't we be saying more about the need to solve the right problems rather than the obvious ones? Shouldn't we be singing loudly that if we lose public education we lose any chance for a sunny tomorrow for America?

Leaders are expected to lead, but they are expected to lead authentically. Leadership comes from the inside out. It derives its strength from the essence of who and what we are as humans. To lead effectively, we have to know what our own voice sounds like and then we have to use it.

### **In Harmony**

But leadership is also about helping others find their own voices. What do we do to help our staff and teachers discover and use their voices?

One of the leader's greatest frustrations is our need to try to get everyone singing from the same page. Singing the same song is good, but if they are all singing the same notes it is pretty boring. You need a variety of tones to make the music interesting.

Suzanne had wonderful preparation for blending her voice with others. She is amazing at harmonizing. But her gift is also the ability to belt a solo. Don't we want all our teachers using their gifts to greatest effect? Wouldn't education be more effective if we could encourage them to use what they have and what they know?

We are living and working in a time when schools and learning are being minimized and marginalized. Education is being equated with the results of norm-referenced tests — seeing who can repeat a few limited notes most accurately. It is also focusing on what you know, not what you can do. I read music, but you would never want me to sing for you. Yet if we really expect our children to learn, they have to be let out of the box and allowed to find their own expression and be encouraged to make the music.

Real learning will happen when leaders use their voices to help teachers find theirs so that students can sing with openness and freedom. The balancing act for us is to make sure they learn the notes and know how to blend their voice with others without giving up their unique gifts.

The meaning of "educate" comes from the Latin "educare" which means "to bring forth." The essence of what we must do as leaders is to use our abilities to help our teachers bring forth all that is within them so that they can do the same for children. If we can do that, the sun really will come out tomorrow.

Education Week  
Published Online: June 14, 2005  
Published in Print: June 15, 2005

## COMMENTARY

### 'Intelligent Redesign'

#### Reframing the Discussion on High School Reform

By Paul D. Houston

When the most powerful man in the world and the richest man in the world agree on something, attention must be paid. President Bush has made high school reform a centerpiece of his second term, and Microsoft Corp. Chairman Bill Gates has been putting his money where his mouth is by massively funding high school reform efforts. Both men, along with most of the nation's governors and business leaders, have concluded that our high schools are badly broken and that something must be done.

Before we get too carried away, however, let's consider several problems with the current discussion about high school reform. Anyone with a short-term memory will realize we have seen this movie before. It starts with an avalanche of crisis rhetoric, supported by selective data. Then it is decided that the solution involves making people work harder; pressure is put on the system by adding more tests, and then the powers that be move on to the next big reform. It happened after Sputnik, it happened after *A Nation at Risk*, and it has been happening with the No Child Left Behind Act.

The real problem in discussing high school reform is that, quite simply, anything you want to say about high schools is true—and false. With over 18,600 high schools, you can find the good, the bad, and the ugly. America can claim that it has some of the best high schools in the world, and it does. But there are others that aren't so great, and some that few of us would want to be around. Some high schools are incredibly boring places where kids are allowed to put in their seat time in exchange for a diploma. But others are vibrant and exciting places. Perhaps we should learn from them before we reinvent the system—one more time.

We have been reforming high schools since they were created. So before we rush too far down the reform highway, perhaps we should find out why folks don't feel they are reformed yet. There are a number of reasons, but chief among them is that we haven't reached a consensus on what high schools are supposed to do. Western society has created a waiting room for young people called "adolescence," which is a purgatory between childhood and adulthood, and high schools are where we put them until they ripen. It can be argued that in some communities high schools have become holding pens for the disinterested. The schools' main task, in this mode, is to keep teenagers off the streets and out of adults' hair until they can move on. In other communities, high schools are prep schools for later life—a place to "get ready" for adulthood by taking college-

prep courses, or to prepare for a job through vocational training. In still other communities, they are beacons of excitement that run on the recognition that teenagers are living their lives now and have legitimate gifts and interests that should be supported.

The first question is whether all our high schools need to be reformed. And the second, related question is, do we need another federal intervention to make things better? Perhaps all we need is an “intelligent redesign” to identify the real problems and solve them.

The reality is that, like a lot of other aspects of American education, high schools are asked to be all things to all people. Yet, they are shaped by the communities in which they exist. Communities with resources tend to have more vibrancy in their programs and better achievement. It is still true that the prime variable on SAT outcomes is family income—the richer the family, the higher the score. In other communities, we put students in facilities that more closely resemble factories or prisons and add to the burden they’ve already been given. Despite this, many less-affluent communities have been working hard at improving their schools, even without sufficient support. But we cannot build a system on heroic exceptions.

One major issue is that high schools are part of a bigger system. They are affected by the preparation students receive prior to arriving at their doors. They are also shaped by the expectations of colleges and employers. If we want a different result from our high schools, we need to look much more broadly at the context in which they exist. Failure to do so will lead to a continuation of piecemeal solutions and growing frustration.

A further reality is that there have been fairly intensive efforts at reforming high schools for over 20 years. People have not been waiting for politicians to discover high schools and the next great reform opportunity. The National Association of Secondary School Principals published a comprehensive reform document called “Breaking Ranks” in the early 1990s that has been a blueprint for reform. Schools have expanded graduation requirements. Since the publication of the federal report *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the average number of Carnegie units earned by public school graduates has gone from 21 to 26. Schools have introduced more rigor into the curriculum. The number of schools offering Advanced Placement courses, for example, has gone from a little over 5,000 to more than 14,000 in the same 22-year time frame, the number of AP candidates has grown from about 175,000 to nearly a million, and the number of AP exams taken has risen from slightly under 200,000 to nearly 1.6 million. More students are taking more and harder courses. Meanwhile, the use of high-stakes tests has become a stick to wave at indolent students and teachers. At last count, more than 20 states had introduced some form of high-stakes graduation test, with more on the horizon.

So what is being suggested by our august leaders as the new path to reform? How are we to fix this “broken” system? Tougher curricula and more testing. I am reminded of one definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over expecting a different result.

Alarmingly, as we have increased the rigor and the assessment, students' interest in school seems to have diminished. One survey of high school seniors showed that the percentage who found schoolwork always meaningful declined from 40 percent in 1983 to 28 percent in 2000. And the percentage who felt that school learning would be quite helpful in later life dropped from 51 percent to 39 percent. So we seem to be moving in the wrong direction. If we stay on this path, we will see a day when students take many more and harder courses, and none of them will see this as meaningful or useful.

---

What do we want the schools to be about, and what should we do in them to produce a different result? It may be instructive to hear from Intel Corp. CEO Craig Barrett, who is a board member of Achieve Inc., the business- and governor-sponsored reform group that co-hosted this year's national summit on high schools.

In a recent op-ed piece in *USA Today*, Mr. Barrett says, "The harsh fact is that the United States' need for the highest quality of human capital in science, mathematics, and engineering is not being met." He is quoting the U.S. Commission on National Security for the 21st Century and espousing a common expectation for our schools: to produce human capital for the international marketplace.

The "one simple reason we're lagging behind" the rest of the world, Mr. Barrett suggests, is that "we've institutionalized low performance through low expectations." "High schools," he writes, "expect only a small number of students to take the advanced math and science young people need." He goes on to say that until we feel more pain, there will be little motivation to change.

The Intel chief merely is stating what so many others believe: The function of schools is to be instrumental to the greater economy, and the reason schools don't do better is that they don't expect enough of themselves or their students. The solution is achieved by creating a greater sense of pain through threats of "accountability."

At some point we need to have a discussion on whether schools are a farm team for corporate America or should serve a broader goal of molding educated citizens who can pursue their dreams. No one would argue that having marketable skills to make a living is not necessary to pursuing one's dreams. But it can be argued that job skills, though necessary, are not sufficient to living a successful life.

Another discussion should be around the "low expectations" charge. Certainly there are teachers and schools that do not expect enough of their students. But it is also true that virtually all the successful adults I know are successful because a teacher believed in them and helped them believe in themselves.

We also should have a national discussion on how best to motivate educators and learners. Is there any evidence, for example, that you can bludgeon people to greatness or

beat them to excellence? Pain may be useful to encourage people to change, but is it helpful in sustaining the change?

Most of all, I want to take exception with the core of what Mr. Barrett and others believe can and should happen to make schools better.

The op-ed piece looks back fondly to the post-Sputnik era, when the United States awoke to the competition represented by the Soviet Union's exploits in space and pushed for excellence in mathematics and science. The push resulted in a dramatic increase in enrollments in engineering and science. I was in school myself during that era, and I can't recall that we felt much of a difference between pre- and post-Sputnik education. Ironically, what happened during that time was not a sweeping reform that greatly expanded the numbers of children getting access to a first-rate education so they could become scientists and engineers. What happened was an increase in gifted-and-talented programs for some, and better college scholarships for those who were interested in engineering and science.

In that era, the government even gave a lot of support to those who wanted to go into teaching, something we see much less of today. If we want better students, shouldn't we start by helping our teachers?

---

I read Mr. Barrett's essay on a plane to Kansas, where I was to visit a high school program in the city of Olathe. The school district there has developed a series of programs in all its high schools called "21st-Century Schools." These programs are vocational, in that they are focused on the future working lives of students. But they also are very rigorous academically and produce great results. Most important, they are interesting, engaging, and meaningful to the students. These are hands-on programs that use the students' motivation to create as a vehicle for excellence.

As I walked through Olathe Northwest High School during that visit, I saw students and teachers engaged in hard work. I'm quite sure they saw their work as meaningful and useful. In one classroom, the students were constructing a "battlebot," which is a robot used in gaming to battle other robots. The last one running is declared the winner. These students were looking forward to taking their creation to a national competition later this year.

While this kind of work is fun—some might say frivolous—what is really happening in the class is much deeper. Students are learning about metallurgy, structures, engines, insulation, and a hundred other difficult concepts now made concrete and understandable. The Olathe students were excited about what they were doing—and yes, they were knowledgeable. They talked about how hard the project was—and how enjoyable.

There were 10 or 12 students who stayed after the bell to talk with me, and I found that every one of them plans to go to college to study engineering. In Olathe, it seems, there is

no shortage of engineering candidates. I asked them why they liked what they were doing, and the answer was simple. One student told me he got to use what he was learning in class. "Telling me that calculus is good for me isn't very meaningful," he said. "Now I see how I can use it."

Those who want to reform high schools should start in places like Olathe, where the district has figured out that the best way to get students to learn more is to give them work that engages their imaginations and creates meaning for them. We have to give schools adequate resources, of course, to provide the kind of state-of-the-art opportunities that allow students to get their hands on the learning. And the learning must look to the future, not the past.

Those who are interested in reform should focus on getting schools the resources they need to do the job, and then challenging them to make schools interesting and engaging places. Reform will not work by putting on more handcuffs. It will be accomplished by removing shackles so that people can fly.

Education has always been about the whole child, and unless we take that into consideration, the current effort to reform high schools will be just as successful as all the others that preceded it.

Kappan Magazine - May, 2002

### NCLB: Dreams and Nightmares

*The idea of leaving no child behind may sound like a noble dream. But the federal law intended to fulfill that dream is in Mr. Houston's opinion so flawed that it has become a nightmare for educators.*

*By Paul D. Houston*

IT IS MY understanding that humans share many of the same nightmares, like going to a party with no clothes on or showing up for the final exam in a class you forgot to attend or, on the happier side, falling from a cliff and discovering that you can fly. Today, educators share a nightmare known as NCLB (or "Nickelbee" for the alphabetically impaired). Sadly, the No Child Left Behind Act is a nightmare in which everyone is naked while being pushed off a cliff because of poor test performance.

The Nickelbee nightmare has many variations. One involves trying to fill every classroom with a "highly qualified teacher." But in Nightmareland, highly qualified doesn't necessarily mean good. It means the teacher took the right number of subject-area courses in college and is teaching only those subjects. A certified chemistry teacher is not a highly qualified biology teacher. A middle school teacher certified as an elementary teacher is not highly qualified for middle school English. (Didn't we create middle schools so we could get away from the rigidity of the junior high school curriculum?)

The big exception is teachers who have taken no education courses but apply for alternative certification. The day they apply for certification, they become highly qualified. This is the magical approach to becoming highly qualified and proves that the bureaucrats who draft these laws have a sense of humor. Of course, highly qualified teachers don't have to be good teachers pedagogically, and they certainly don't need to be kind or compassionate toward children. They just need to show they mastered their subject areas.

The Nickelbee nightmare also involves explaining to your community why your award-winning school is on the list of those that need to improve because you didn't make AYP (adequate yearly progress) in every sub-area with every subgroup. You might try to explain how progress isn't really progress because you aren't measuring the same children. You might explain that your school failed because one or two children were absent on test day, which dropped you below the 95% threshold for attendance. You might also have to explain why kids who have been identified for special education now have to meet the same standards as those who have not been so identified. In other words, students with special needs aren't really special when it comes to achieving common results. Makes one wonder why we have spent billions on special education when we could have just tested all those children to greatness. Oh, and don't forget that you have to make sure that students who come to you from Albania in third grade and who don't



speaking English will master that subject and the first three years of the curriculum in one year so that by fourth grade they are "proficient."

I could go on, but like swatting flies at a watermelon-eating contest, it is just too easy to make fun of Nickelbee. The fact is that the goals of the law are fine. I haven't found one educator who doesn't agree with the high-minded goals of Nickelbee. I haven't met an educator who thinks it is just fine to leave some kids behind. Many have swallowed hard in their efforts to embrace the law because it is an attempt to create more equitable expectations for our students. The President has talked about the soft bigotry of low expectations, and most educators I know agree that the phrase describes a real problem.

No one wants to see a single child left behind. In fact, it is a tribute to the nation's teachers and administrators that, despite the inanity of the law's details, they are working hard to implement it and make it work. From the coercive aspects of the law, one might think that the drafters thought children were being left behind on purpose. Why would people enter a profession as pressurized and thankless as teaching if they wanted to prevent some children from reaching their dreams? If policy makers really believe that, then we have a bigger failure to communicate than when we attempt to explain the law to parents. At some point, we need to discuss the hard bigotry of high expectations without adequate resources. It is no accident that most of the children left behind are clustered in poor schools in poor neighborhoods. That fact doesn't seem to get discussed much.

Further, no one argues that unqualified teachers belong in classrooms. No district advertises for poorly qualified teachers. The fact is that some schools are harder to staff than others. And we have to remember that private schools have made their reputations using uncertified teachers. (Come to think of it, private schools don't have the public accountability or testing requirements of Nickelbee.)

Educators welcome responsible accountability, and public schools have been open to public scrutiny on a regular basis. They are the one place where you can call public officials to account in a very public manner.

It is not the goals of Nickelbee that are problematic, nor its implementation and funding. They are fixable. We can modify the law to make certain that accountability occurs in ways that actually make sense by using the right assessment tools and measurements. We can raise the caliber of teachers in the classrooms by reshaping the qualities we seek in teachers and changing our incentives under a reasonable timetable. More money will help, but money alone is insufficient.

**THE FACT** is that the law has design flaws. The real reason that Nickelbee resembles a group nightmare is the lack of truth that permeates it. It is a search for weapons of mass mis-instruction that simply aren't there.

The fact is that we as a nation aren't really trying to leave no child behind. If we were, we would be doing much more than we are. We would recognize that we have an interrelated

set of issues to confront and that they are bigger than a breadbox. Let me demonstrate by asking some questions.

If we really intended to leave no child behind, wouldn't we be worried about the kind of start children are getting? Wouldn't we see to it that those most likely to be left behind get reasonable pre- and postnatal health care so that by the time they get to school they haven't already fallen behind because of chronic health issues? Wouldn't we want to make sure that they are parented by people who can provide the kind of mental and emotional support a developing child needs? Might not that mean more parent education and the creation of a safety net around the parents of young children to help them in this vital work? Wouldn't we want to make sure that those most likely to fall behind get a better head start by having preschool programs available to them that develop their intellect by applying all we know about the development of young children?

If we really wanted to leave no child behind, wouldn't we see to it that those most likely to fall behind have the best teachers we can find? Wouldn't that mean "caring" as well as "qualified" teachers? Wouldn't we pursue policies that create incentives for our best teachers to work with those children who are most difficult to educate? Wouldn't we want to make sure that the schools these children attend have the best technology and learning materials we can find, and wouldn't we house them in the finest facilities? Wouldn't we make sure that different learning styles are accommodated to capitalize on their strengths? Wouldn't we make the school day and year flexible in order to accommodate different learning speeds?

If we really wanted to make sure no child was left behind, wouldn't we make certain that schools are so personal that all children have access to adults who know them well and who care about them? Doesn't that imply moving away from our fixation on economies of scale and efficiency and moving toward smaller and more intimate learning environments? Wouldn't we provide many different activities to motivate and engage students in learning so that they run into the schools in the morning with the same energy and exuberance as they run out with in the afternoon?

If we really believed that all children are going to be highly proficient by 2014, wouldn't we be seeing major shifts in funding to make certain that those with the greatest needs receive the greatest resources? Wouldn't we also be seeing a massive effort to build up our universities to accommodate the crush of students who will soon be able to handle university work?

Sadly, no answers are being offered to any of these questions. In our quest for accountability, shouldn't we also be holding the politicians and bureaucrats accountable for creating systems that move beyond rhetoric so that we could truly remake American education into a system in which every child succeeds and in which each child's hopes are allowed to soar? If not, we must ask, "Where will we see no child left behind?" In our dreams.

[Type text]

June 2007 issue of *Kappan* magazine

### **The Seven Deadly Sins of No Child Left Behind**

*The pending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is prompting much discussion about what should be done to improve NCLB. But Mr. Houston believes that the law has been taking U.S. education in entirely the wrong direction and that a totally new agenda is needed.*

by Paul D. Houston

HAVE YOU ever considered that the remedy for being lost is not to drive faster? You have to stop and change direction. For five years the major school reform agenda in America has been the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which was part of the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Now ESEA is up for another reauthorization by Congress, and everyone is wondering what is going to happen next. It has been suggested that NCLB be expanded to high schools or that more interventions or national standards be required. But more is not the solution. It is time to change direction.

It is now universally accepted, even by those who authored the bill, that NCLB is flawed and needs fixing. In fact, describing the law as flawed might be charitable. If you take the definition of "sin" as a "shameful offense," then it could be argued that NCLB is full of sin because it has proved itself to be an offense against good education. For that reason, merely adding a growth model to the accountability provisions or creating some additional flexibility for English-language learners will not fix the underlying structural weaknesses of the law. Neither will adding more money. You can't get something designed for one purpose to be effective at fulfilling a very different purpose, no matter how many resources you apply to it. While there are aspects of the law that could be fixed, there are flaws in it that are so fundamental that there is not enough paint and spackle in the world to make them presentable.

Many will dismiss any criticism of NCLB now just as they have dismissed previous criticism. In the past, critics have been accused of exhibiting "the soft bigotry of low expectations" and have been labeled "apologists for a failed system." The generic response to critics has been that educators don't want to be held accountable. Now the contention is that America is failing to remain competitive in the global economy and that if we don't put more rigor into the education system our children will not be able to compete. None of these retorts are accurate or particularly useful.

### **The Need for a Systemic Solution**

One could argue that there is much in the U.S. education system that is not effective and needs to change and that NCLB's focus on accountability has helped to illuminate this need. Some educators may have held inappropriately low expectations for their students, so requiring schools to disaggregate test-score data by race, disability, socioeconomic

[Type text]

status, and English proficiency helps make certain that schools do not paper over the lack of success of some of their students. But the most fundamental problem facing education is that the current system is perfectly designed to yield the current results. If we are not happy with the current results, a systemic solution is called for. NCLB, which adopts assessment as its key strategy, does not begin to deal with education in a systemic way.

The deadly sins of NCLB are largely the result of a set of wrong assumptions about the problems facing schools and children. If we continue to fix things that are not really broken, we will simply break those things that work while the real problems go unattended.

**Sin Number 1: Assuming that schools are broken.** Most education reform is driven by a belief that the system is badly broken and must be fixed. In fact, the system is quite successful in fulfilling its historical mission of preparing children for an agricultural and industrial economy. It is not broken. It is a well-oiled machine doing the wrong thing.

The problem is that the world now requires a different set of skills. Indeed, the jobs that the education system was designed to fill are in short supply. What is required is a hard look at what schools need to produce and then a total retooling aimed at achieving that end. Schools haven't failed at their mission. The mission has changed.

Some might argue that NCLB will lead to the retooling needed in education. But that is true only if you believe that the road to the future is paved with low-level tests that measure discrete bits of knowledge. The reality is that anyone in business will tell you that successful workers in the new global economy must have skills of collaboration, ingenuity, problem solving, comfort with ambiguity, and a dozen other things -- none of which are tested for and subsequently taught as a result of NCLB. Schools that focus on 21st-century skills are doing so in spite of NCLB, not because of it.

The truth is that many schools and school systems in the United States work remarkably well for most students. Furthermore, the system is made up of over 50 million children, over 95,000 schools, and over 14,000 districts. Most of these children, schools, and districts are pretty successful, even under the restrictive expectations of NCLB. Even using AYP (average yearly progress) under NCLB as a measure, most kids meet most of the standards. Were it not for the "all or nothing" aspect of the scoring system, only a small fraction of the schools in America would be having difficulty making AYP.

And even the harshest critic of public education must admit that the majority of students are not failing. Nevertheless, we have constructed a federally mandated system that treats all school districts, schools, and children pretty much the same -- whether they are failing or succeeding dramatically. Would a business that has a high failure rate in one factory and a low one in another subject both to the same treatment? Would a doctor treat a patient with a head cold the same way she would treat one with lung cancer? Any rational response to our educational challenges would examine the range of school performance and act accordingly.

[Type text]

**Sin Number 2: Conflating testing with education.** Testing is an important part of the educational process. Teachers need to know what kids know and how they are progressing, and the public has a right to have a snapshot of how well benchmarks are being met. But testing must be kept in perspective. A number of states were making significant progress on their statewide plans before NCLB was implemented, and they had to step back from more sophisticated uses of assessments to meet the lower standards set by NCLB.

When student achievement is discussed, it has now come to mean test results. Yet the least sophisticated citizen among us understands that there is much more to education than what can be tested. When our sole emphasis is squarely on a single aspect of education, the entire process gets distorted. One of the greatest dangers posed by NCLB is that we will reach a point where most kids meet an acceptable standard set by the tests but do so at the expense of a broader and deeper learning experience. Setting standards can be useful, but only if the standards do not lead to standardization. A wise man once pointed out to me that training makes people alike and education makes them different. If we put too much emphasis on a lower, common denominator, we will be sacrificing higher possibilities for our children.

**Sin Number 3: Harming poor children and ignoring the realities of poverty.** ESEA was originally created to address the needs of poor and minority children. While great strides have been made, much remains to be done.

Those who wrote and voted for NCLB ostensibly did so out of a belief that we should not leave some children behind. However, broadening the law's requirements well beyond those most in need to include all schools and all children has caused educators to take their eyes off the ball. A recent study showed that the children closest to making AYP, not those most in need of assistance, are the ones receiving the bulk of the attention. Drilling poor students on basic skills while their middle-class counterparts partake of a richer curriculum will not close the real learning gap between students. It simply further limits the possibilities for poor children.

While Washington has created a system that ostensibly helps poor children, it doesn't want to talk about the impact of poverty on school success. Those who see poverty as an intervening variable have been accused of having lowered expectations for disadvantaged children. This has meant there has been no real discussion about what might be needed to *really* leave no child behind. While history is replete with stories of heroic exceptions (e.g., Lincoln was born in a log cabin and became President), there is no evidence that whole groups of people have been elevated by ignoring the chains that bind them.

Everyone in America knew which children were being left behind long before NCLB became law. A massive system of testing was not required. When you are born without adequate prenatal care, when you do not have sufficient health care as a toddler, when your parents do not know how to provide cognitive stimulation and cannot afford high-quality preschool programs, chances are you will come to school with a working

[Type text]

vocabulary that is just a fraction of the vocabularies of middle-class children. You have already been left behind.

Still, most educators put their shoulders to the wheel and try to push it uphill anyway. Sometimes they succeed. But when they fail, as they often do, they know that any law that fails to acknowledge the broader systemic issues that cause some children to be hobbled by circumstances is a law that will not work. The sad fact is that schools can and should help disadvantaged children -- but schools can't do it all. Leaving no child behind also requires us to leave no family and no community behind.

The inequities that exist between school districts and between states further complicate the issue. For example, the children in Cuyahoga Heights, Ohio, receive twice as much financial support for their schools as do the children in nearby East Cleveland. Yet the taxpayers in Cuyahoga Heights have to tax themselves only about one-third as much as those in East Cleveland in order to create this unequal result. At the same time, children in California are not getting nearly the same level of school support that the children of Connecticut get.

How can we pretend to have a national law that holds educators accountable for outcomes when the resources are so uneven? Put most simply, some children get left behind because our society, through a series of policy decisions, has chosen to leave them behind. Testing and sanctions on schools will not change that reality.

**Sin Number 4: Relying on fear and coercion.** Motivation has always been the key to good education. Unfortunately, NCLB relies for motivation on the blunt force of threats and punishments. It starts by assuming that those at the top know better than those farther down the line, even though those nearest the bottom are charged with actually doing what is needed to educate children. By using fear and coercion as a change strategy, NCLB ensures compliance but blocks the pursuit of excellence for teachers and children. While you can beat people into submission, you can't beat them into greatness.

You can't inspire children by means that either turn them off or traumatize them. Children are subjected to days of examinations annually, with the time taken away from instruction. Indeed, we have actually reduced the time we spend on instruction so that we can increase the time we spend on measuring the results of instruction. To offset this, many schools have chosen to neglect subjects not covered by the tests, so that the curriculum has narrowed. Many children have chosen to turn off and not try. Others have felt traumatized by the pressure. Cognitive scientists are clear that the emotion of fear blocks clear thinking by impeding neural processing. Any educational model that relies on fear undercuts its own aims.

Collaboration, not coercion, is what is needed. While most educators believe accountability is an important part of the public education experience, supporters of NCLB fail to see that other options for accountability exist. Accountability systems will work only where there is collaboration and trust between the federal government and the

[Type text]

schools. Good accountability systems would be broader in nature and would actually allow us to examine the broader needs of a child's learning.

**Sin Number 5: Lacking clarity.** Any accountability system should be clear and understandable to those it is accountable to: parents and other citizens. Most parents find the AYP model to be confusing and, when explanations are given, counterintuitive. Why would you measure completely different groups in the same way and compare the results? Why would a school that fails to make progress in one cell be treated the same as one that fails to make progress in all cells? Why would you hold special education children, who have individual education plans because of their needs, to the same standard as children who do not have the same needs? Why would you test children in English when they do not yet speak English? Any accountability system needs to have a sense of authenticity if it is to be useful.

**Sin Number 6: Leaving out the experts.** Those at the federal level do not -- and cannot -- know better how to educate a child than those working at the child's level. In other professions, while guidelines are created for public safety, bureaucrats don't try to second-guess the work of professionals who deliver services. For example, pilots, while subject to rules and regulations, are still presumed to know better how to fly the plane than their passengers. No federal law that takes the professionals out of the decision-making process will ever work. Professional judgment must be taken into account if we have any hope that NCLB will work. Jamming a comprehensive set of mandates down the throats of those who must carry out the mandates is doomed -- not just because of the insurgency it creates, but because many ideas that look so good in Washington just don't work in Weehawken.

**Sin Number 7: Undermining our international competitiveness.** Finally, the greatest sin committed by NCLB is a sin of omission. NCLB fails to address the core question for America: How do we sustain our place in a global environment? NCLB's answer is that drilling our children will allow them to compete with the Chinese. Yet the real winners in the coming competition between East and West will not be the nations that focus on basic skills but those that cultivate high-level skills and ingenuity. In that regard, America has had an edge for some time.

Our society seems to produce unusually creative and entrepreneurial people. Most of those people went to our public schools. In fact, much of America's creativity emanated from those in our society who had been left behind. Whether in music, sports, or technology, innovation comes from the edge, where many of those children who are left behind congregate. These individuals have enormous capacity to lift our society to new levels through their creativity.

Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer has pointed out that fear of evaluation, an acceptance of absolutes, and mindless ideas about our mistakes can stop us from being creative and responsive to the world. She has said that such mental paralysis comes from "anything hierarchical [that] suggests that there is a single metric -- a 'right' way of understanding the world." If America is to continue to lead the world, we must begin to undo the

[Type text]

damage created by a system that is built upon the notion that there is a single right way to do education.

How can we sustain our creativity while paring down our education to a stimulus-response system of learning that reduces knowledge to a series of test bubbles and communicates to children that what is on the test is the only thing worth learning? The great danger we face is that, in our rush to build skills, we undermine our wisdom. Then we will all be left behind. For that reason NCLB needs to be deposited in the dustbin of history, and Congress, with the assistance of educators and other citizens, needs to think more broadly and deeply about how to build on and make use of the talents of our poorest citizens.

### **A New Agenda for Education**

It's easy enough to level criticisms when a law such as NCLB misses its mark by so wide a margin. But what would a new agenda for U.S. education look like? The following steps can serve as an initial blueprint for building a new agenda for U.S. education.

1. Fix the assumptions. Stop the blame game. Put an emphasis on systemic thinking that looks at what it would take to retool the education system to respond to the new mission of preparing all children to reach their highest levels. Stop blaming the professional educators who must carry out this retooling, and construct a system that supports their work. Create schools that children want to go to, schools that emphasize meaningful and engaged learning and acknowledge that imagination is as vital at age 18 as at age 5.
2. Put testing in context and emphasize depth in education. Put the emphasis on testing into a broader context. Use models to measure growth, but continue to find ways of disaggregating data to allow schools to see clearly where they are succeeding and where improvements are needed. Challenge schools to continue to emphasize the depth and breadth of education. Help schools shift from a "coverage" mentality to one that focuses on depth and "metacognition." Emphasize that the work of schools is educating children, not training them. Put the focus on educating the whole child, not just the parts that decode and cipher.
3. Use a change strategy that emphasizes collaboration. Take a page from the Irish playbook and create a new model of accountability that creates a collaboration between states and local districts in which the role of states is to build capacity for change and improvement at the local level. Create a system of ensuring quality that touches on all the major parts of the learning process. Restore a sense of trust and mutual support.
4. Focus on a strategy for addressing poor children. Go back to the intent of ESEA and focus the money and effort on those who most need help. Forget about trying to use a limited program to "reform" all of American education. Understand that just as nation building in other countries requires enormous resources, so does dealing with the plight of poor children at home. End what I call the "hard bigotry of inadequate resources" by



[Type text]

developing a Marshall Plan for America's Poor that provides adequate health care and preschool programs for those in need and creates "human enterprise zones" where large numbers of poor children live. Stop pretending that money doesn't matter. The only people who believe that are people with money.

5. Renew America's commitment to innovation. Require and support the teaching of art, music, and drama in all of America's schools. Make certain that any language assessment includes creative writing. Develop programs that value and support innovative thinking in schools. Put a new emphasis on a broad program of gifted education. Require any new mandate in education to undergo an "innovation protection assessment" to make certain that it does not unintentionally undermine creativity. Emphasize attracting and keeping creative teachers and leaders in our schools by enacting a new version of the National Defense Education Act that supports students going into teaching and forgives the student loans of those who teach in hard-to-staff schools. Create a dialogue -- a real two-way conversation -- between America's educators and business leaders about what we need to do to maintain America's innovative edge. -- PDH

PAUL D. HOUSTON is executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, Va.

*Reprinted from the November 2006 issue of The School Administrator*

### **Barking Up the Right Tree**

What if our society's future economic health belongs to the artists, storytellers and poets — and not the scientists and engineers?

*By Paul D. Houston*

There is a childhood saying about a confused dog who thinks he sees a possum in a tree. The problem is that the possum is actually in a different tree so the dog barks up the wrong tree. American education is constantly playing both dog and possum. Sometimes we are the prey, and sometimes we are just confused about what and where the prey is.

The last few years have revealed growing concern about U.S. global competitiveness, particularly against a backdrop of the rising economic power of India and China. This is not unlike concern in the 1980s with Japan and Germany. But this time the competition looms larger, and the stakes are higher. This topic has been regularly addressed in the news, and corporate CEOs and governors have weighed in with their views, as has President Bush in his 2006 State of the Union address. The hysteria could best be summed up in a paraphrase of a 40-year-old saying, as “the Asians are coming, the Asians are coming.”

Undoubtedly, the ascendance of China as an economic power and of India as a place where many American jobs go to die has raised legitimate concerns. Thomas Friedman, author of the best-selling book *The World Is Flat*, suggests that with the rise of China and India, America will have to run faster just to stay in place.

Today, hardly an American CEO can be found who does not look with awe and concern at what is happening on the other side of the world. Many U.S. businesses have shipped work and jobs to both India and China, and, as with every previous threat to American dominance, our schools have been called to account for failing to produce enough engineers and math and science workers to compete with this rising threat.

The education solutions offered are that we should make our students work harder and study more math and science. And we need more and harder tests to motivate them to do so.

#### **A Sophisticated Answer**

The problem with this thinking is that it just isn't that simple. First, the math doesn't add up for the United States. Both India and China are massive countries. If they educate only their elites, they will still have a huge edge in available knowledge workers. America could make all its children high-tech workers, and we would still be outnumbered. Further, an engineer in either Beijing or Bangalore will work for a fraction of the wages of her American counterpart. To remain competitive, our workers would have to take

monumental pay cuts, with attendant reductions in lifestyle, simply to hold their own. If we were to stop at this point, despair would seem the only rational response.

The good news is that there is more to the story — a right tree to bark up, so to speak. Put most simply, America should compete at what it has always done best: being the innovative engine that drives the world economy. To do that will require increased efforts at producing more highly talented engineers and technical workers. But we must improve the way we teach math and science by making these subjects more engaging to more students.

Yet there is also a bigger issue emerging. Daniel Pink in his provocative book, *A Whole New Mind*, has gone so far as to declare that the Information Age is nearing an end and that we are entering the “conceptual age.” He argues that the dominance of the “left-brain-driven” world, where everything is sequential and logical, is giving way to a more “right-brained” endeavor that focuses on the creative, holistic skills.

Pink suggests that if you have a job that can be done by a machine, can be done cheaper or can be done somewhere else, you have cause to worry. Those who work on conceptual and creative work — design, storytelling and the like — will dominate in this new world. He turns the current discussion upside-down. It isn't about how many engineers a nation has. Rather it's about how many artists and poets it produces. These are the individuals who can create the new meaning necessary in a conceptual world.

Richard Florida, in his book *Rise of the Creative Class*, makes similar arguments. The future belongs to the creative. They will be the leaders, the earners and the learners of the new age. It is not the programmers in India who will dominate; it is the people who conceive of the work the programmers should do who will “rule.”

Already we know that most of the places where America has an economic edge are where our creative workers have gone before. For example, our popular culture, best exemplified by the entertainment industry, is a major export for the United States, and in fact it might be argued that “the American Century,” as some called the 20th century, came about not simply because of our economic or military might but because we were the source of the images and sounds people savored. Even our high-tech industries have found their dominance at the edge of such work, creating new concepts of the way work should be done or “imagineering” (as the Disney folks call it) new ways of doing things.

While it is important that our children be educated to be comfortable with and conversant in the languages of math and science, and while we need to continue to produce our fair share of technical workers, the future will not be created by these folks. The future will be created by those who can dream bigger and more innovative dreams.

### **Schooling's Impact**

The implications for education are profound. We must re-examine how we teach children and what we teach them. I was one of those students who grew up hating math and science. I wasn't much happier with social studies and language arts. As an adult

educator I finally came to understand why. When I became superintendent of schools in Princeton, N.J., I was thrown into an environment rife with Nobel laureates and world-class theoretical mathematicians and physicists. And I made a profound discovery in talking with them. I found out that the math I learned in school had the same relationship to mathematics as a log has to a blueberry.

Mathematics wasn't about mastering rules; it was about discovering the elegance of a well-stated problem. Further, science is not about mastering the periodic table and a series of formulas, it is about seeking answers to the mysteries of the universe. Likewise, social studies isn't about dates and events, it is about understanding the human condition, and literature is a way of coming to understand more about ourselves.

If we expect our children to become more adept in all of these subjects, we must begin to educate our teachers to be more knowledgeable about their subject matter and to be more creative in the way material is presented. Teachers must be designers and storytellers. Further, school leaders must reassess their roles as instructional leaders. How do we reinvent the learning process so that it becomes meaningful and engaging for students, so they are motivated by more than a test or benchmark? As one student, quoted in a recent Time magazine cover story on the current science crisis, said, "I associated engineering with long, boring assignments. No one showed me why it was cool."

We have to find a way to make learning relevant and "cool." We can do that only by having teachers who are supported in using their own creativity. So how do we recruit and support teachers who see themselves as artists? Sadly, with the way we currently approach schooling in America, we are destined to become a third-rate economy and a third-world power. We are forfeiting our greatest edge by walking away from what we do best.

In a Newsweek commentary last January, Fareed Zakaria described a conversation about education that he had with people in Asia. China has increased its spending on colleges and universities tenfold in the past decade. This comes at a time when states in the United States, which cut taxes during the boom years of the 1990s, are struggling to hold their own in education spending and when the recent federal budget proposed to cut support for education by more than \$12 billion. Clearly it will be hard to maintain our edge without investment.

Zakaria's commentary also pointed out that America has slowed its investment in research and development at the very time other countries have accelerated theirs. The United States currently ranks seventh in percentage of gross domestic product devoted to research spending.

### **Untested Qualities**

But money isn't the only issue. Zakaria talked with the minister of education in Singapore, a city-state that is often compared to the United States in education. Singapore is the top-ranked nation in the global rankings of children's performance in science and math. Zakaria asked the minister to explain why it is that, even though the Singaporean

students do so well on these tests, when you look at the same students 10 to 20 years later, few are world beaters. American students, by contrast, test much worse but seem to do better in life and the real world — particularly as inventors and entrepreneurs.

The minister explained that both countries have meritocracies. America's is based on talent; Singapore's is based on test scores. Because we cannot effectively test much of the intellect, such as creativity, curiosity, ambition or a sense of adventure, the tests don't measure areas where America has an edge.

The minister further explained that America's culture of learning challenges conventional wisdom, even to the point of challenging authority. He suggested that these are areas in which Singapore must learn from America. He ended by explaining that the problem in America is that poor children are not brought along and that very bright children are allowed to coast.

### **Test Preoccupation**

America is currently caught up in a frenzy of test-based reform, designed ostensibly to benefit those most likely to be left behind. The problem is that this authoritarian model, which emphasizes the achievement of the left brain, is doomed to fail with many of these children. And the failure will not be because students do not test well; there is every indication that when emphasis is put on tests, the scores rise. Just ask Singapore.

The real test will be faced when we ask whether this increase in scores will lead to increased life success for these students. And this brings us back to the premise of Pink's work — that the future belongs to the creative. The "test and tremble" model of school reform that is the current craze, which values a score over broader success, is unlikely to move us toward a more conceptual and creative society.

In fact, with the emphasis placed so solidly on basic reading and math, the creative activities that Pink espouses (art, music, and creative expression generally) are being squeezed out of the curriculum.

Ellen Langer, in her book *Mindfulness*, suggests that an education that is based on an outcomes model leads in fact to "mindlessness." She points out that from kindergarten on schooling usually focuses on goals rather than on the processes needed to achieve them. She says, "When children start a new activity with an outcome orientation, questions of 'can I' or 'what if I can't' are likely to predominate, creating an anxious preoccupation with success or failure rather than drawing on the child's natural, exuberant desire to explore."

We know from brain researchers that fear inhibits cognitive ability. An educational model based on coercive strategies is doomed to undo the very thing it is trying to create — a smarter and more capable America.

The major goal of American education under No Child Left Behind is to "close the achievement gap," which as the minister of education from Singapore noted exists

because America has a large underclass that has not been educated to the highest possible levels. This problem is pretty universally accepted. The question is whether an educational model that focuses on outcomes and deficits will close the gap or whether a different approach — one that focuses on a broader definition of education and focuses on assets — will work better.

### **Laudable Capacities**

The irony of our current educational angst over poor and minority children is that the same children who cannot read well can create and remember incredibly complex song lyrics set to hip-hop music. In fact, much of America's creativity in music came from blues, jazz, rock 'n' roll and rap, all products of the so-called underclass.

Further, children who cannot spell "systems thinking" demonstrate an understanding of the movement of 10 people on a basketball court as they move through time and space at high speeds and are able to anticipate future moves and instantly create elegant responses to them. Children who have trouble following a teacher's instructions can shift language and culture numerous times a day, and children who have trouble with basic math can create intricate designs and artistic creations.

The good news is that much of America's creative expression has come from the very people we worry about not having received a great "left brain" education. But as creativity and invention grow in importance, the assets that are already present simply need to be nurtured. Is there a way for America to rediscover its competitive edge, not by becoming more like the Asians, but by being more like Americans? Is there a way to use the inherent talents that many of our underperforming children exhibit in nonschool activities and bring those talents into the classroom by helping teachers focus on the assets the children have and by honoring their thinking skills and ways of looking at the world?

Isn't it time we started barking up the right tree?

## Superintendents for the 21st Century: It's Not Just a Job, It's a Calling

By Paul Houston

*The mission of public school leaders is to help children create a future where democracy is preserved and the ideals of this nation are moved forward, Mr. Houston maintains. And that is a wonderful challenge and an amazing gift to receive.*

I ONCE HAD a school board president who told me that my job as a superintendent was to be a quick-healing dartboard. And he was a supporter of mine! Over the years I have used a number of other metaphors to describe the role, all of them just about as unappealing. I get the greatest response when I say that the relationship of the superintendent to the community is analogous to that of a fire hydrant to a dog. The reality of the modern superintendency is that it is both exciting and exasperating, and we are finding it increasingly difficult to attract people to the role. Understandably, people don't want to be dartboards or fire hydrants. As we face the challenges of a new century, we must find ways to reconfigure the role of the superintendent so that it attracts our best leaders, even as we also transform it to meet the opportunities that change presents.

There are a number of reasons why people are not interested in becoming superintendents. They see the "lightning rod" aspect of the job, and they choose not to do it. The superintendency is a job fraught with public criticism, mixed with private moments of triumph. Superintendents are sometimes abused and other times blamed. Expectations are high and often unrealistic. I have frequently thought that, if I ever write a book on the subject, I will call it "What Are You Going to Do About It?" That phrase sums up the almost universal expectation that somehow one person in an organization can shoulder the responsibility for all aspects of the organization. That person must provide the "final answer." But, unlike contestants sitting opposite Regis Philbin, superintendents are given no lifelines to help with questions that seem to have no answers.

Yet, when superintendents get together, after they vent about their problems, they tend to talk mostly about their successes. And many who leave the job find themselves working their way back into it. While the job is fraught with external pressures, it is filled with internal possibilities. Superintendents know they can change the trajectory of children's lives, alter the behavior of organizations, and expand the possibilities of whole communities. This creates a powerful attraction to the job. Such ambivalence makes the superintendency a wonderful subject of study. As education stands in the national spotlight, there are few roles as complex or as pivotal as that of the public school superintendent. And as we move into the future, it is inevitable that the job will continue to be one of controversy, concern, and consequence.

Most of the people who have been superintendents have found it exhilarating and challenging in the best sense of that word. It is clearly a position in which a person can make a big difference. But there is much about the current role that is dysfunctional. Expectations and resources are mismatched. Accountability and authority are misaligned. This means there must be a shift in expectations and a corresponding shift in role. Part of the shift that must take place is a change in how the world sees and treats superintendents. But the bigger part of the shift must take place in

the hearts and minds of those who fill the role. For how one chooses to confront the challenges of the superintendency will make all the difference.

As a minister's son, I realized early in my own career as a superintendent that there are a great many spiritual overtones to the superintendency. The ultimate responsibility of the role is to shepherd other people's children through the often dangerous valley of childhood. So it is easy to see religious symbolism in the role. That led me to a realization that superintendents tend to spend most of their careers between Palm Sunday and Good Friday. They enter a community as a new savior who is thought capable of performing miracles and healings. Sometime later, they are put on trial, marched through the streets in public humiliation, and crucified. Jonathan Kozol once said that he thought that cities needed superintendents because they needed someone to die for their sins. While this is a disturbing thought, there is still the reality that Easter Sunday follows Good Friday and that resurrection remains possible. The superintendent of the 21st century must look to the hope of resurrection as the source of possibilities for success. It is a tough job, but it is one that bears great promise and possibility.

### **The Challenges**

While much of the attention of school reformers is focused on accountability, test scores, standards, and the like, much of the superintendent's job is actually shaped by issues that exist on a more macro level. And that is where the superintendent of the 21st century should focus attention.

School leaders of every stripe must face a number of broad social challenges that are reshaping our society and the way children learn. These are what I call the "demanding D's" of change that will shape the future. They are things like changing *demographics* and growing *diversity*. The shift in population to Sunbelt states, the generational divides created by baby booms and baby busts, and the changing complexion and accent of America's children all create real challenges for school leaders.

The job is made more difficult by the *divide* between the haves and have-nots and by the *devaluing* of our children. The dirty little secret of American education is the degree to which we allow inequities in resources to exist between communities. These inequities mean that the children with the greatest need often have the fewest resources and that those who come to school as the most advantaged are given even more support once they enter the schoolhouse door. Although America leads the world in talking about how much it values its children, it is often near the bottom of developed countries in the measures that show how it truly values its children. That is because America tends to put its resources into remediation rather than prevention. This was best summarized for me by someone who pointed out that America is a nation that will air-condition its prisons, but not its schools.

One cannot overlook the *deemphasis* on education that leads us to substitute test scores for learning and to believe that the only goal of education is making a living rather than making a life. But there are several D's that strike directly at the heart of what the superintendent of the future will do.



The first of these is *deregulation*. Most major industries in the U.S. have been deregulated, and it is now education's turn. This change manifests itself in such issues as home schooling, vouchers, and charter schools, as well as in the massive changes brought on by privatization. The reality is that the world for a 21st-century school leader will be one in which competition is a way of life and scrambling for dollars and customers will be requisites for the job. The role of the future will not merely entail running a school system. The superintendent of the future will also serve as a broker of services and as an ensurer of equity. The task will be to determine which services are needed and what the best source of the services is and then to make sure that every child benefits from them.

The second big issue confronting school leaders is *devolution*. This is the historical wave that pushes power from centralized to decentralized places. It was the force behind the break-up of the countries in Eastern Europe, it is the force behind the growth in power of America's governors, and it is the force behind the movement toward site-based management in America's schools. What are the implications for people who have traditionally run centralized organizations, such as school systems, in a devolutionary moment of history? Successful superintendents of the 21st century will be those who find a way of leading by sharing power and by engaging members of the organization and the community in the process of leading.

The third big issue that directly affects superintendents is *demassification*. Historically, people got their information from mass media that were limited in diversity. When I grew up, I had three choices of television channels to watch. Today's children have literally hundreds. This increase in choice is both positive and popular. People can choose how they spend their time and to whom they are exposed while they spend it. However, it also means there are fewer common experiences that hold society together, and this erosion of the common ground necessary to hold a democracy together presents a potential threat to our future.

Although the experience of public schooling still constitutes much of that common ground, the very institution of public education is increasingly being called into question. The challenge to public education created by the nearly 20 years of unrelenting criticism of schools presents a clouded future. What happens to America if the movement toward demassification destroys the ties that bind? Superintendents of the future must focus on creating learning for children that is on the one hand individualized and connected to personal interests and on the other hand inclusive of the broader social context that will allow children to live together in our increasingly complex democracy.

The final issue that will have profound implications for school leaders is *disintermediation*. This daunting word refers to a phenomenon that occurs when a technology introduced into society replaces old institutions. For example, when Gutenberg invented the printing press and in so doing made the Bible accessible to the masses, he "disintermediated" the church. People no longer had to go to a priest to get the interpretation of God's will. They could read and decide for themselves. That led to the Reformation and a profound shift in humanity's relationship to God.

Today, computers, CDs, and the Internet are disintermediating schools. Schools have been the place where people go to get learning. That is no longer necessarily true. Parents and children no longer have to go to school to have access to skills or knowledge. They can access these via technology. What are the implications for leaders in this brave new world? Twenty-first-century

superintendents will understand that learning is no longer about place, it is now about process. They will find ways of extending the reach of schools beyond the schoolhouse door, while maintaining the traditional and historic role of public schools as central to our society. Schooling must continue to convey civic virtue to our population.

We can like or dislike these challenges. It doesn't matter. They are with us, and that is really all that counts. How school leaders choose to face them will make the difference in how the future looks. And choosing to face this new future from a position of strength will require a new breed of leader.

### **A Superintendent of Education**

The reality is that, for superintendents to be successful in the future, they will need to completely change their approach to the job. Historically, if superintendents were good at the management issues, they were held to be successful.

Let's call that being good at the "killer B's." These were things like buildings, buses, books, budgets, and bonds. It was the "stuff" of education. A superintendent was a superintendent of schools, with the presumption that school was a place for learning and that the superintendent's job was to take care of that place. The future dictates a very different approach.

Educators are fond of pointing out that it takes a village to raise a child. But this begs a crucial question -- what does it take to raise a village? We are no longer a country of villages, and the web of support that historically supported families and children is tattered. It must be rewoven, and the superintendent must play a pivotal role in that task. Superintendents of the future must see themselves as village builders. They can use the centrality of their institutions to help re-create a support system. But they must do so by reaching outward to connect to the resources of the broader community.

That means they will have to be masters of the "crucial C's." The C's are the processes that support the work and get it done. They are things like connection, communication, collaboration, community building, child advocacy, and curricular choices.

Leadership in the future will be about the creation and maintenance of relationships: the relationships of children to learning, children to children, children to adults, adults to adults, and school to community. The increasing complexity of our society, the deterioration of families, and the loss of social capital available to support children and families mean that superintendents must be adept at creating a web of support around children and their families. School leaders can no longer wait until the child is 5 years old to become involved with his or her learning. Much research has demonstrated that the early years of a child's life are crucial. If schools wait to address a child's needs past those formative years, the subsequent work becomes much more difficult.

Leaders cannot forget about children after 3 p.m. Children spend the bulk of their time someplace other than school. If schools are not helping to shape that time through parent education and after-school and summer learning opportunities, the work that schools do will be diluted. Schools must become part of the broader social context that creates a true system of

lifelong learning in the community. This does not mean that schools must become all things to all people. It means schools must team up with other care-giving agencies, such as the health department, the parks and recreation folks, or the church down the street to see to it that a network of mutual care is created around the children and their families.

Creating this network will require skills that differ from those traditionally used by superintendents. The ability to communicate and to market ideas will be critical. Superintendents in the 21st century will need to be able to facilitate and affiliate. They will need to turn in their "power over" skills of command and control and take on a "power with" mentality that allows everyone to be part of the action. This is a huge shift in perception and approach, for which new training models will be needed.

The key point is that we will no longer be able to pretend that learning stops and starts at the schoolhouse door. Learning has always been affected by the contextual issues that plague many children and families, and the superintendents of the 21st century must become courageous champions for children, using their skills to muster the broad support for children and families that will enable children to be successful at learning.

But superintendents will need to do more. They will also have to be leaders who see that the content of learning changes dramatically. Yes, they will have to create conditions that get children ready for school. But they will also have to create conditions that get schools ready for children.

### **New Approaches to Learning**

Critics of education have argued for some time that our current system is a failed system, a system that has deteriorated over time and must be reenergized and reshaped by competition if it is to recapture its past glory. This is a false reading of history. The reality is that the current system is better than ever at conducting its historic mission. The problem is that, while the system has gradually improved, conditions have exploded around it. Schools have been making incremental progress in an exponential environment. That does mean that major transformation is required -- not because the system has failed, but because the mission has shifted.

The recognition that we must transform the system has led us to the current efforts at school reform. Unfortunately, these reforms are based on a faulty analysis of what ails us. If you lean your ladder against the wrong wall, you will paint the wrong house. If you believe that the problem of American education is that we need to *force* students to learn by giving them high-stakes tests and a narrow curriculum, then you will create our current model of reform -- a model that is doomed to failure. It is doomed because current reform efforts are external and overly simplistic. Those who endorse these current reforms rely on the belief that you can bludgeon people to greatness through external pressure. Their efforts are built on a mechanistic world view that stresses fixing the parts to create a better whole.

Education, however, is a human enterprise. So the solution to its problems must be much more organic. It must recognize that all parts of the system are interwoven and that moving one affects all the others. In essence, the difference between current reform efforts and what is truly needed to change schools for the 21st century is the difference between geology and ecology. Geology

gets its power by studying the past layers of rock that envelop the Earth. It is a somewhat fixed science that gains its power by studying inert objects. Ecology recognizes the existence of ecosystems -- interconnected systems of living organisms -- that are highly interdependent. The slightest change in one affects all the others. That is also true of the education system.

These differing perspectives on reform lead to very different assumptions about how learning happens. One assumes that learning is external and can be invoked from without. The accountability and competition movements are based on this belief system. Those who hold this view forget that education and learning are essentially internal and tied directly to motivation. Education is really about evocation -- drawing forth the creation of meaning from the learner. Fear has never been a particularly effective motivational tool, particularly when complex thought processes are required. That means that reforms built on a foundation of fear are doomed.

Thus effective school reform in the future will focus on creating schools that students want to go to. These schools will have to be places that are engaging and that allow learners to undertake activities they find meaningful. Creating such schools will require a total revamping of how we approach teaching and learning, and it will require leaders who are focused on the process. Twenty-first-century superintendents will have to be leaders who focus on the organic and holistic qualities of learning and who structure learning that speaks to the hearts and minds of learners.

Creating such schools will require opening them to the broader world. Meaningful learning can happen only in the broadest possible context. Once again, the future will require leaders to turn the current process inside out and to structure learning so that students will use complex skills in practical situations that challenge their thinking while connecting them to reality. It's a tall order.

### **Who Will These Leaders Be?**

How will we find leaders who can act as courageous champions for children and who are willing and able to change the status quo, while acting as collaborative catalysts and working with others to make that happen? We must look very hard to find a source for such leaders. There are really just four problems with the current leadership system: the job is impossible, the expectations are inappropriate, the training is inadequate, and the pipeline is inverted.

The job is impossible because the expectations are unrealistic. We want one individual to be all and know all in a complex system. Furthermore, while we tend to centralize responsibility in education, authority is widely dispersed. We ask superintendents what they are going to do about a particular matter, while we spread the power to do something across a system that includes boards, unions, and community groups. Of late, governors, legislators, and judges have also taken a bite out of the authority apple.

With the current emphasis on accountability, the problem intensifies. Accountability without authority is punishment. That means that either authority must be recentralized -- unlikely in a world of devolution and demassification -- or responsibility must be decentralized. That means that we must evolve a distributed system of leadership in which the skills and the ability to make

things happen and the accountability for whether they did happen are spread across a wider spectrum. Under this model, the superintendent must be a team leader and team developer.

Our current training system is inadequate for this new model, because it reflects a rearview mirror approach to leadership. Most of the coursework now required for licensure focuses on the old role. It prepares people for centralized, command-and-control managerial tasks. It doesn't teach the collaborative skills needed in today's more complex and connected environment.

Superintendents must be great communicators. They must be outstanding facilitators. They have to know how to take the pulse of the public and how to sell their ideas. Persuasion is the ultimate tool for a superintendent of education. This is particularly true when dealing with boards of education. The disconnect between superintendents and boards has become almost the stuff of legend, and there are no quick fixes to the problem. However, one thing that would help would be to offer superintendents better preparation for working in a collaborative way with their boards. Leadership in this arena isn't about exerting the superintendent's will, but about working collaboratively with a board for the greater good.

And certainly our current training fails to recognize that leadership in the future will be all about navigating white water. When you get to the top of the organization, there are no right or wrong answers. There are merely dilemmas. There are paradoxes, with each option having both good and bad implications. How does one prepare leaders for such choices?

First, we must recognize that this is reality. We must help our leaders let go of the "black and white" mindset that sees the world as an "either/or" kind of place and come to understand that it is really a "both/and" place, where both ends of the continuum can hold equal elements of truth.

The best training for this would be cross-disciplinary and embedded within preparation for becoming a reflective practitioner. Since the role is being shaped by pressures outside of education, school leaders must be aware of and knowledgeable about these pressures. This means they must be historians, demographers, sociologists, and futurists. And because the work is centered on and carried out by people, management ideas from the business school and spiritual awareness found in the divinity school would also be appropriate.

Of course, nothing about leadership in a fast-paced, pressurized environment encourages reflection. In fact, everything about the superintendent's role makes it reactive rather than reflective. Yet seeing the whole can come only in moments of quiet contemplation. This necessitates forcing reflection onto an active leader. It won't be easy, but it can be done. It comes about through the experiences of writing journals, mentoring, and teaching. Much of the coursework in superintendents' preparation should concentrate on problem analysis. Preparation programs for the next generation of leaders must involve a constant dance between doing the work and thinking about it. Over time, doing this will produce a reflective practitioner.

The current pipeline into school administration is inverted. There are many people in it who have great potential for leadership. They must be nurtured and encouraged. But the profession can no longer depend solely on those who choose it -- i.e., the "wannabes." We must begin to identify a new cadre of leaders who see the role as one of collaboration, rather than of command, and then mentor them into the jobs. These are the "oughtabes," and they must be identified and

encouraged. The good news is that the pipeline is filled with them. Nearly two-thirds of the current staff members in district offices are women, and many of them have mastered the skills of affiliation and collaboration through the process of acculturation that we seem to reserve for little girls. We must find ways of shattering the remnants of the glass ceiling and making the role attractive to this new kind of leader.

### **A Mission, Not a Job**

This brings me back to the central question of why anyone would want to do these jobs. Superficially, the current role isn't very attractive, and the challenges we can see for the future make it potentially even more difficult. Why would anyone in his or her right mind choose to become a dartboard or a fire hydrant? What kind of job is that?

It is, in fact, a very challenging job with many frustrations and perils. It is also a job with many psychic rewards. Superintendents have the chance to reshape the lives of children in profound ways. They can create a sense of community where none exists. They can transform institutions of learning through their leadership and courage. They can make smooth the rough path.

I once heard Cornel West, a Harvard professor, describe the superintendency as "soul craft." And he was right. School leadership is about the mind and about how we might better shape the minds of our children. But it is also about touching hearts. And that makes the work much more sacred than we have traditionally thought.

It is ironic that education has become embroiled in the battles over the separation of church and state, when so much of what we do in education is akin to the work of the churches. School leadership focuses on the substance of what it means to be a human and to live together harmoniously in this world. Education isn't about the skills we teach, it is about the spirits we nurture. For without healthy spirits, the world is full of young people like Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold who could grow into Fidel Castros and Adolf Hitlers.

St. Francis of Assisi once said that, if you work with your hands, you are a laborer. If you work with your hands and your head, you are a craftsman. But if you work with your hands, your head, your heart, and your soul, you are an artist. School leaders will be effective only if they choose to be artists.

School superintendents like to see themselves as CEOs, for they are responsible for the entire school organization. But with authority so widely distributed, that is not an effective model. Certainly, superintendents have the responsibility of CEOs, but they lack the authority. A better analogy might be to liken themselves to ministers. Ministers get their authority from on high. When you work with other people's children and become responsible for them, that is very powerful moral authority. Moreover, ministers get their work done by means of persuasion and by creating common purpose. That is really the challenge of the superintendent of the future. Can we find ways of bringing communities together in a kaleidoscopic environment to create a better world for our children?

The superintendency isn't so much a job as it is a calling. You may choose it, but it also chooses you. You are summoned to it. Part of the responsibility of the current generation of leaders will

be to summon that next generation to duty. And that leads back to the fire hydrant. Yes, the hydrant does serve as a convenience for the dog, but that isn't its mission. Its mission is a much more noble one. It is there to keep houses from burning down. Public school leaders may get a little damp from time to time from the exercises of their critics, but their mission is to help children create a future where democracy is preserved and the ideals of this nation are moved forward. And that is a wonderful challenge and an amazing gift to receive.

---

PAUL HOUSTON is executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, Va. Before moving to AASA, he was a superintendent for 17 years in three states. This article was published in the Phi Delta Kappa International *Kappan Professional Journal*, February 2001.

July 17, 2008

[www.pdkintl.org](http://www.pdkintl.org)  
[information@pdkintl.org](mailto:information@pdkintl.org)

## **Letter in Support of Dr. Paul Houston for the Brock International Prize in Education**

Every so often, a leader surfaces—a man or woman who truly understands the issues that confront society. This leader will not accept expedient solutions to complex challenges. This leader will press through the “simple solution rhetoric” to fully understand the problems that a nation faces. Then with clarity, this leader will offer solutions that if pursued will result in improved conditions. Dr. Paul Houston understands the problems, and has time and again offered meaningful solutions.

But understanding the issues and offering solutions is only one skill requirement of a great leader. A truly great leader then must possess the courage to speak out when others won't; to take a stand that isn't popular. Paul Houston possesses that courage.

But understanding problems and having the courage to question popularly held beliefs is still not enough. A great leader is a great communicator; an individual who can speak with force and write with clarity. Paul Houston is a great communicator.

But these three traits are still not enough. Truly great leaders care the most about those individuals in our society who need the most assistance. Great leaders are committed to justice and fairness. As a great leader in education, Dr. Paul Houston cares most about those at-risk children who need our help the most.

The Brock International Prize in Education is one of the most coveted awards an educator can receive. It must honor a leader who has demonstrated clarity of thought, courage, the ability to communicate, and a commitment to justice. Dr. Paul Houston is that leader!

Sincerely,



William J. Bushaw, Ph.D.  
Executive Director



**TERRENCE E. DEAL**  
6625 Via Piedra  
San Luis Obispo, California  
93401

e-mail: [sucha@slocoast.net](mailto:sucha@slocoast.net)

Tel: (805) 783-1680

Fax: (805) 783-0211

June 25, 2008

South Lane School District  
c/o Krista D. Parent  
455 Adams Avenue  
Cottage Grove, OR 97424

To Whom It May Concern:

I can think of no one more worthy of the Brock International Prize than Paul Houston. He has successfully filled all the rungs in education: teacher, principal and superintendent. In addition he has contributed some of the most novel and interesting work to the fields of education and educational leadership. In many ways his influence has shaped the profession in very positive and innovative directions.

In my view his reign as the Executive Director of the American Association of School Administrators alone would earn him the distinction of the Brock Prize. Paul has been at the helm of the association during one of American Education's most troubled times. Intense political forces have sought to standardize and quantify the outcomes of education. In the name of accountability we have narrowed multiple benefits of teaching and learning into a single score on standardized tests. Our rationale for this truncated approach is that this is how businesses succeed –riveting their attention on the financial bottom line. Yet this is not true of top businesses that place a premium on people, values, beliefs and spirit. We are now blindly pursuing a strategy that is producing some costly side effects and may eventually undermine one of America's advantages – innovation.

Paul Houston is one of the few educators with the courage to challenge this lopsided view that making schools more rational will make them better. But he is not just oppositional without offering a viable alternative. Paul's position and work on spirituality in organizations is right on target. But here again Paul has the courage to stand up for something that is not currently in vogue. It has been said that "managers do things right; leaders do the right things". Paul Houston is a leader, one of the finest I know. Making him the recipient of the Brock Prize recognizes his noble commitment to the best of education and provides an outstanding role model for other educators in America to emulate.

Sincerely,

Terrence E. Deal, Ph.D.  
Professor, Retired

June 24, 2008

Dr. Trent Gabert  
Associate Dean  
Chair of the Executive Committee  
Brock International Prize in Education  
College of Liberal Studies  
The University of Oklahoma  
Norman, OK 73072-6405

Dear Dean Gabert:

It is my privilege and honor to support the nomination of Paul D. Houston for the 2009 Brock International Prize in Education. I have known Paul since 1977 when he was Superintendent of the Princeton Regional Schools and I was a high school principal in a neighboring district. Paul's career journey and his success as the ultimate advocate for public education in our nation have gratified me enormously. Having served thirteen years in the superintendency and eight years as a college dean, I truly understand the importance of the work that Paul has done to change the way that school leaders are prepared and the way that they operate in service of our nation's youth.

An earlier manifestation of my regard for Paul's accomplishments came in 1997 when, as Dean of Duquesne University's School of Education, I successfully nominated Paul to receive an honorary doctoral degree from our University. The resolution I introduced then was as follows:

Whereas, Dr. Paul Houston has enjoyed a long and distinguished career as a school teacher, administrator, and superintendent; and

Whereas, Dr. Houston has distinguished himself as a scholar in his doctoral studies at Harvard University and later in his writings regarding school reform and assessment; and

Whereas, Dr. Houston has successfully reorganized the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) in his capacity as Executive Director to be even more responsive to the needs of school leaders in service of students' learning needs; and

Whereas, Dr. Houston has worked as a tireless national advocate for the needs of children and of schools; and

Whereas, Dr. Houston has served as an early proponent of the Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational Leaders (IDPEL), having provided effective consultation and advice regarding early IDPEL plans and documentation and having encouraged the use of AASA's Standards for the Preparation of the School Superintendent as a basis for IDPEL's Professional Strands Practicum Checklist;

Now, Therefore Be It Resolved, That Dr. Paul Houston be awarded a Doctor of Education Degree, *honoris causa*, on 10 May 1997 from the Duquesne University

School of Education for his many and significant contributions to the field of education.

Paul's accomplishments over the past eleven years make the aforementioned assertions seem understated. His writings have profoundly influenced several generations of school leaders and leaders-to-be. His advocacy and tenacity on behalf of student- and learning-centered education have helped stem the tide against mechanistic and simplistic approaches to schooling that would devalue the work of insightful and talented teachers and administrators in our schools. Finally, Paul's work on the spiritual dimensions of leadership has opened the minds and hearts of both current and aspiring school leaders.

In conclusion, I wholeheartedly endorse the nomination of Paul Houston for the 2009 Brock International Prize in Education and urge your Committee to act favorably on Paul's behalf. Please contact me if I may provide any additional information or perspective on behalf of this nomination.

Sincerely yours,

James E. Henderson, Ed.D.  
Professor of Educational Leadership and Director,  
Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational Leaders

**Karl V. Hertz**  
**627 Lake Bluff Road**  
**Thiensville, WI 53092**

2009 Brock Jurors and Committee  
%Dr. Krista D. Parent  
455 Adams Avenue  
Cottage Grove, OR 97424

Dear 2009 Brock Jurors and Committee:

It is indeed a pleasure to write this letter in behalf of Dr. Paul Houston for the Brock International Prize in Education. The timing of such a recognition would come at a completely appropriate time as Paul retires from the position of executive director of the American Association of School Administrators where he has served with such distinction for the past fourteen years. Having said this, I find it highly unlikely that this will be the end of his impact on the education of children.

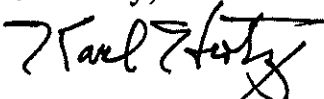
My association with Paul has been primarily through involvement with AASA having been on the association's board of directors when he was hired and having served as the president of AASA in 1997-98. Paul and I have shared a passion for the needs of disadvantaged children; it is there that we believe that a leader may have significant impact on the general improvement of the condition of struggling young people who desperately need a high quality education.

Dr. Houston has the wonderful ability to inspire through his writing and by his public speaking. His career started with teaching in the middle grades in North Carolina and led him to the major speaking and writing venues of this country and around the world. One of the features of his work which continues to get the attention of people is his keen and original way of looking at a situation and extrapolating to solutions which are unique. In a self deprecating way, Paul attributes being able to do this to spending so much time in airports where he has time to think.

Since I am sure the jurors will have an extensive resume telling all of the fine contributions Paul has made, I shall not reiterate them here. Let me say that Paul has impacted greatly on the lives of children, school leaders, and the direction of education generally. He is a bright, thoughtful, creative, and empathetic man. It is my great hope for him at this point in his life that he will find continuing outlets for his creative and inspiring ideas so that education will continue to benefit from his thinking.

Kindly allow me to reiterate my most sincere support for Dr. Paul Houston as the jurors and committee select the recipient of the 2009 Brock International Prize in Education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karl V. Hertz', written in a cursive style.

Karl V. Hertz, Ed.D.

July 9, 2008



## **DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES CENTER**

Educating Minds and Hearts™

July 9, 2008

South Lane School District  
c/o Dr. Krista D. Parent  
455 Adams Avenue  
Cottage Grove, OR 97424

Dear Dr. Parent:

I have known Paul Houston for twelve years. He and I have served together on several governing boards and advisory and planning committees. We have co-presented at conferences and meetings. Last year I wrote a chapter for one of several books he has edited. And, two years ago, after advising my organization, the Developmental Studies Center, for some years, Paul joined our twelve-person board of trustees and has become a key member of our governance committee.

In the pantheon of contemporary leaders in public education, Paul stands out for his vision and courage. When it comes to vision, he possesses a keen appreciation of the broader purposes of public education—which include fostering students' social, emotional, and ethical growth in concert with their cognitive learning, and thereby, their abilities to contribute to a just, productive, and humane democracy. At the level of educational practice, he possesses a deep understanding of the classroom and school conditions that must be established in order to achieve those long-term purposes. At the policy level, he possesses a unique ability to trace out the potential unintended as well as intended effects of legislation and regulation, and is as insightful as anyone I know as a policy analyst.

When it comes to courage, Paul has been fearlessly outspoken about the misguided and sometimes hypocritical initiatives that have been hatched in recent years at the federal level—far more outspoken than any other head of a professional association. Bringing to bear his vision and judgment, his courage, and his unusual gift for language, Paul has made some of the most important speeches, and written some of the most important essays and commentaries, of recent times. Paul's speaking out in these ways surely has helped others to see those flawed policies for what they are, but I am sure that doing so has involved considerable risk given how those in power these days have rewarded "friends" and punished "enemies." And so one reason for honoring Paul is his willingness to put himself on the line in this commendable way.

Paul is also an exceptionally effective builder and manager of organizations. He was an outstanding principal in North Carolina, New Jersey, and Alabama, and later he was an outstanding superintendent in Princeton, Tucson, and Riverside. And of course he performed wonderfully as AASA's Executive Director for fourteen years, building the organization's membership at the same time that he significantly strengthened its various services and publications. AASA is no longer the relatively staid organization it was when Paul took the helm. Although Paul may now be officially retired from AASA, he continues to

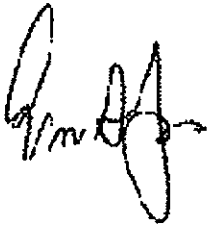
Dr, Krista Parent  
Page 2

give back by serving on numerous boards and committees, and by continuing to write and speak in his inimitable style. He may be "retired" but he is still full-time in education.

I will end with a few words about Paul the person. I have never met anyone who is as brilliant and knowledgeable but at the same time as patient and accepting. Paul is clearly aware of his own strengths but he is invariably gracious with others and always open to new ideas. This combination makes for truly wonderful company; time with Paul is always a rare and wonderful treat.

It is my privilege and honor to recommend Paul Houston for the 2009 Brock International Prize in Education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Schaps". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "S".

Eric Schaps  
President





WISCONSIN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS, INC.

4797 Hayes Road, Madison, WI 53704-3288

Miles Turner, Executive Director

608/242-1090  
608/242-1290 FAX  
<http://www.wasda.org>

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Terms expire 6/30/09

KIM EPARVIER  
President  
Peshtigo Public Schools  
341 N. Emery Ave  
Peshtigo, WI 54157

GREGG LUNDBERG  
President-Elect  
Maple Public Schools  
PO Box 188  
Maple, WI 54854

JON BALES  
Past President  
DeForest School District  
520 E. Holum Street  
DeForest, WI 53532

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ms expire 6/30/09

Gale Ryczek, CESA #2-East  
Jon Bales, CESA #2-West  
Jamie Benson, CESA #3  
Randal Braun, CESA #11

Terms expire 6/30/10

Michael Beighley, CESA #4  
Jeff Dickert, CESA #7  
Dave Polashek, CESA #8  
Jim Friesen, CESA #10  
Steve Murley, Lg. Schools

Terms expire 6/30/11

Michael Weber, CESA #1  
Michael Shimshak, CESA #5  
Michael Kremer, CESA #6  
Sally Samstrom, CESA #9  
Michael Cox, CESA #12

WASDA STAFF

MILES TURNER  
Executive Director  
[mturner@wasda.org](mailto:mturner@wasda.org)

NANCY LUND  
Executive Assistant  
[nlund@wasda.org](mailto:nlund@wasda.org)

JESSICA SCHWEDRSKY  
Secretary/Receptionist  
[jschwedrsky@wasda.org](mailto:jschwedrsky@wasda.org)

July 10, 2008

To the Brock International Prize Jurors:

Please accept this letter of support for the nomination of Dr. Paul Houston as the recipient of the Brock International Prize in Education. It is an honor for me to support the nomination of this outstanding educator whose contributions to the field of educational leadership have been exemplary.

Dr. Paul Houston has led the American Association of School Administrators for the past 14 years and has contributed to public school administration leadership in many ways. One of his most significant strengths is his ability to provide school superintendents with the inspiration and vision necessary to succeed in their challenging roles. Dr. Houston has also taken significant public stands to promote and defend public education even when these positions may not have been politically popular. As a man of courage and conviction, he has effectively demonstrated those characteristics needed to lead our nation's public schools.

Dr. Paul Houston's educational leadership has brought public school administrators into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the vision, integrity, dedication and intellect necessary to serve America's public school children.

I can think of no other educator more deserving of the Brock International Prize in Education.

Sincerely,

Miles Turner  
Executive Director

MET:nl