America’s Public Schools
As We Enter the 21st Century

Separate and Unequal

A Resource for Congregations of the United Church of Christ
on Justice Issues for Public Schools
As We Enter a New Century and a New UCC Structure

Final Report of the Joint Public Education Task Force
of the American Missionary Association and the Commission for Racial Justice
2001
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Public Education Task Force

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The American Missionary Association (AMA) of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries (UCBHBM) and the Commission for Racial Justice (CRJ) in the fall of 1998 appointed a joint, two-year Public Education Task Force to examine urgent issues surrounding public education across the United States. Persons of African American, Latino/Latina, and European American heritage were chosen from East, West, North, South and Mid-West UCC Conferences. Many expressions of the United Church of Christ were represented including the local church, conferences and the national setting. Members also represented a variety of experiences in public education service—retired superintendent from a major large city school district, administrators, teachers, a counselor, school board members and the mother of the plaintiff in a major desegregation lawsuit. Dr. Fay E. Brown of the Comer School Development Program at Yale University served as a valuable consultant to the Task Force.

At an initial meeting in early spring of 1999 in Cleveland, the Task Force set five goals:

- rekindle support for public education within all settings of the UCC;
- communicate the urgency of God’s call to support quality education for all God’s children in the context of our justice heritage;
- enhance existing alliances to support public education: between churches and public schools, within the UCC and ecumenical settings, and with public interest groups involved in strong advocacy;
- create resources for local churches on faith and justice issues; and
- speak truth to power by advocating forcefully for equity in public education.

The Task Force held three meetings, which included visits to local schools—elementary, middle and high schools—in three regions of our nation. Each visit had a special focus. In 1999 the fall visit focused on urban education in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In the spring of 2000, the Task Force met in the Portland, Oregon region to explore challenges in several suburban school districts with burgeoning numbers of students from many cultures and whose families speak a wide variety of languages. In late fall 2000 the group met at our own UCC Franklinton Center in eastern North Carolina to focus on the needs of rural schools. The Task Force held hearings during all three visits to learn from local students, teachers, parents, educators and community members about the issues and concerns of their experience. Local church leaders also participated.

**Biblical and Theological Reflection and Guidance from General Synod**

The AMA and CRJ convened the Public Education Task Force in the context of our faith and our commitment to public schools as the embodiment of our historic UCC commitment to community and to justice. The Puritan forbears of our United Church of Christ were instrumental in the New England colonies in building the system of public schools we enjoy today as the foundation for our democracy. Our work is also in the tradition of our American Missionary Association, which established schools across the South during and after the Civil War as the path to full citizenship for freed slaves.

We are called to remember the words of Moses, who declared, “If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your
God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.” (Deuteronomy 15:7-8) Jesus wants us to pay special attention to those who are vulnerable and without power, for he told Peter to “feed my lambs” and to “tend my sheep.” (John 21:15-19) Jesus’ attitude toward children also speaks to the modern issue of public education when He takes a child into the midst of his Disciples saying, “whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me,” (Mark 9:37), and further, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea (9: 42).” Surely a society that tolerates poor, crumbling schools and inferior education for children places great stumbling blocks in their way.

Stephen Patterson of Eden Seminary shares insight from the New Testament related to Public Education. Noting the great hierarchy of the Roman world of Jesus’ time, Patterson cites how often Jesus is with the outcasts and expendables at the bottom of this hierarchy. Patterson also cites the parable of the Great Banquet in which the street people are invited to the feast when the wealthy are too preoccupied to come. Here all are welcome at God’s table. All shall have access to the means to life. Patterson states, “There is nothing more essential to the means of life and livelihood in our culture than education.”

UCC General Synod policy speaks to concerns about public education, including pronouncements passed by UCC General Synods 15 and 18 in 1985 and 1991. GS 18 urges UCC commitment to “Quality, Integrated Education for All Children in Public Schools,” proclaiming: “As Christians we believe that God desires for children the life abundant which comes from the fullest development of their gifts—physical, intellectual, social and spiritual...We support equalized funding for all schools and work for the day when public schools will offer all children the quality and varieties of education and other services they need to participate fully in the creation of a just and peaceful society.” While the UCC has spoken in the past, the crisis in public schools has only deepened across the nation. To guide the UCC in addressing this crisis as we enter the new century was the charge to the AMABCRJ Public Education Task Force.

Why a Public Education Task Force?

“Almost a century after the first school finance reforms using state aid to reduce fiscal disparities among local school districts, almost 50 years after Brown v. Board of Education... made segregated schools illegal, 35 years after the nation launched a “war on poverty” that made equalizing educational opportunities one of its main targets, 30 years after the first successful court cases overturning state education financing policies that made the educational resources available to children dependent on where they happened to live: after all this time and effort, the United States still has an education finance system supporting schools that in many places are separate and unequal.”

While we have all read about troubled, sometimes called “failing” public schools, many of us are hard-pressed to name the issues or to describe precisely the many factors that contribute to the perceived wide-spread malaise. The Task Force was convened in 1998 with the goal of beginning a more focused conversation across the United Church of Christ about such concerns as the following:
• A growing sense of despair, hopelessness, and anger accompanies discussions of school finance today.
• Desperation in big-city districts has led to state takeover, threat of state takeover, or mayoral takeover of schools in Baltimore, Chicago, Cleveland, Compton, Detroit, East St. Louis, Harrisburg, Hartford, Jersey City, Newark, Paterson, and Philadelphia.
• Academicians have identified serious achievement gaps between middle class and poor children and between European American children, African American and Latino/Latina children, but by 2001 not one school district in the United States has been able to increase student achievement across the entire district for all of the children.
• Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, but accelerating in the 1990s, federal courts have retreated from racial integration as a civil right across big-city school districts in the United States. As a result the extent of racial isolation in America’s schools in 2001 is deeply troubling.
• In both the 2000 and 2001 sessions of Congress, debate about renewal of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act has exposed a massive attack on federal Title I funding, targeted since 1965 to poor children and the schools that serve them. This debate signifies a new willingness to turn responsibility for meeting the needs of poor children over to state governments that have a dismal record on school finance equity.
• As we enter a new century our nation faces an alarming shortage of qualified teachers.
• The 2000 federal Census confirms that our nation is experiencing significant demographic changes in its school population, and yet our public schools are not prepared to embrace the opportunities accompanying this diversity.
• As we enter a new century incarceration is one of the fastest growing lines in all state budgets while in many places investment in public education has remained flat or declined in real dollars. Just as an example, New York City is currently spending eleven times as much to incarcerate a prisoner as it spends to educate the average child in its public schools.6
• Finally voucher programs are operating in Cleveland and Milwaukee, and ready to operate in Florida. This turn toward privatization demonstrates the growing sense of despair, hopelessness, and anger that topped this list of serious problems.


At its initial meeting in Cleveland, the Task Force determined to accomplish its goals through immersion visits to local schools in three kinds of locationCa big city school district, suburban school districts experiencing rapid demographic change, and a rural area. We chose these settings because we hypothesized specific challenges would be apparent in each location and because each kind of setting serves millions of our children. Urban school districts in 226 big cities serve 31% of the approximately 50 million public school students in the United States.7 Rural and small town school districts continue to serve a significant percentage of the school-age population: 25% of public schools are located in towns with populations less than 25,000; 14% of schools are in districts serving towns of less than 2,500 people.8 Finally, while suburban school districts continue to expand rapidly, and the suburbs have for fifty years increasingly become the destination of the privileged and those in the middle class who choose to insulate
themselves from perceived troubles in the city schools, suburban school districts themselves are
diverse and rapidly changing.

We chose Philadelphia because as the seventh largest school district in the United States, with
212,865 students and 12,300 teachers, it would present the challenges of a large, urban school
district. The student population is diverse—approximately 64.5% African American, 18%
European American, 12.5% Latino/Latina, 5% Asian. An important objective in Philadelphia was
to examine the ways racism, classism, and poverty affect public schools today in a district where
80% of students are poor.

Our reasons for choosing rural North Carolina were also connected to the themes of race,
culture, and poverty. The Rural School and Community Trust has pointed out that:

“Rural America is far poorer than metropolitan areas as a whole, and nearly as poor as
central cities. Of the 250 poorest counties in America, 244 are rural. Poverty is especially
prevalent among rural minorities. In fact, if you are African-American, your chances of
living in poverty are greater if you live in rural America than if you live in the inner city.9

Finally, in the Portland area we visited suburban schools, also facing major cultural challenges
as we enter a new century. Our special interest in the Pacific Northwest was to examine what
happens in school districts with burgeoning populations of children whose language as well as
their culture may be different than the dominant group at their school.

“The linguistic composition of our public schools is rapidly changing. Today, over three
million students come from homes where Standard English is not the main language
of communication... Whether U.S. or foreign born, we find variation in students’
native language, culture, race, class, religion, economic resources, parental education,
geographic mobility and immigration histories....Language-minority students face these...
challenges within a political context that defines their bilingualism as ‘problematic,’
deficient, and a sign of inferior intellectual and academic abilities.10

What Did We Learn?

“It is interesting to me that while all of the schools we visited during the past two years
with the Task Force were very different, they were, effectually, all the same.”—Minnie
White, Member of the Task Force

The three locations for our visits were chosen intentionally to create an opportunity for
members of the Task Force to experience some of the serious issues described in the academic
literature. Here are four trends the Task Force observed across schools in all three settings.

1. Pennsylvania, Oregon, and North Carolina are all enduring a crisis in school finance.
2. Family poverty is interwoven with funding inequity in urban and rural areas.
3. Children and parents from ethnically and racially diverse cultures are frequently made
   invisible by schools that don’t reflect or respond to their realities.
4. Students in middle and high schools are troubled by these same issues and want to work with adults to make their own schools meet the needs of all kinds of students.

Members of the Task Force submitted impressions of their experiences, and we recorded comments from educators and members of the community who shared their concerns with us in Pennsylvania, Oregon, and North Carolina. As we explore the four trends, we will share these personal impressions. What is astonishing is the clarity and consensus among members of our very diverse group. We represent many races, many backgrounds, and many regions, but as we look back on our experiences together observing public schools, we are of one mind and one heart.

Pennsylvania, Oregon, and North Carolina are all enduring a crisis in school finance.

“If this plea sounds desperate, it is. The sadness, poverty and injustice I see every day makes me want to cry. Imagine how the children must feel. Societies, individuals and churches are judged by how well we treat our poorest and most vulnerable...The inequity of the Pennsylvania school funding formula is not only unconstitutional, it is inexcusable, indefensible and unconscionable.”—Harvey Thompson, Philadelphia School Psychologist

“It is essential in Pennsylvania to keep the focus on school funding. Vouchers are not an educational reform. Instead we need to improve education and fight for fair funding.”—Linda White, Executive Director, Parents United for Philadelphia Schools

“The Philadelphia School District was suing the State based on the grave inequities in the State’s school funding practices that directly affect the academic achievement of urban Philadelphia’s minority children. This is essentially a racial justice issue and a civil rights issue.”—Sol Cotto, Philadelphia School Administrator and Member of the Task Force

“I was shocked to learn that students had to pay to participate in extra curricular programs that many school districts around the country would consider a part of the basic instructional program and would protest vehemently such charges... I was appalled at the grantsmanship and subterfuge that a district such as Beaverton had to engage in to get funding for its fine arts program. Funding for education... in Beaverton is problematic.” —Dr. Manford Byrd, Jr., Member of the Task Force (Manford Byrd) on the Beaverton School District, Oregon

“There are references in the notes to the negative impact of Measure 5 for this school district - reducing expenditure per pupil from $5,800 to $4,500. Class size has been affected, field trips have been curtailed, students have been forced to pay to participate in athletics and extra-curricular programs. There were portable classrooms even at the elementary level.” CAMABCRJ Public Education Task Force, Report of the Meetings in Portland, Oregon, “Background on the Parkrose School District”

“Ywe observedY the corporate sponsorships throughout the district. In addition to Intel, Nike is a major partner and supplies clothing, equipment and almost anything that carries its
“After visiting school districts across this great land, I was struck that there is a common denominator between slavery and the current crisis in public education: economics.”
—Rev. Carl P. Wallace, Member of the Task Force (Carl Wallace)

“What were the common threads in all three settings? Inequitable funding; in every school we visited, we saw the need for adequate funding. The dependence on property tax penalizes economically deprived school districts.”—Cev. Fidelia A.. Lane, Member of the Task Force (Fidie Lane)

It is evident from these impressions that financial shortages threaten the school districts across all three locations. Philadelphia’s crisis reflects the school funding inadequacy that pervades all but the richest and most homogenous districts in Pennsylvania. When the Task Force visited Philadelphia in the fall of 1999, two separate funding equity lawsuits had been filed: the first on behalf of tiny, Appalachian rural school districts, and the second a ground-breaking suit filed by the School District of Philadelphia under the federal Civil Rights Act, and alleging that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania spends less in majority-minority districts than in majority European American school districts. Then-Superintendent David Hornbeck was pursuing a multi-pronged reform effort across the district with funding reform as one strategy among many. In early June, 2000, however, several months after our Task Force visited, the crisis deepened. The State struck a deal to avoid the District’s bankruptcy and shut-down. The agreement mandated the School District would cut $30 million from its budget and agree to a one-year moratorium before pursuing its lawsuit. Superintendent Hornbeck was forced to resign, and the state invested enough funds to get the district through the 2000-2001 school year. Subsequently, the Legislature passed enabling legislation to permit state-takeover of the District if the financial emergency continues. In the meantime, Governor Ridge has aggressively attempted to introduce vouchers legislation. In 2001 the District continues to operate in crisis with significant staffing cuts and the elimination of many Hornbeck reforms including extensive staff development.

The decline in the Portland School District budget from $355 million in 1992-1993 to $335 million in 1998 despite the addition of 2000 students, and the array of portable classrooms surrounding public schools across Portland’s wealthiest suburbs are the symptoms of yet another kind of funding crisis. Oregon, which frequently engages in government by ballot referendum, in 1990 passed Measure 5, a property tax limitation that freezes local property taxes at 1.5% of property value. This measure required the state of Oregon to replace the local property tax funds lost to school districts but did not preclude the states’ finding those dollars by cutting general fund moneys previously appropriated to schools. Accordingly in a slight-of-hand maneuver, the Oregon Legislature replaced the local shortfall but did so by eliminating school programs the state had traditionally funded.

Because of Measure 5, school district expenditures in Oregon were equalized from district to district as the state assumed additional responsibility for financing schools, but equalization
occurred at a level far lower than many districts had been spending prior to Measure 5. In school finance discussions this phenomenon is known as “leveling-down.” Then in 1996, Oregon voters narrowly approved another tax reduction initiative at the polls. Like a handful of other states with tax freeze laws (California and Ohio are examples) Oregon has been experiencing the effect of the strangulation of expenditures for programs, curriculum, and facilities.

One hopeful sign: six months after the Task Force visited, in November 2000, Governor Kitzhaber managed to get a ballot initiative passed that will require the Oregon Legislature to fund school districts at a level that will enable them to meet the state’s required minimum academic standards. It will be important to watch debate about the what is adequate to meet minimum standards, and to watch the intersection of the conflicting ballot initiatives passed in Oregon in recent years.

**North Carolina’s school funding** troubles resemble Pennsylvania’s. In North Carolina, school finance is heavily dependent on county-wide local property taxes which are uneven from place to place. The Task Force was able to view school finance from a very different perspective, however, as we visited schools near the UCC’s Franklinton Center. While Philadelphia is poor relative to its suburban neighbors, as an urban school district it does have significant property that can be taxed: downtown office towers, industry, and commercial enterprises. In contrast, in the rural area near Franklinton Center, the property that can be taxed includes primarily small tobacco, cotton, peanut, and sweet potato farms. This area typifies the school funding dilemma addressed by most of the lawsuits across the states since the early 1970s: the property in many rural school districts is valued so low that, even if local residents agree to tax at very high rates, little money can be generated for the schools:

“For years the Forum’s annual school finance studies have been documenting the large and growing gap between low wealth and high wealth counties across North Carolina—\[the gap is larger than it has ever been and it continues to grow. What makes those findings even more troublesome than usual, however, is that many of the counties that have been hardest hit by the recent hurricane and follow-up flooding are among the poorest counties in North Carolina... one can’t fault these counties for not trying to support their schools and other county services. For the most part, their tax rates are substantially higher than state averages and higher yet than the counties that have the most resources—\[the level of school spending is low because there are so few resources to tax.\]”

While the state averages approximately 69% of school funding, disparities in public education in North Carolina arise from county-wide spending levels. North Carolina has 100 county school districts, and 17 city school districts left over from earlier times before county-wide consolidation became the trend. The presence of a handful of city school districts left among the county systems is significant because the city districts can and do pass supplemental taxes. The Chapel Hill-Carboro City District, for example, adds an additional $988 per pupil to its county’s expenditure every year through its city supplemental tax, which is itself more than the total county-wide expenditure per pupil in each of 23 poor districts, including all four of the counties we visited. We visited schools in Edgecombe County, an area severely impacted by flooding

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following Hurricane Floyd; Franklin County, Halifax County, and Vance County. All four of these counties are ranked by the Public School Forum of North Carolina in the bottom quartile of counties in North Carolina according to their capacity to raise revenue.

Here is how the four counties we visited rank, next to more affluent Orange County (Chapel Hill), Mecklenburg County (Charlotte), and Wake County (Raleigh/Durham) and next to the state average:\(^\text{12}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Rank Of 100 Counties in Property Valuation</th>
<th>Property Valuation/Pupil</th>
<th>Total County Spending/Pupil</th>
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<tr>
<td>Edgecombe</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>$260,337</td>
<td>$711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>$247,651</td>
<td>$692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halifax</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>$228,461</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vance</td>
<td>86</td>
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<td>Mecklenburg (Charlotte)</td>
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<td>$547,070</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wake (Raleigh/Durham)</td>
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<td>$482,258</td>
<td>$1,302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange (Chapel Hill)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>$450,989</td>
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<tr>
<td>State Average</td>
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<td>$361,387</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Like Pennsylvania, North Carolina has been challenged in court for its system of funding public schools. The \textit{Leandro} Case to determine whether the state of North Carolina is providing each child a sound basic education, has been heard by the North Carolina Supreme Court, and a decision is pending.

Funding troubles affect the number and qualifications of teachers.

"Currently at Northwest Halifax High School there are 22 teachers who are new and teaching without any training in education. Many lack a four-year degree. The Principal told us he conscientiously pairs each one with a mentor teacher and gets each one into a degree and certification program, but as soon as a teacher finishes this 4-5 year process, he or she is picked up by a wealthier district in Rocky Mount or Raleigh or Durham. He said, 'There is no question in my mind; if I could just get a full staff of qualified teachers...’" —\textit{Jan Resseger, Member of the Task Force, on Northwest Halifax High School, Halifax County, North Carolina}

"He expressed concern that teachers need additional support in order to provide language instruction and better understand the acquisition of a second language."—\textit{Teresa Campbell, Member of the Task Force, on Neil Armstrong Middle School, Forest Grove, Oregon}

"Our Task Force needs to make a strong statement about the impending crisis created by a shortage of competent teachers. We should advocate for scholarships offered to quality candidates and incentives for excellent teachers to locate in urban and rural areas. Create incentives for kids to go to school to become teachers - to build the pipeline of new teachers."

"—\textit{Manford Byrd}
The teacher shortage was obvious in the rural North Carolina school districts, where isolation and low salaries are disincentives for teachers who can easily find jobs in the metropolitan centers where salaries are higher. Schools in this area struggle to attract teachers at all, especially those who are well qualified. One elementary school had eliminated art and music because qualified teachers could not be found at the salaries offered in this district. This shortage is surely not limited to rural America, however; across the nation a shortage is forecast of teachers to fill positions that will be vacated by older teachers facing retirement before 2010.

Funding affects not only the availability of new teachers; it is essential also for on-going support of the teaching staff. As Philadelphia restructured to cut $30 million from its budget several months following our visit, one of the significant Hornbeck reforms to be cut was staff development. The District had recently begun to invest significant dollars in programs to re-train teachers, update teaching techniques, and build community among staff teams. Philadelphia eliminated these programs in the June 2000 budget crisis long before these reforms could possibly have begun to make a difference and before they could even be formally evaluated. Across Pennsylvania, Oregon, and North Carolina the Task Force observed an additional serious personnel scarcity: a critical shortage of teachers of color professionals who could serve as strong role models for school populations that are rapidly becoming more diverse. As a society we need to evaluate how salaries for teachers compare to those of other professionals, and think about ways to respect and support teachers in our communities.

Maintenance and replacement of facilities and equipment depend on school funding.

“One could not miss some of the antiquated structures, lighting and heating systems. As a result, hallways and classrooms appeared dim. The school is situated on land where a public street runs through the campus. During our visit students were preparing for a Christmas parade. The principal was standing guard in the street (running across the school yard) to protect children from oncoming vehicles” —Art Cribbs on Inborden Elementary, Enfield, North Carolina, Halifax County Schools

“This was a well-worn, well-used school with at least two or three separate buildings on campus. I thought they were making creative use of what they had.” —Fidie Lane on Louisburg High School, Franklin County Schools, North Carolina

“Northwest High School is very creative in amassing computers, distance learning equipment and educational resources to address the academic needs of its students. It relies on a professional grant writer in the county schools superintendent’s office. That person works on a percentage basis and receives payment based on the success of acquiring grants. The Principal made significant comments about the lack of a substantial tax base in Halifax County to help fund public education” —Art Cribbs on Northwest Halifax High School, Halifax County Schools, North Carolina

“When one child fails in school for lack of access to computers and new technology, it is one child too many. I believe it is a sad commentary when this nation cannot provide computers
and internet access for all public school children.” — Carmen Muhammad, Member of the Task Force

From the elementary school in Philadelphia where running water was turned off in a first floor restroom and where the library, filled with outdated books, was cold and un-staffed; to the school yards filled with portable classrooms across suburban Portland—to the North Carolina elementary school with a public road running right across the school yard between the buildings and the North Carolina high school that had been directed to replace 40% of its antiquated library books to prevent the school’s losing accreditation; Caging school buildings and out-dated or poorly maintained equipment were everywhere. We visited a state-of-the-art distance learning laboratory in a North Carolina high school, the kind of facility described in the academic literature as the way to connect children in remote and isolated settings with their peers in more privileged schools. In this case, however, the facility was of little use to the rural students, because the school district had acquired the technology with grant funding that did not include long term maintenance. The district did not have a budget to replace the broken parts on this expensive equipment.

Family poverty is interwoven with funding inequity in urban and rural areas.

“Every year I see a growing number of depressed and disturbed children. The problems are becoming more serious, and they are starting at earlier ages each year. It is not merely a matter of numbers and severity. I can tell you, as someone who is based at the eye of the storm, that public education in the urban areas is a Category 5 hurricane.” — Harvey Thompson, School Psychologist, School District of Philadelphia

“For 26 years I worked so hard to educate her. I was so stressed from trying to raise her and work two jobs.” — Ms. Ida Boddie, Franklinton Center Staff

“My concern is the need to speak truth to power about the poverty and the connection between poverty and challenges for public schools. This issue has surfaced in every one of our visits in Philadelphia, Portland, and now rural North Carolina” — Linda Jaramillo, Member of the Task Force

Current academic research confirms the severity of challenges for two of the three school settings where the Task Force visited:

“Today, in about 75 percent of American public schools, a majority of students are from middle-class households. (. . . more than $32,000 for a family of four, the eligibility threshold for the subsidized school lunch program.) Those schools tend to work pretty well at educating children, whatever their individual family circumstances. In the other 25 percent of schools, the majority of students are from low-income households, and those schools overwhelmingly fail to educate children to high levels of achievement.... when public schools educate poor students separately from other students, the high-poverty schools do not normally provide an equal, or even adequate education to their students.”

“... heavily
minority schools are much more likely to be high-poverty schools than heavily white schools. Only one in twenty predominantly white schools is poverty concentrated compared with more than 80 percent of predominantly black and Latino schools. Schools that are 90-100 percent black and Hispanic are fourteen times more likely to be majority poor than schools that are 90 percent white.”

In big-city public school districts in the United States, according to the Council for the Great City Schools, an average of 65% of children qualify for free or reduced price lunch. The rural area we visited in North Carolina exemplified a similar poverty level. The Harvard Civil Rights Project has documented that schools serving concentrations of families in poverty, whatever their geographic setting, struggle to help their students overcome low achievement. While we could observe the effects of extensive poverty in Philadelphia and in rural North Carolina, we surely did not observe any school in either setting that had succeeded in developing a definitive strategy for supporting an entire school population experiencing severe family poverty. The issues are overwhelmingly complex, including the myriad economic pressures for families that are largely outside the purview of the school: the need for affordable housing, lack of reliable transportation, lack of a phone, unavailable or unaffordable health and dental care, hunger, inadequate and unavailable child care, and illiteracy. As the effects of these issues are brought to school every day with children in poverty, they build up within classrooms and across schools to stress the adults trying to balance all the needs. Thus family poverty has an appreciable effect on the school institution itself in a very poor neighborhood. We did observe some instances in which principals and teachers were, to some degree, managing these challenges and doing a good job of supporting the children emotionally and pedagogically. These professionals demonstrate that despite the obstacles, it is possible to find a way to make our schools more welcoming and more supportive of children and parents. This brings us to the third of our four major learnings:

Children and parents from ethnically and racially diverse cultures are frequently made invisible by schools that do not reflect or respond to their realities.

“It is the failure or inability of the school to bridge between conflicting cultures that renders schooling a risk-inducing phenomenon for many students. Since learning is such a personal achievement, it is critically dependent on the learner’s engagement in the process. When the learning process comes to be associated with that which is >not me,< that which is alien to me, learning task engagement is interfered with.”

In all three places where the Task Force visited—Philadelphia, Portland, and rural North Carolina—we noticed times when children from ethnically and racially diverse cultures were made invisible because staff or the physical setting at school somehow failed to acknowledge their culture and their identity. This phenomenon was not difficult for any of us to observe, whether our background was African American, Hispanic, or European American. As we walked into schools in far distant places, where every one of us had a fresh pair of eyes, it became clear that in many ways schools reflect the norms of the dominant culture, and significantly fail to acknowledge many of the children in the classrooms. There is, of course, a continuum of sensitivity to these issues. We observed a real range including many staff people who were
working hard to pay attention. When schools do affirm the identities and cultures of the children, wonderful things can happen. In this section we highlight the observations of members of the Task Force from each visit. For each location, we will share concerns, and then at the end of the section we will report the strengths we observed instances when school professionals succeeded in connecting well with students and families. First in Philadelphia:

“Children who lag behind act-out in frustration. The District then spends money for special schools to deal with students labeled as Abehavior problems, @ and for metal detectors and systems to prevent violence. The majority of these children are smart and capable. The District should emphasize quality teaching and exposing children to a range of new experiences. Where is the support for our children? Something is very wrong with this system. Children will become respectful when they are heard and respected themselves” — Bora Harrell, District President, Philadelphia Council of Home and School, Philadelphia’s version of PTA

“We have teachers who put us down instead of helping us learn. We are not allowed to speak Spanish, because they say we speak it wrong. Sometimes teachers are cold and hard. I would like to have some Puerto Rican teachers.” — Ms. Amaliris Gonzalez, Philadelphia high school student

“Displayed along second floor hallway after hallway of this middle school is a collection of paintings donated to the school almost 70 years ago. While there is a growing number of African American students at this school, I did not see one person of color depicted in any of the paintings. It felt very odd here.” — Jan Resseger

“We need to think about why a consciously integrated school will almost always be located in a white neighborhood with students of color being bussed to that location. Almost never will white children be bussed into a black or Latino neighborhood.” — Teresa Campbell

“Participation in a desegregation effort was proudly announced, but I saw no commitment to desegregation in the school. There were no pictures of persons of color in this building.” — Elizabeth Horton Sheff, Member of the Task Force

“(This) struck me as a fifties style school trying to accommodate a world that is changing all around. They face challenges in making the school welcoming to a broad diversity of students of different racial-ethnic backgrounds and different languages, but haven’t quite figured out what to do.” — Teresa Campbell

On the positive side, members of the Task Force also reported these experiences in Philadelphia schools:

“The Afro-centric emphasis I found very stimulating...What I took away from this experience was the power of weaving a cultural emphasis into the whole curriculum.” — Rev. Tim Downs, Member of the Task Force
“U.S. Pledge of Alliance followed by >Lift Every Voice & Sing.= Good portion of teachers of color; community service organization located in the school is a definite plus,” —Elizabeth Horton Sheff

“Oldest building in the district, but very well maintained, rich with color and art work, both reflecting African-American culture and students= art. Pictures of great African-American heroes from history to the present. Colorful fabrics hanging from the ceiling. I was delighted by the simulated village created by various projects made by the children and complete with the friendly brown rabbit hopping about. I found it a very positive learning environment for children, stimulating, welcoming and affirming.” —Fidie Lane

“Meeting parents from the Home-School group was exciting for me, because as we walked through the school together, I could see how well they knew specific children and teachers and how involved they were in the life of the school. I was also very impressed with the senior citizen I met who was part of the neighborhood group that walks with children to and from school. It seemed apparent that the Principal and others had made an effort to build these connections and to create a school community.” —Jan Resseger

“WOW! First impression from the outside was, >What a mammoth building, a learning factory! how impersonal.= This impression soon changed after meeting the principal and experiencing students in the hallways and large central gathering area. In the center court, the large metal owl created by students in a metal-working class was a real statement of student achievement, as was the lunch room, the beauty salon, and automotive shop. The vitality and energy of the students was evident. The informal dress of the Principal, his personal story (coming from the neighborhood), the way he related to students in the hallway, all showed a relationship that made significant change in student drop-out rates. What could have been big and cold seemed to show community.” —Fidie Lane

“This operation struck me as being very smooth, hitting on all cylinders. I know that urban high schools can be explosive environments. The cleanliness of the halls and the absence of stragglers in halls once classes began suggested that everybody knew what was expected... The Principal was an interesting personality. First of all, physically he was impressive. He appeared physically fit, apparently a frequent visitor to the gymnasium. His casual dress and the way he displayed his jewelry said to me that he was making a deliberate effort to say to his students, in effect, ‘I know what’s going on in your world.’” —Manford Byrd

Because our group’s focus in the Portland area was the response of schools to the needs of children recently immigrated to the United States, students who are English language learners, the challenges we observed for schools were a little different in this location. At the same time we were examining how schools are responding to families who are not of the traditional white, middle class, dominant culture. This challenge is magnified by the number of cultures and languages represented in public schools in the Portland area, where the largest language minority are Hispanic students, many of whom are from migrant families. The Pacific Northwest is also home to students from across Asia and the Pacific Islands and a surprising number of students from the former Soviet republics and the Middle East. These cultures and the languages differ
from the dominant culture and from each other. A student from Beaverton High School, for example, explained to our Saturday Community Forum some of her own cultural issues that affect her work at school and her future:

“My mom knows I am really good friends with teachers and administrators, but she doesn’t have relationships with them. She knows college is important but she doesn’t know what college is really about. She attends parent conferences but she doesn’t get more involved.... it is so hard to be fitting in to two cultures. It is very hard for my mom to think about letting me leave home to go to college.” —Fatima Ali, Beaverton High School, from Lebanon with some time in the United Arab Emirates

Members of the Task Force split into small groups to tour four school districts, where we saw tremendous variation from district to district and among the schools in each district. All four districts are operating within the funding crisis of the Measure 5 property tax freeze. Financial shortages mean that educators must continually broker the needs of one group of students against others: gifted students vs. average students vs. students identified for special education vs. English language learners vs. elementary students vs. middle school students vs. high school students. In this kind of setting it is easy for groups to be overlooked, whether consciously or unconsciously. Forest Grove School District, the location of Intel and its accompanying tax dollars, has made the greatest investment in imaginative programming for English language learners. In all four settings attention to the needs of English language learners seems uneven. Sometimes one school demonstrates visionary programming, while another school in the same district lacks adequate programs. In some districts, programs are stronger at one level, elementary, middle, or high school, but weaker at other levels.

In one rapidly growing district, members of the Task Force had the opportunity to attend a district-wide meeting, during the fall of 2000, of those developing a Lau Plan, to comply with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Federal Bilingual Law of 1965, and the 1974 Supreme Court Decision in Lau v Nichols, which together guaranteed for all language minority students (1) teachers trained in English instruction and (2) a curriculum designed to provide for instruction in content areas in their native languages until they are ready to learn in English. This school district was rushing to comply because the state planned to begin enforcing these federal bilingual regulations in January 2001. The threat of systemic, institutional enforcement of the Lau Decision (more than twenty-five years late) is finally pushing professionals to develop broad policies to support the needs of a growing population of English language learners.

Here are some of the specific concerns raised by members of the Task Force:

“It was reported that here is little visible celebration of the different cultures represented by the students. Students recently arrived do not have access to science classes and receive only limited math instruction. For last year’s arrivals there was minimal ESL intervention, and instead immersion in regular classes. It is reported that the lack of support increased the rate of failure and dropping out of school; the dropout rate is particularly high for Hispanic students. One administrator handles special education, talented and gifted programs, ESL,
“The district does not seem to have developed a comprehensive policy or curriculum for English language learners. We heard about a transitional, early-exit English program at a middle school that moves students as quickly as possible into “regular” classes with English speaking peers. We also heard about a late-exit developmental bilingual program in an elementary school, a program in which students develop competency in their native language as well as English over the six years of elementary school. We heard about a program at another middle school where five assistant teachers serve as translators for English language learners who sit in regular classes for native speakers of English, and where it was stressed by the person making the report that this is ‘anti-pedagogical’ because this process discourages English language learning.” —AMABCRJ Public Education Task Force, Report of the Meetings in Portland, Oregon, “Background on the Parkrose School District”

“The Principal and the counselors confessed that there are barriers that keep many parents from participating in school activities or inquiring about their children. One barrier is language. This limits telephone contacts as well. Some parents apparently see teachers as ‘experts.’ Such a perspective furthers the separation and increases the barrier between parents and school.” —Art Cribbs on Forest Grove District

“English only is very hard for children because eventually they are less able to communicate with their parents through reading and writing, and they can’t communicate with their grandparents any more. The church can address the fears and concerns of persons who believe children should speak English only. Children with multiple language skills become world citizens.” —Anita Chase, Elementary Bilingual Teacher, Vancouver, Washington

“It is important for teachers to remember: just because a student doesn’t have a good grade point average, doesn’t mean that student is dumb. Students need teachers and counselors who believe in them. My counselor said I should not become a nurse because it will be too hard for me. But now I am in college becoming a nurse.” —Ms. Leticia Betancourt, nursing student at an Oregon community college

Concerns are balanced by some positives, however:

“They are trying to get a Russian font for their computers. This is very expensive. One computer crashed because the memory has to be updated. Parents are involved through the Parents Advisory Council. They have a sub-group called ETP (English Transition Parents)… Large representations of Caesar Chavez were on the wall…The library was very interesting. They had made a valiant effort to get children’s books written in the Russian language (believing that it is better to teach beginning reading skills in the child’s native language).” —Fidie Lane on Woodburn District

“Forest Grove High School is the recipient of a Title VII grant which provides for staff to further develop their ESL program. Their goals include training for academic and elective
teachers to improve instruction for limited English speakers and development of sheltered English classes. There seems to be an awareness that teachers need to understand the strengths and needs of English language learners and to develop skills to address them. An intentional effort has been made to attract bilingual teachers. We observed a class of basic English instruction and visited the biology classroom of Esther Garcia, who teaches a class of twenty-one students using both Spanish and English and a variety of hands-on activities.” —Teresa Campbell on Forest Grove District

“An African American student said that she doesn’t feel quite such a demand to assimilate as she did in past years. Diversity Club has helped to bridge among the cliques. Now she doesn’t feel that she has to Acompromise who she is@ to the degree that she did in the past. Two students spoke of their positive experience in Catapult, a program beginning in ninth grade to support students who have been identified as having academic potential but who seem to be slipping through the cracks. I admired the Principal for his willingness to discuss these issues openly with students and in the presence of guests.”—Jan Resseger on Beaverton District

“A Spanish speaking teacher and an English speaking teacher work together at each grade level. Subjects are taught in both languages, in English one day and Spanish the next. Students work on reading and writing in their first language. The plan is to add another grade in this program each year... All signs in the building are in both English and Spanish, and students work covers the walls. Pictures of students walking the red carpet into school on the first day are posted in the office.” —Teresa Campbell on Forest Grove District

While we traveled to Oregon to examine schooling issues for immigrant students, these same challenges exist for students and their schools across the country, as we were reminded by an encounter at an elementary school in Vance County, North Carolina, where there is a significant Hispanic migrant population. A group from our Task Force visited a school that did not offer any special services for language-minority children. An assistant principal commented on a student who appeared very withdrawn, but who had shown what the assistant principal described as surprising gifts in computerized math lessons. Linda Jaramillo, a member of the Task Force, was able to talk with the child in Spanish and to learn of his sense of total isolation:

“The disturbing part of this encounter was the seeming “insensitivity” of the Assistant Principal to the child=s needs. Understand, I do believe he cares about the well-being of the child; but he is very naive about what is needed to address the issues of ESL students. I got the impression that he seems to think that if they just sit and pay attention, they will grasp onto everything.”—Minnie White on Vance County Schools

In North Carolina, the cultural challenges reflect not only issues of race, country of origin, and poverty, but also may, in a place where many teachers are from larger cities, reflect misunderstanding of the challenges for families living in remote rural areas, where extreme poverty and lack of transportation can be barriers.
“School officials don’t understand that some families lack a phone or any transportation to get all the way to the school. For some a newspaper may be a luxury, but the schools don’t make allowances for this in the way they communicate with families. Many parents have limited education themselves and culturally for several generations have been discouraged from advocating for their children in schools. The culture has encouraged them to ‘leave the decisions up to the professionals.’” — Ms. Geraldine Blackston, Director of Project Rescue of Wilson, Wilson County, North Carolina

“Most of the students travel great distances to attend Northwest High School. At this rural high school, students come from 35 to 40 miles away. Many of them travel by bus and are picked up as early as 5:45 A.M. There are 23 buses that transport the students. That creates a hardship on those who desire to participate in extra-curricular activities.” — Art Cribbs on Halifax County Schools

“There is a lack of celebration of multicultural diversity in the school. Parents can request specific teachers which has the effect of segregating specific classes racially.” — Carl Wallace on Edgecombe County Schools

“There are lots of ways children feel rejected at school because their backgrounds aren’t well understood. Most children start out loving school, but by fourth grade they begin to understand that they are not really appreciated there. By middle school students start to rebel. Then schools become the revolving door to the juvenile courts.” — Ms. Geraldine Blackston, Director of Project Rescue of Wilson, Wilson County, North Carolina

“Rules are designed to keep black children down. Once a child gets into the discipline system, there isn’t a second chance. Children are >identified< early on and labeled as >problems.< They try to break the spirit of black males by second grade.” — Rev. Jo Watson, Raleigh, Community Forum, Franklinton Center, December 2, 2000

While we heard about the inequities of high-stakes standardized tests to drive accountability in all three locations, we heard the greatest level of concern in North Carolina, where retention in grade has begun in some locations and was, as of November 2000, scheduled to begin across the state in June 2001 as a consequence of failure. The discussion of the North Carolina ABCs was part of the larger discussion of whether schools respond institutionally to the needs of all the children, because issues surrounding the ABCs are culture and equity issues. Ms. Geraldine Blackston who joined our community forum from neighboring Wilson County, which has already imposed high-stakes consequences for test failure, commented:

“There are two alternative schools in Wilson County where children are being kept too long, to prevent their having to take the ABCs, because their scores might drag down school averages at the Wilson County middle and high schools. Public schools are pushing low-performing children out of the public schools into alternative settings, which aren’t funded as well as the regular schools.
Marybe McMillan, a policy analyst with North Carolina’s Common Sense Foundation, told us:

“The ABCs program exacerbates inequality by holding all students to the same standards, when students and schools have vastly inequitable resources. As retention increases as a consequence of the test, North Carolina will likely experience a serious increase in the drop-out rate of African American and Latino-Latina students.”

Students in middle and high schools are troubled by these same issues and want to work with adults to make their own schools meet the needs of all kinds of students.

The Task Force took the opportunity on two occasions to convene workshops of adolescents at the National Youth Event in Ames, Iowa, and the Harambee Youth Event, at Talladega College in Alabama, both in July of 2000. In each workshop we handed tables of youths a list of issues that affect public schools:

1. I would recommend that my own school district make one important change to improve education for all the students. It is ___________________________.
2. How can public schools do a better job of preparing our children to participate in a multicultural, economically, globally connected world?
3. How can we help parents, guardians and other significant adults play a more significant role in the education of their children?
4. In your state are there problems of inadequate and inequitably distributed school funding?
5. So often ideas about school reform reflect various kinds of blaming: replace the superintendent; fire the principal; blame out-of-date teachers; blame the family=s poverty or level of education; blame students for lack of motivation. If we stop blaming, where can we begin instead?
6. What elements create a positive learning environment in the classroom?
7. What should be included in the curriculum of teacher preparation to insure that more teachers can effectively teach children of all racial/ethnic/economic backgrounds?
8. What elements compose a positive learning environment in the classroom?
9. How can public schools best support children who have fallen behind academically?
10. How can we, as people of faith, help strengthen public support for public education?

We asked each small group to prioritize by consensus the ten questions. We then asked them to discuss the top three issues to be able to share why these concerns are the most important. We were struck on both occasions by the engagement of adolescents in discussion of policy issues affecting the schools they attend. We were also struck by the level of consensus at each event, and among youths at the two different gatherings.
At the National Youth Event, we worked with two sessions, of 21 and 30 youths and adult youth leaders from across the United States who talked together at the tables. During the two sessions, a total of nine tables reported out.

- 6 tables identified inadequate and inequitable school funding as a major issue.
- 5 tables identified the need for increased parent involvement and the need for schools to do a better job of reaching out to parents.
- 4 tables identified the need for schools to do a better job of preparing students to participate in a multicultural, economically and globally connected world.
- 4 tables identified the need to better support students who have fallen behind.
- 4 tables identified the need to stop blaming parents, teachers, and students.

At Talledega College, we met with a large group encompassing all 200 participating students, who felt this work was important enough to remain fully engaged for an-hour-and-a-half in stifling 97 degree heat. Seventeen tables reported out, again with remarkable consensus on the issues:

- 10 tables identified the need to support students who have fallen behind.
- 7 tables identified the need for increased parent involvement and the need for schools to do a better job of reaching out to parents.
- 7 tables identified inadequate and inequitable school funding as a major issue.
- 6 tables identified the need to better prepare teachers to work in diverse, multicultural school settings.
- 6 tables identified the need for schools to do a better job of preparing students to participate in a multicultural, economically and globally connected world.
- 4 tables identified the need to stop blaming parents, teachers, and students.
- 4 tables identified the need to create a positive learning environment in the classroom.
- 4 tables identified engaging people of faith to strengthen support for public schools.

It was startlingly clear among the students we encountered at public schools, among the students who spoke at our community forums, and among public school students at the UCC=s own youth events that adolescents are paying close attention not only to what they are being formally taught, but also to the hidden lessons they absorb as they observe the way they and their classmates are treated at school and the way society treats their own schools and public schools in general. Public school students themselves, as the primary stakeholders, are important allies for adult advocates and policy makers. We need to create opportunities where our youth can be heard and where we can listen to the concerns of our children.
Conclusions and Recommendations

What is at stake as we enter a new century with public schools under assault? Could a system based on vouchers, choice and privatization assume the role historically played in the United States by the civic institution of public education? James Banks, the educator who has written most widely about multicultural education, affirms an important role for public schools: to help “students to understand concepts, events, and people from diverse ethnic and cultural perspectives.”

Agreeing with Banks, educational philosopher Walter Feinberg writes that in public schools, where children from all backgrounds come together, we can offer our children the opportunity, “to speak from the knowledge that their cultural identity provides and, as audience, to hear the voices of others.”

Dr. Manning Marable, Professor of History and Political Science, and the Director of the Institute for Research in African American Studies at Columbia University, asserts that without the public schools our democracy cannot survive:

“I believe that real academic excellence can only exist in a democracy, within the framework of multicultural diversity. Indeed, our public school systems, despite their serious problems, represent one of the most important institutional safeguards for defending the principles of democracy and equality under the law. Public education alone has the potential capacity for building pluralistic communities, and creating a lively civic culture that promotes the fullest possible engagement and participation of all members of society. In this sense, the public school is a true laboratory for democracy.”

What is the role of the Church? Our Task Force, empowered by the American Missionary Association and the Commission for Racial Justice, two former instrumentalities of the United Church of Christ, would implicate a web of complex social and economic issues including poverty, racism, classism, and inequitable school funding as the causes of the current crisis in public education.

“The visits to the various school districts reinforced a realization from my own experience: The challenge of working for the best public education possible is a multi-faceted task. We must strive for proper funding, as well as engage students in programs that build self-esteem; we must support educators helping to offset the burnout that can so readily manifest itself in the profession as well as assist parents in their interaction with the schools and their children’s educational process; we must work for positive climates both inside school walls and outside. If we fail on any one of these fronts, our public education system will not live up to its potential.” —Ken Brown, Member of the Task Force

We call on the United Church of Christ to name the widespread malaise in American public schools in 2001 as a civil rights crisis. While, in the public consciousness, the 1954 Brown Decision marked the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, our society has not successfully realized Brown’s dream. In other areas, while our society has not fully achieved human rights for all citizens, we have gained more ground than in the area of public education. Surely we have improved access to accommodations by eliminating segregated washrooms, restaurants, hotels, and transportation. We have removed some of the formal barriers to voting rights. We have
begun to dismantle some of the barriers to fair housing through enforcement of laws prohibiting protective covenants, and banning block busting, steering and red-lining of mortgage and insurance. At the same time, our public schools remain racially and economically segregated, and research exhaustively demonstrates that children in poverty and especially children of color are ill-served by public schools that, nearly fifty years after Brown, remain separate and unequal.

We call on the United Church of Christ through its new structure to proclaim the urgency of public school support. We are convinced the UCC should keep alive in all its settings the efforts begun by our Task Force, for in our information age, education is imperative. It is our special role as the Church to speak for access for every child of God to the means for a full life. Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”(John 10:10)  Certainly we hope this report will serve as a resource for study and discussion in UCC congregations. We can also recommend another excellent way to learn more about local schools: begin as we did by visiting at school.

“There is a need to feel that the community is supporting and also scrutinizing what happens at school. Teachers would be more motivated if they felt someone cared. The school felt like a forgotten place in a time when people are glorifying private school and writing off the public schools. If the community came in, it would make such a difference.”—Mario Cotto, former drama teacher, Stetson Middle School, Philadelphia

We further recommend that the Church convene an on-going task force responsible to General Synod and an advocacy coalition to continue this work that we have only begun. Ongoing efforts should engage adults and the youths who are the primary stakeholders in public schools. These efforts should include further study, research, organizing and advocacy in local congregations and across many UCC conferences. Specific action steps mentioned by Task Force members include:

“Mr. Thompson, the school psychologist spoke of a drop out rate of 50%. Maybe this group could consider creating some focus-group discussions to listen to some of these children, because it would be helpful to interview them to find out what pushes them out of school.”—Dr. Fay E. Brown, Member of the Task Force

“We need to advocate for better training of teachers so that they learn to respect diversity and therefore are able to teach in diverse settings.”—Elizabeth Horton Sheff

“We urge local UCC congregations to adopt local church initiatives and partnerships to support specific public schools.”—Carl Wallace

Certainly we heard from educators and others who came to tell the Task Force they hope the church will provide leadership in addressing justice issues at school. Diane Kimmel, former moderator of the Penn West Conference and 5th grade teacher in the tiny Appalachian town of Nanty Glo, Pennsylvania, told our Task Force:
“There is something wrong with a state system that makes some schools more or less desirable. The system needs to change, but reform will not occur in Harrisburg. These attitudes must be changed in our pews.”

Efrain Cotto, pastor of Community of Joy United Church of Christ in Philadelphia, added: “This is a matter of the spirit.” Task Force member, Ken Brown, describes his hopes for the UCC’s future engagement of this issue in the tradition of our justice heritage:

“The role of the Church in this process is clear and imperative. In national, regional and local settings, we must, as people of faith, work for measures that will enhance our schools. We must help parents with skills that will enhance their children’s educational development and assist them to become advocates for what their children need. We must walk with students as they navigate their educational journey. The Church should provide the quintessential voice demanding that all of the Creator’s children have the fullest opportunity to learn!”

Dr. Manford Byrd expresses the gratitude of members of the AMABCRJ Public Education Task Force to the United Church of Christ for the opportunity this experience created for each of us:

“I appreciated and enjoyed working with my colleagues across the church on such an important subject as public education. Because of that service, I am convinced the larger church needs to keep the work of this Task Force ongoing, especially for such a time as this, when education is at the center of the public policy debate in America.”

Endnotes


2. This reflection is written by Rev. Fidelia Lane and taken from the resolution proposed to GS 23: AAccess to Excellent Public Schools: A Child=s Civil Right in the 21st Century.@


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