

## HERE AND THERE

### New People

In 2011, the Roundtable has been enriched by the addition of several new members: Peter Ansingh, West Des Moines, Iowa; Richard Cole, Sunnyside Unified School District, Washington; Yvonne Curtis, Forest Grove Public Schools, Oregon; Suzanne Cusick, Longview, Washington; Frank Hackett, Pembroke, Massachusetts; Mary Ellen Johnson, Sandwich, Massachusetts; Scott Kizner, Harrisonburg, Virginia; Donna Simpson Leak, Rich Township, Illinois; Lorna Lewis, East Williston Public Schools, New York; Art McCoy, Ferguson-Florissant, Missouri; Christine Mahoney, East Granby, Connecticut; Steve Rasmussen, Issaquah, Washington; Robert Slaby, Storey County School District, Nevada; Jeffrey Smith, Balzs Schools, Phoenix, Arizona;

and Kathleen Willis, North Reading, Massachusetts. Welcome!

**The Superintendent's Fieldbook**  
*The Superintendent's Fieldbook*, written and edited by four of the Roundtable founders in 2005, is a best seller for Corwin Press. Corwin has asked for an update of the book, drawing on the Roundtable's experiences. Several Roundtable members have expressed interest in contributing to the second edition, to be published in 2013.

**SAT Scores & Family Income**  
The chart below (from 2009 data from the College Board) examines the relationship between income and achievement on the SAT. It's very clear: There is a direct correlation between family income and achievement. As one goes up or down, the other moves with it. Other data indicate that gaps in achievement are readily identifiable within racial and ethnic groups by income.

The achievement gap must be addressed, but responding to it fully will be very difficult if policy continues to ignore the educational correlates of poverty.

### Calendar & Contact

#### July 22-24, 2011

Summer Meeting, Chicago, Illinois.  
Engaging with your public.

#### October 21-23, 2011

Fall Meeting, Alexandria, Va.  
Superintendent as instructional leader.

#### November 3-11, 2011

Fifth Roundtable delegation visits China.

#### July 2012 (dates tbd)

Roundtable study group to examine PISA & Finland.

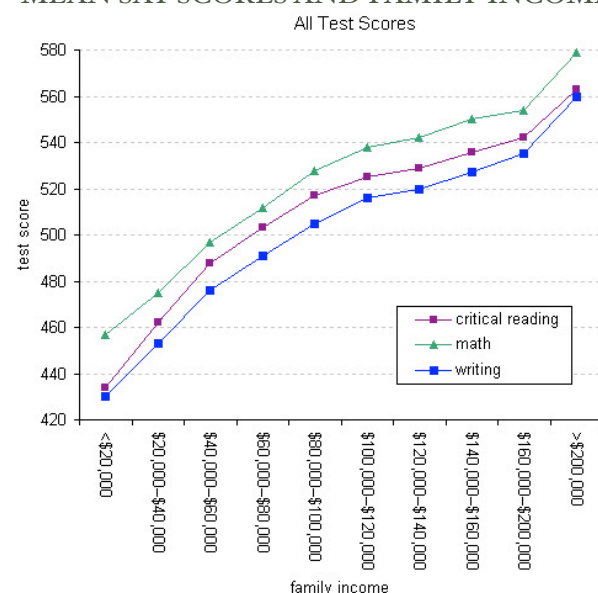
#### October 2012 (dates tbd)

Fall Meeting, Silicon Valley, California  
Technology and Being in the Moment

#### The Roundtable:

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### MEAN SAT SCORES AND FAMILY INCOME



# Roundtable News

## Public Engagement

*What's on the Public Mind in 2011?*



President Barack Obama in auditorium of Booker T. Washington High School, Memphis, with principal Alisha Kiner (2nd from left) and senior class officers. The president honored BTW for raising graduation rates from 55% to 82%. Kiner met with the Roundtable in Chicago to describe how she did it. (Story, p. 5).

One constant in communications, is that before people are willing to hear what you have to say they need to be reassured that you're listening to them, according to pollster Dan Yankelovich, a co-founder of Public Agenda, a non-profit seeking to improve public decisions in all walks of life.

For decades Public Agenda has included in its portfolio a significant emphasis on education. Will Friedman, president of the Public Agenda and Jean Johnson, ex-

ecutive vice president, shared their expertise with the Roundtable.

Johnson laid out ten broad conclusions, based on opinion polls and focus groups, about how Americans see their country today. It was a sobering presentation.

The first thing to understand is that Americans fear the *country is moving in the wrong direction*. Tracking polls exploring how Americans feel about the future

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John Brademas (center) enjoys light moment with U.S. Senator John Kerry and former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. Dr. Brademas, president-emeritus of New York University and a 22-year veteran of Congress, will be honored by the Roundtable at its October meeting for a "lifetime of contributions to American education." (see p. 7).

indicate that shortly after the collapse of the American financial system in 2008 the sense that the country was moving in the (p. 4)



## EFFECTIVE OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Against the background of big public concerns and major educational issues laid out by Jean Johnson, Public Agenda Foundation president Will Friedman described the importance of effective engagement with the public.

“Its important to let the public into the discussion, said Friedman. “Because you can improve policy via stakeholder involvement. You can create shared ownership for results. You can inoculate the schools against backlash. You need buy-in from everyone and this is a way to promote synergy between the school, the home, and community.”

**Strategies that backfire.** The typical approach to the public can backfire, Friedman noted. The “decide and sell” strategy will get superintendents into trouble. People want an authentic chance to have their voices heard.

**Authentic processes.** Here are the signs of authentic engagement: The community is seen as a partner in defining the problem, it is not the problem. Communication is a two-way street. Engagement is “early and often” not late and cursory. The bias is toward inclusion of as many people as possible. Engagement is hard to do well, he acknowledged, in an atmosphere of mistrust and cynicism.

**Principles of Effective Engagement.** “How do you go about involving the public in this effort?” He offered two comprehensive suggestions.

First, get *Communications 101* right. Districts need to do basic communications well. Often they flunk this basic test. They don’t have good materials to explain what they’re doing. They react to what the media says instead of pro-actively engaging the media. The people answering phones in the central office give off a sense that the public shouldn’t be bothering them. “Give the public a human being, not a machine. Develop timely, jargon-free information. Reach out to the media and the public. And ensure that you have a solid line of communication from the superintendent

down to the teacher’s aide,” was Friedman’s advice. Good communication, he emphasized, begins by listening.

Second, *community dialogue can be a powerful engagement strategy.* Well-designed, face-to-face dialogue works. The keys to success here are to provide local, non-partisan sponsorship; create well-crafted discussion materials to help with choicework; encourage dialogue, not speeches; set up the conditions for diverse participants; employ skilled, neutral, and trained moderators; and develop honest leadership responses and follow-up.

All of us have to understand, said Friedman in conclusion, that “many of these issues are our issues, not theirs. You need to talk the local talk. And you have to make these issues their issues.”

(A detailed summary can be found at: [www.superintendentsforum.org](http://www.superintendentsforum.org))

Will Friedman



## SUPERINTENDENT AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER

The superintendent can no longer get by worrying just about buses, budgets and books. Issues of teaching and learning and providing all students with first-rate instruction now dominate the leadership agenda. What does it mean to be an instructional leader? Tim Grieves (Sioux City, Iowa) has developed an exciting agenda for our meeting in Alexandria. We will work with Harvard University's **Richard Elmore** on instructional rounds (in which superintendents



visit each other's districts), and with **Jim Knight** of the University of Kansas who advocates an instructional coaching model.

Richard Elmore is faculty co-chair of the Doctorate in Educational Leadership (Ed.L.D.) program at HGSE. He spends at least a day a week in schools, working on instructional improvement. He is co-author of *Instructional*

*Rounds in Education*, Harvard Education Press, 2009.

Jim Knight is a research associate at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning and president of the Instructional Coaching Group.

He has spent more than a decade studying instructional coaching and has written several books on the topic, including *Instructional Coaching* published by Corwin (2007).



Jim Knight

## EXPERT ON EDUCATION, FAMILY SERVICES, AND POLITICS KEYNOTES ROUNDTABLE'S OCTOBER MEETING



**Bill Purcell**, a lawyer who was formerly mayor of Nashville and Davidson County, five-term member of the Tennessee House of Representatives, director of Vanderbilt's Child and Family Policy Center, and director of Harvard's Institute of Politics at the Kennedy School, enjoys a national national repu-

tation for his expertise on education, health care, community services, and alternative sentencing. Purcell, who will keynote the Roundtable October meeting on the theme of “When Will Happy Days Return?” will examine what’s required to restore American confidence in the future.

## JOHN BRADEMAs TO BE HONORED AT OCTOBER MEETING

**John Brademas** served in the United States House of Representatives for 22 years (1959-1981) where he earned a reputation as “Mr. Education” for his work on elementary and secondary education, higher education, the arts and humanities, as well as special programs to encourage international and environmental education and to combat drug and alcohol abuse. Brademas was a Rhodes Scholar who earned a doctorate from Oxford University. He was serving as Majority Whip in the House when he left Congress in 1981, after which he became 13th president of New York University. He brought NYU into the top rank of international universities and was credited with launching one of the first successful billion dollar university capital campaigns. Brademas will be honored at the Roundtable gathering for a lifetime of contributions to American education.





## MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED ROUNDTABLE EDUCATORS TO CHINA

Since 2008, more than a hundred superintendents, administrators, board members, principals and teachers associated with Roundtable districts have had the benefit of an extraordinary experience. As guests of the Chinese agency Hanban, through a program coordinated by the College Board (The Chinese Bridge), they visited Chinese schools and met with Chinese educators and national and regional leaders. The purpose? To expand the teaching of Chinese language and culture in the United States.

In November 2011, another Roundtable delegation will visit China. Like earlier study trips, this one will in-

volve an exhausting round of meetings, first in Beijing and then in an outlying province. In previous years, Roundtable members have visited Heilongjiang, Hebei, Guangxi, and Tianjin provinces. This year's destination has yet to be announced.

These visits bring vividly into focus how impressive China is and how hard its students work. "There are not enough words to describe the difference between reading about China and experiencing China," said Kathleen Cooke, superintendent of Hamilton Schools in Wisconsin.

*Roundtable members enter the Forbidden City, home to generations of emperors*



## ROUNDTABLE TO STUDY PISA AND FINLAND

As this edition of the newsletter went to print, Roundtable staff were working with Education First to organize a study mission of superintendents to examine the Program on International Student Assessment (PISA) and Finland's success as the Western nation at the top of the PISA charts.

Preliminary plans call for the delegation to leave the United States early in July to meet with public officials and visit schools in Britain, France, and Finland. In London, the group will look into British experience with charter-like schools and national examinations. In France, the Roundtable will benefit from a briefing on

PISA from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which administers the assessment. The study will conclude by meeting with officials and visiting Finnish schools to get a better understanding of how Finland succeeds in a system in which students start school at seven, standardized tests are almost unknown, and ten applicants seek every teaching slot.

An indications of the surprises in store can be found in a September 2011 [Smithsonian Institution](#) report, "Why Are Finland's Schools So Successful?"

## BIG ISSUES IN EDUCATION

While policymakers worry about global competitiveness, science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), and teacher accountability, parents, the general public and teachers worry about things closer to home, said Johnson. She focused on four topics: the knowledge sweepstakes in a globally competitive work force; propelling change in public schools; teacher demoralization; and the lack of communication among stakeholders.

### The Knowledge Sweepstakes.

Today, 55% of Americans think college is essential, compared to just 31% in 2000. More than 90% of public school parents want their children to go to college and 95% of students say the same thing. But there are serious challenges. Counseling has broken down. Most students give high school counselors a rating of only "fair" or "poor"; and 48% of students think high school guidance counselors see them as "just a face in the crowd."

Families are confident their children are ready for college. They think schools are better than when the parents were in school and that their children will have the skills to succeed in the workplace (69%) and in college math and science (61%). The "customers" are not as confident, reported Johnson. The ACT College Readiness Standards indi-

cates that fully 78% of entering college students are not adequately prepared in either reading, English, math, or science, while employers and faculty members report broad concerns with readiness.



*Will Friedman & Jean Johnson*

Wealthy kids, said Johnson, do a massive college search with good search strategies. Low-income students, by contrast, have very poor access to counseling, few role models and have a more difficult time with the search.

Meanwhile, only four in ten teachers "strongly agree" that all students can go to college with the right support and 35% of adults report they had trouble writing college papers when in college (and 39% say they had at least some trouble paying attention in class).

Issues of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) attract parents. They understand that more jobs are opening in these fields and would be pleased to see their children enter them. However, parents see STEM as the basics in math and

science. Just a quarter of parents see calculus is important in high school and most parents think things are "fine as they are." Low-income parents disagree. Despite these strong feelings, parents overwhelmingly support such ideas as a national math curriculum or requiring students to take four years of math and four years of science.

To most parents, social problems and behavioral issues trump academic concerns, reported Johnson.

**Change in Local Schools.** With regard to change in local schools, parents see most solutions as less-than-satisfying. Transparency and accountability through data are fine so far as they go, but they are incomplete.

Parents and citizens spend a lot of energy worrying about funding for local schools. They are concerned about federal cutbacks. But education is seen as a quintessentially local issue and there are concerns about where the money goes. Survey result about people's support for increased funding should be taken with a grain of salt, according to Johnson.

School closing are big problems for most parents, she noted. In fact, there's a backlash against closing even low-performing (to 5)



wrong direction shot up. From November 2009 through July of 2011 about 60% of Americans expressed fear for the future.



Jean Johnson.

Next, said Johnson, *Americans feel cynical about government.* 70% of Americans feel that people like themselves have little influence on government; and 80% believe most members of Congress serve interest groups rather than the public.

A related issue: *very few institutions or leaders enjoy the public trust.* Only the military (59%) and small business (50%) enjoy significant public trust. Leaders elsewhere do not enjoy majority support: higher education (35%), medicine (34%), U.S. Supreme Court (31%); White House (27%); religion (26%); the press and law firms (both 14%); Congress and Wall Street (both 8%). Just 22% of the public expresses “a great deal of confidence” in public school leaders.

Fully 86% of Americans feel that *government is broken.* But almost

all of them *also believe it can be fixed* (81%), said Johnson.

The fifth issue is unsurprising to anyone who reads a daily newspaper: *Americans are badly divided about the role of government.*

*Concern about the economy and jobs dwarfs everything else.* While Washington was consumed in the summer of 2011 with the budget deficit and national debt, only 7% of respondents thought that was the most important problem facing the country. Meanwhile, concerns about the economy and jobs preoccupied 53% of Americans. Issues such as health, care, foreign wars, education, and bureaucracy were the principal concern of fewer than 5% of voters.

Seven: *economic fears are personal.* American’s fears are not about headlines, policy, or public debt. About 60% of Americans worry about such issues as jobs, health care, and retirement income. Nearly half are worried about a major wage earner losing a job, affording mortgage payments, and financing their children’s education. For younger Americans, college debt is a brand new anxiety, Johnson reported.

Next, *most Americans are searching for ways to regain economic security.* They want higher education made more affordable (63%), Social Security

and Medicare preserved (58%), expanded job-training programs (54%), and tax cuts for the middle class (48%). No other issue, including the national debt or the deficit, approaches the 50% threshold.

*The rules have changed* is lesson number nine. Just a decade ago, only 31% of Americans believed a college education was necessary for a person to succeed. Today that figure stands at 55%. Two-thirds of Americans in 2000 believed there were many ways to succeed without a college degree; today just 43% share that view.

Finally, *Americans are anguished about the culture.* Only 17% of Americans believe the “overall state of moral values” is good or excellent. Fully 82% report it is only fair or poor. More than seven out of ten believe values are getting worse; and almost eight in ten feel that people’s “sense of right and wrong” is not as strong as it used to be.

“Government . . . the economy . . . anguish about the moral culture—those are the big issues,” according to Johnson. “There is a craving for leaders who are genuinely willing to listen. The people want problems solved, not argued about. And they are skeptical about one-way communication from the top.”

(A detailed summary can be found at: [www.superintendentsforum.org](http://www.superintendentsforum.org))

schools. A majority favors keeping low-performing schools open while providing comprehensive support. Some parents, stressed Johnson, “compare a school closing to a factory closing in a community.”

**Teachers.** Survey results indicate extreme demoralization among teachers. The numbers are troubling: 76% feel they are scapegoats; 70% feel they are “left out of the loop” in district decisions; 80% do not feel consulted on what is happening, although they are on the front lines; 80% and more see unions as essential protections against poorer working conditions, reduced salaries, unfair complaints from parents or students, and abusive administrators.

About 40% of teachers describe themselves as “disheartened.” About 37% are contented. The final 23% are described as idealists.

Older teachers (over the age of 35) and teachers from the millennial generation (born in the 1980s) show some differences in what they tend to favor, although the differences are easy to overstate. Younger teachers tend to be more favorable to financial incentives for working harder, attaining national certification, working in tough neighborhoods and challenging schools. A strong majority of teachers in both groups (56%) support finan-

cial incentives for all teachers in schools who routinely produce good results. Older teachers are more inclined to support extra pay for teachers in hard-to-fill subjects and for teachers who routinely score higher than similar students on standardized tests.

Neither younger or older teachers support making it easier to terminate teachers, eliminating tenure, or tying teacher rewards to student performance.

**Stakeholder Communication.** Johnson also pointed to serious gaps in communication or attitudes among major stakeholders. Policymakers are focused on college attendance (although what “college” means is less than clear), while many teachers and college students raise questions about the goal. Simultaneously, the “guidance system is failing students and college dropout rates are sky high.”

For their part, business groups are worried about math/science education, but 60% of principals and superintendents think this is not a serious problem locally and parents and students, themselves, are lukewarm about the issue.

In the midst of this great national debate, Johnson’s final conclusion is perhaps most troubling: teachers are alienated: “Teachers haven’t been invited to the reform table and they believe they are caught between the sword and the wall.”

## Raising Graduation Rates

Alisha Kiner



In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education’s Race to the Top High School Commencement Challenge winner was Booker T. Washington in Memphis. In selecting BTW as the place where President Obama would deliver the commencement address, the White House cited the increase in its graduation rate from 55% in 2005 to 82% in 2009.

Principal Alisha Kiner understood she had problems when taking the job, she told the Roundtable. Seventeen-year-olds were entering 9th grade; discipline problems were huge for boys. She began by separating ninth-graders by gender “because the data told us to.”

Kiner’s big message: “How did I make such massive gains? I loved my children. I hired people who would love my children. And then I did my job.”

(Detailed summaries of both presentations can be found at: [www.superintendentsforum.org](http://www.superintendentsforum.org))