

# Roundtable News

## A Lifetime in Service to Schools



### *A public man's commitment to public education*

*John Brademas, President Emeritus of New York University, known as "Mr. Education" during a 20-year career in the United States House of Representatives, accepts Roundtable award in October 2011 for a lifetime of contributions to American education. Steer-*

At its October 2011 meeting, the Roundtable presented Dr. John Brademas, a 20-year veteran of the United States House of Representatives and President Emeritus of New York University, with an award for a "lifetime of contributions to American education and to the American people." The citation described Brademas as a "a vital figure in American life with a vision that all citizens in a democracy deserve to be treated with dignity and respect." His work, the citation read, "had touched the lives of literally tens of millions of people."

Brademas, whose legislative accomplishments in sponsoring the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Higher Education Act, Public Law 94-142, and other legislation had earned him the nickname of "Mr. Education" on Capitol Hill, responded with a ringing affirmation of the central importance of education and of restrained but strategic government in American life.

"I have long believed that educators are among the great heroes of our country," he said. The son of a teacher and grandson of a high school superintendent, Brademas reviewed his

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*Roundtable members (l to r) Ralph Marino (Horsehead, NY), Martha Bruckner (Council Bluffs, IA), Juli Di Chiro (Ashland, OR) Suzanne Cuzick (Longview, WA) and Joseph Hochreiter (Elmira, NY) outside the Forbidden City's Gate of Heavenly Peace.*



sponsorship of most of the major education legislation of the last half of the 20th century and then took issue with the governing sentiment of the last 30 years.

Painting a broad picture of (to p. 7)

## HOPE AMIDST AUSTERITY

Amidst growing concern about the difficulties of the national economy, how can school leaders construct a sense of optimism about the future? Where can we find new sources of inspiration?

Think we have it bad now? Things were much worse during the Great Depression, reported Bill Purcell, former mayor of Nashville and former director of the Kennedy School's Institute of Politics (right).

Like Brademas, Purcell preached a politics of hope in an era of austerity and reported that the public respected educators, understood the centrality of education for the nation's hopes, and looked to superintendents for leadership.

**Where Have the Happy Days Gone?**

Purcell set out to explore where the "happy days" in American education have gone and how better times might return. He reported that during his first day in the Tennessee state legislature decades ago he hoped for an exploration of the great issues facing the Volunteer State. Instead he found the entire day consumed with a rancorous debate about where to locate a snack bar in the state capitol. "Even worse, the majority whip was in jail," he observed.

Nevertheless, three years after his disappointing introduction to policymaking in Tennessee, the legislature had enacted the biggest education reform in generations, a significant health care overhaul, and put in place new ethical safeguards for better government. Despite the shallowness and puffery that surrounds politics, was Purcell's message.



"all of us have been uplifted and educated by this apparently self-absorbed system." Purcell, who after leaving elective office served as director of a Vanderbilt University center on children and families and as director of the Harvard Kennedy School's Institute of Politics, (to p. 6)

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 ROUNDTABLE'S EUROPEAN STUDY MISSION - JUNE 17-28

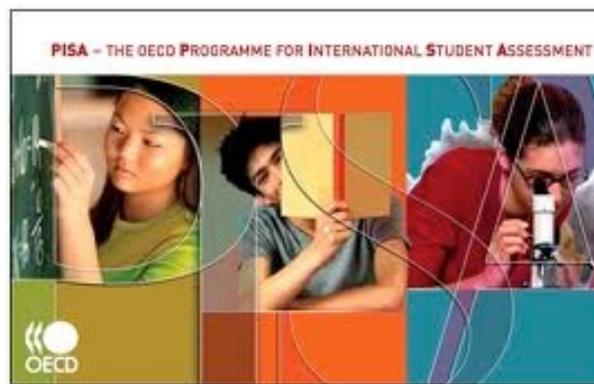
The end of June will find 25 Roundtable members examining three different educational environments, those of Finland, France, and England. Built around a meeting with OECD officials to discuss international assessment results for 15-year-olds according to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), this study mission will look at schools in Finland (where large-scale assessment is almost unknown and teachers are given a great deal of freedom to develop instructional programs to achieve national goals), France (traditionally the very model of a top-down ap-

proach to educational administration), and England (which is experimenting with "academies" and "free schools," very similar to

what Americans think of as charter schools).

Embassy and ministry officials from the three nations have helped Roundtable staff and its travel partner, Education First, arrange visits with schools and with national and local officials.

Regular blogs and posts from this experience will be provided on the Roundtable website.



## FIFTH ROUNDTABLE DELEGATION VISITS CHINESE SCHOOLS

Since 2008, nearly 150 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 have visited Chinese schools and met with Chinese educators and national and regional leaders. The purpose? To learn more about China, explore Chinese culture, and expand the teaching of Chinese language and culture in the United States.

Roundtable members have visited Heilongjiang Province (abutting Siberia, with a population of around 20 million), Hebei Province (surrounding Beijing, a vast agricultural area stretching out to the Mongolian grasslands with a population of 60 million), Guangxi Province (in Southern China, bordering Vietnam, a province with a population of 50 million), Tianjin (the sixth largest city in China, with a population of more than 12 million), and Jiangsu province, with its capital city of Nanjing, a great historic city that served as the Chinese capital in both the 3rd and the 20th centuries.



During these visits, delegates routinely visit Beijing sites like the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, the Great Hall of the People, the Lama Temple (right), as well as provincial historic spots such as the Cathedral of St. Sophia (Harbin), the Mausoleum of Sun Yat-sen (Nanjing), or the Mongolian grasslands (Hebei). They meet with national leaders and educational luminaries and enjoy impressive student performances.

In the regions, they visit elementary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education. These visits bring vividly into focus how impressive China is and how hard its students work. After visiting schools in Harbin, Scarsdale, New York superintendent Michael McGill concluded: "Everyone in China recognizes that education is the path to a better life and a stronger nation. They figure they've got time and numbers on their side. We'll have to make up in quality what we lack in size and numbers."

These study missions provide indelible impressions of life in China. Take Jiangsu and its capital city Nanjing. The province and the city are stunningly beautiful and impressive. Jiangsu is one of the wealthiest provinces in the Middle Kingdom, with traditional income from agriculture and produce now supplemented by thriving high technology industries, petrochemicals, and automobile and aerospace parts production. Provincial factories have created partnerships with Ford Motor Company, Volkswagen, and Volvo to manufacture and assemble automobiles for distribution in China.

It can be quite overwhelming for the American educator. On one hand it seems global and complex. The Chinese are remarkable and generous hosts. They embrace American visitors. They are rightly proud of a great culture that stretches back through the millennia. Although shocking poverty remains amidst emerging plenty, China is determined to take its place among global leaders.

Yet in a lot of ways it is very simple. There are now seven billion people on this planet. Twenty percent of them live in China. The Western world can no longer afford to ignore this emerging giant.

SUPERINTENDENT AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER: INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS

By the time he retired as superintendent of schools in Springfield, Massachusetts, wrote Peter Negrone in *The Superintendent's Fieldbook*, he had concluded that superintendents cannot succeed in educating all children to high standards by concentrating on systems at the expense of teaching and learning. "We cannot lead learning if we leave the core of instruction unquestioned, unexamined, and essentially mysterious."

*Richard Elmore addresses Roundtable*



Negrone was in the vanguard of a movement that came to understand that superintendents must become instruc-

tional leaders who view time spent in schools and the classroom as the most precious and productive use of their talent and energy.

**Instructional Rounds**

Richard Elmore, faculty co-chair of Harvard's Doctorate in Educational Leadership program and co-author of *Instructional Rounds in Education*, led the Roundtable in a discussion of instructional rounds, which his book describes as sitting "at the intersection of three current popular approaches to the improvement of teaching and learning—walkthroughs, networks, and district improvement strategies." Classroom observation, under different names—walkthroughs, learning walks, classroom visitations, peer observation—is at the heart of instructional improvement.

"Unfortunately, the practice of walkthroughs has become corrupted in many ways by confounding it with supervision and evaluation," says Elmore and his co-authors. Descending on classrooms with checklists of things to do is "antithetical to the purposes of instructional rounds and profoundly unprofessional."

**Building a Profession.** "My goal," announced Elmore at the Roundtable meeting, "is to build a profession. (*to p. 5*).

SUPERINTENDENT AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER: INSTRUCTIONAL COACHING

Top athletes, singers, and dancers have coaches. Should you? That was the provocative lead to an article in the October 3 issue of *The New Yorker* by Atul Gawande, a brilliant writer and physician who described how he came to feel he could benefit from coaching after experiencing what he felt was a "plateau" in his development as a surgeon. His epiphany involved realizing that he'd just paid "a kid out of college" to look at his tennis serve while people like tennis great Rafael Nadal are accompanied by coaches everywhere they go.

What about other professionals? Gawande cites the work of Jim Knight in improving coaching for teachers.

Knight told the Roundtable that instructional coaches are onsite professional developers who teach educators how to use proven teaching methods. They employ a variety of procedures to foster widespread, high-quality implementation of interventions, providing "on-the-job learning."

Coaches take a partnership approach. They respect teachers' professionalism and focus their efforts on conversations that lead to creative, practical applications of re-

search-based practices. Instructional coaches are thought of as colleagues and friends who listen with care.

*Jim Knight during seminar with Roundtable*



**The Meeting of Two Minds.** At its core, instructional coaching involves two people: the classroom teacher and the coach. Coaches work one-on-one (*to p. 5*).

## ELMORE (CONT'D)

It takes about 10,000 hours to become competent in complex work, Elmore pointed out. "It's easy to criticize education schools, but the criticism is completely misplaced."

The issue is that the only way to learn how to practice in a profession is to learn under real conditions. The challenge is to "build fluency in a core set of practices under close supervision." Instructional rounds are one way to approach building fluency in core practices, noted Elmore.

Pointing to what was Community District #2 in New York City as a model, he noted that the district spent about 10-15% of its budget on professional development, most at the classroom level. "This wasn't the car wash model of spray and pray, but a lot of boots on the ground worried about coaching and paying attention to what students were learning."

Community District 2's efforts involved what Elmore called "brutal conversations about classroom practice. They had none of these conventions about saying nice things first. Then I realized that this is what real professions do."

**Differences in Classroom Performance.** Elmore argued that research indicates the proportion of variance in student gains in reading and mathematics is dominated by what happened in individual classrooms, compared to differences between schools, or between students. We find it hard to acknowledge this reality, said Elmore, although no other nation demonstrates such a large discrepancy between classrooms.

**From "Blaming the Victim" to "Owning the Problem."** The challenge is how to go from "blaming the victim" to "owning the problem." Canada might point the way ahead, he thought. Canada has jumped from 10th to 4th in the world in mathematics achievement with a common core curriculum and a commitment to high-quality curriculum. "Canadian teachers taken to ordinary, garden-variety classrooms in American schools are horrified at what they see," he reported. One Canadian told Elmore: "I can't report this in the language of rounds, but you people don't have any curriculum, do you?"

The Canadian success he attributed to a common curriculum and "powerful, driven intellectuals who enter teaching." Such a culture in the United States will have to be developed "*mano a mano*, one at a time, retail, not wholesale." Instructional rounds offer an "opportunity to attack the issue on a retail basis." The issue, he said, is that in most classrooms there is no relationship between what the teacher describes as going on and what is actually happening.

**Three Elements.** The instructional core, he emphasized, focuses on three elements: the student, the teacher, and the content. The general rule is that there are only three ways to influence achievement --and if you intervene in one of these elements, you have to intervene in the other two as well. Individual professional development does not address the need for team building. Changing content without teaching improvements produces low-level teaching of higher-level content. And good teachers with bad materials produce bored students.

Is there a protocol for instructional rounds? Yes. It consists of three simple questions. It's beauty lies in both its simplicity and its complexity. The questions are: What is the teacher doing? What is the student doing? What is the task?

## KNIGHT (CONT'D)

and in small groups with teachers in their classrooms, providing guidance, training, and other resources. Together, they focus on practical strategies for engaging students and improving learning.

At the heart of coaching is the intent to be helpful, Knight told the Roundtable. You're asking people to do difficult things that challenge their identity, threaten their sense of themselves, and may upset their status. You need their commitment—"unless they are committed to the work, they will resist." Coaches need "powerful emotional intelligence" to succeed.

**Significance of Interaction.** Effective coaching depends on how people interact with each other and is guided by seven principles: equality, choice, voice, reflection, dialogue, praxis, and reciprocity. "These principles ground the way we interact with teachers," he observed.

"Most of the things that work in practice revolve around dialog, partnerships, and equality," Knight pointed out. But, he lamented, "most of what is going on to bring school reform to scale points in a different direction, toward school turnaround strategies that rely on mass firings."

**10,000 Hours.** Coaching, he emphasized, is about goal setting, developing explicit skills, precision, modeling and deliberative practice. "You need goals, but you also need a very clear practice of current reality," because you need to be clear about what needs to change.

"It takes 10,000 hours to become expert at anything," Knight observed. "Talent can only get you so far. In fact, in the end, talent is over-rated." Complete summaries of Elmore and Knight available at: [www.superintendentsforum.org](http://www.superintendentsforum.org)

pointed to a notable development during the last 80 years, the strengthening of effective local government. This developed, he said, “because of people’s expectations and the willingness of public servants to meet those expectations.”

*Steve Ladd (Elk Grove, CA) on left chats with Purcell as Bob Koff (Washington University, St. Louis) looks on*



**Education: The Most Important Thing We Do**

“In my first campaign for mayor of Nashville, I campaigned on a platform that education is the most important thing we do,” said Purcell. “Most people still believe that. And most politicians who understand what is going on in the world understand that too.” Taxes, he acknowledged, are “toxic.” But, he said, that’s nothing new. “They always have been toxic, but in the end, the public always comes through.”

Increasingly, predicted Purcell, the public will turn to educators as the experts on what to do about schools. “I don’t underestimate the challenges, but right now people believe education is critical. They know it is an important element in how we respond to challenges of jobs, crime, and sustaining a democratic way of life. No one is satisfied with our schools -- nor should they be, nor should we want them to be.”

However, he continued, “Although 20 years ago people thought they knew what to do about the schools, that is no longer true. They don’t believe anyone outside the schools really knows. So it comes back to the people in this room. You are the experts; you are the only people in authority who can fill this vacuum, which otherwise will be filled with uncivil and bitter words.”

“No one is better equipped to fill this void than you. People across the board want expert contributions to this debate. You have an opportunity in front of you today that no superintendents have ever had before.”

But, he warned during a Q&A session, as a parent and a public official he knew that very real problems existed in K-12 education. He found it frustrating, for example, that after the Tennessee legislature agreed on a new program to provide for technology in every classroom, schools in his home district (Nashville-Davidson County) ignored the statute. School officials tried to tell him that the law he had written did not mean what he thought it meant! School leaders need to become more savvy at reading the public mood and more adroit in responding to it was his point.

*Roundtable co-chair Gloria Davis (Decatur, IL) leads discussion*



*John Brademas and James Egan (Southwestern Wisconsin School District) exchange views*



BRADEMAS (CONT'D)

successful government efforts to build a nation during the 19th and 20th centuries, he argued that leaders who believed in restrained but effective government had built roads, railroads, airports, schools, the internet, and colleges and universities not only to promote commerce and industry but to provide for the common good. "Twice in my lifetime," he said, "government saved Wall Street from itself."

**Schools and the moral arc of history**

American leaders took these initiatives, he argued, because they "recognized Martin Luther King's prophetic insight: 'The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice.'"

"Schools and colleges and universities are part of the moral arc of American history," he insisted. "They have slowly -- but steadily and surely -- bent this nation toward justice."

"I believe," said Brademas, that "our generation of Americans also has a rendezvous with destiny. As we approach that rendezvous, I want you to be of good cheer. If we keep faith with the better angels of our nature, America's best days still lie ahead."

"What is clear to me," he concluded, "is that the success of this generation of Americans in meeting the challenges ahead will depend intimately on the quality and strength of our nation's schools -- and on the sense of decency and values that the men and women in our classrooms transmit to our children."

HOW WELL ARE WE DOING? LET'S LOOK AT THE DATA

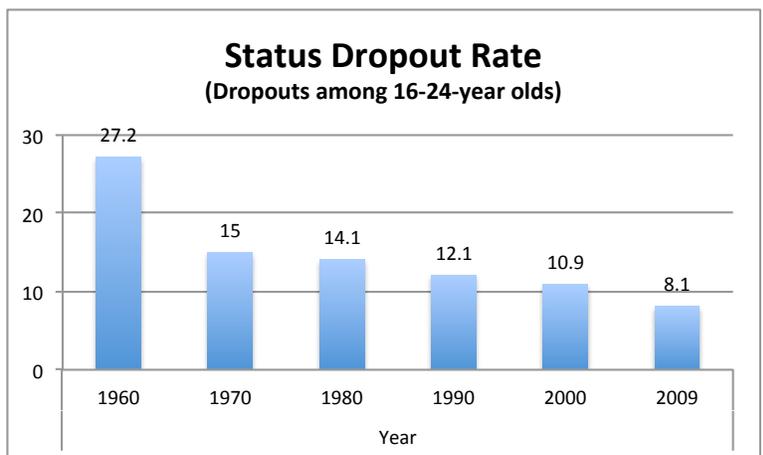
For years, American public education has been subjected to unrelenting criticism: Spending has been out of control for a century; student achievement is flat; and American students fail international assessments. A panel from the Horace Mann League, made up mostly of Roundtable members, argued at ASCD's annual meeting that apples-and-oranges comparisons obscure achievement improvements and value for the dollar and that American student performance is world-class when global analyses control for student poverty.

**Martha Bruckner** (Council Bluffs, IA) chaired the panel. Horace Mann League board member **Charles Fowler** presented data showing that the achievement gap persists because both white and black students show marked average improvement. While far from satisfactory, the average performance of black students now exceeds white students' performance as recently as 1992. Poverty is a challenge and the need for greater investment in preschool programs is self-evident, said Fowler.

**Steve Rasmussen** (Issaquah, WA) pointed out that international rankings highlight small and statistically insignificant differences, according to the well-regarded, non-partisan Brookings Institution. He also noted that analyses indicate that, when PISA results for 15-year-olds are disaggregated by poverty level, American students consistently lead the world. Analyses also indicate that American schools produce 25% of the top performing PISA science students in the world, noted Rasmussen (see graphic, p. 8).

Roundtable director **James Harvey** said that critics who claim Americans are spending more and more on education and getting less and less ignore impressive rates of

growth in high school completion accompanied by declining dropout rates. Taking the critics seriously, he argued, would require schools to dismiss students with disabilities and those speaking a language at home other than English, while throwing 90% of the young women now competing off high school sports teams. At the same time, America would revert to high school graduation rates of 50% or less and to a reborn "separate but equal" school system throughout the South in which spending on black students during the 1930s amounted to only 33% of per-pupil spending on white students -- and only about 66% as the landmark 1954 *Brown* U.S. Supreme Court decision approached. Presentations available at: [www.superintendentsforum.org](http://www.superintendentsforum.org)



HERE AND THERE

**New People**

In 2012, several new members joined the Roundtable: Martha Bruckner, Council Bluffs, IA; David Gentile, Millville Public Schools, NJ; Matthew Keegan, Norwell Schools, MA; and Jerry Wilson, Fort Collins, CO.

We are also pleased to add Apex learning and Pearson to the Roundtable’s corporate sponsors.

Welcome!

**Summer Meeting**

The Roundtable’s summer meeting will be held June 1-2 in Cherry Hill, NJ and Pemberton Schools. Featuring internationally known school finance expert Henry Levin of Teachers College, Columbia University, it will address cost effectiveness in education. David Hespe, chief of staff to the NJ commissioner of education will brief

the Roundtable on educational change in the Garden State.

**Fall Meeting**

The Roundtable will gather again October 26 and 28 in San Francisco to examine technology and neuroscience.

**China 2012**

The College Board has yet to announce travel dates.

**Superintendent’s Fieldbook**

The Superintendent’s Fieldbook, a best-seller for Corwin Press written and edited by four founding members of the Roundtable, will be re-issued in 2013. Reflections from Roundtable members to be included in this volume will make a significant contribution to this text, which is widely used in graduate administrator preparation programs..

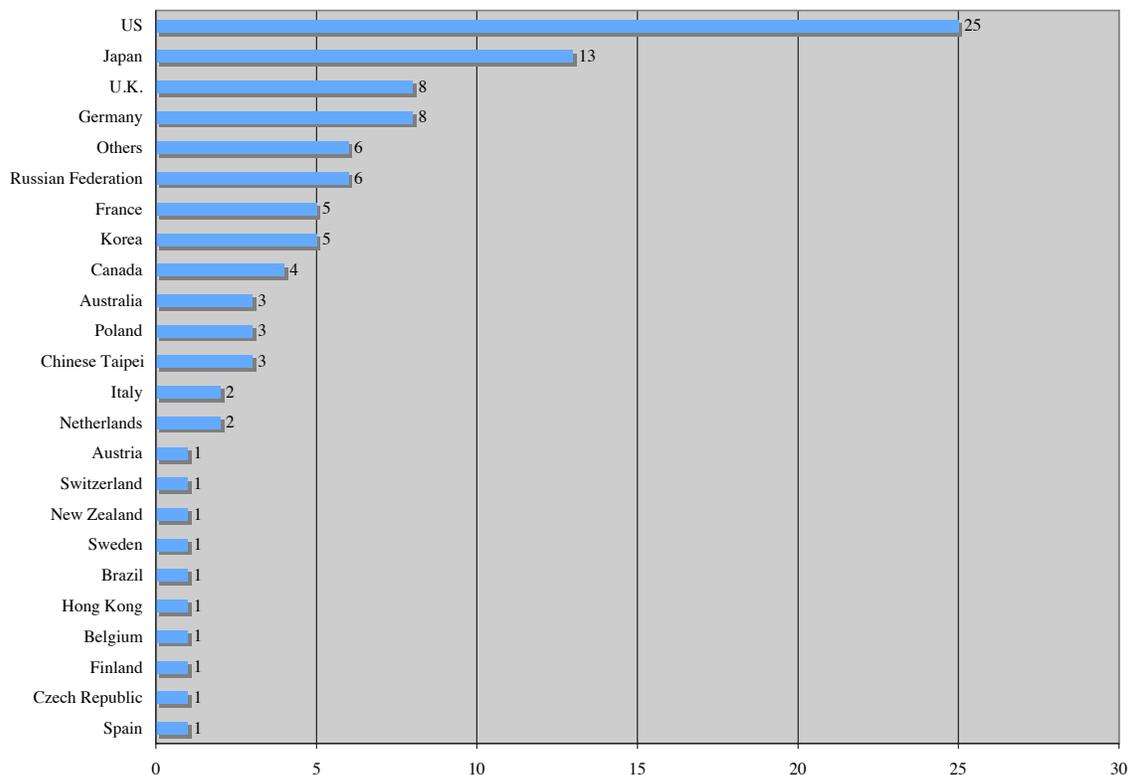
**Roundtable Steering Committee**

- Gloria Davis, Decatur, IL (Co-Chair)
- Stephen Ladd (Elk Grove, CA (Co-Chair)
- Marianne Bartley (Lebanon, PA)
- Yvonne Curtis (Forest Grove, OR)
- Mark Freeman (Shaker Heights, OH)
- James Harvey (Seattle, WA)
- Morton Sherman (Alexandria, VA)
- Bernard Taylor (Grand Rapids, MI)

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**U.S. Produces 25% of World’s Top Science 15-Year-Olds according to PISA Assessment**



Source: OECD, *Top of the Class*, 2009 (p. 21)