

Roundtable News



Discussing the homeless and hungry at Fall 2015 meeting. (l to r): Sherrie Gahn, principal, Whitney Elementary, Las Vegas; Greg Thornton, superintendent, Baltimore City Schools; Charles Fowler, president LeadSchools, N.H.; and Patricia Talton, CEO, Northwest Leadership Foundation, Tacoma, WA

- *What does an award-winning journalist who has interviewed every Secretary of Education have to say about the state of American education?*
- *How can schools and communities come together to deal with the challenges of traumatized children?*
- *Can education be re-conceived as a "civil right" not simply a funding stream or program?*
- *Amidst skepticism that a Congress riven with partisanship can get anything done, is there any hope for renewal*

of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (aka NCLB)?

- *How can we stretch the boundaries of the Roundtable's thinking in dealing with the educational challenges the nation faces?*

These were the issues that gripped Roundtable members at the Fall 2015 meeting, co-sponsored by New York University's John Brademas Center.

Whether during formal presentations, panel discussions, directed small-group conversations, or around the coffee pot during breaks, the ques-

tions were always the same: What is involved in helping all children learn? Where are we in terms of developing the whole child? Can we buttress success by finding models on which to build? What do we do next to help schools and units of local government break out of the silos in which they find themselves?

This issue of *Roundtable News* summarizes these discussions.

A JOURNALIST LOOKS AT AMERICAN SCHOOLS

By the time he retired just a few days before the Roundtable meeting, John Merrow had had a 41-year bird's eye view of American schools as a journalist with NPR and PBS's NewsHour. Armed with a doctorate in education from Harvard, he'd served as a critical friend throughout his career, hailed by Jim Lehrer, former host of PBS NewsHour as "quite simply, the leading education journalist in America."

Merrow was in a reflective mood as he kicked off the meeting, engagingly putting on a PBS hat to play the role of his successor interviewing him on what he'd learned -- and then removing the hat to respond.



John Merrow, reflects on 41 years covering schools as a journalist with NPR and PBS's NewsHour

Among the highlights of the discussion:

Q. What's your big takeaway after 41 years?

A. People used to send kids to school because that's where the knowledge was and for socialization and custodial care. Today we have the internet, apps for socialization, and custodial care is a shaky justification for schools. Schools have not adapted to these changes.

Q. You've interviewed every US Secretary of Education. Who was the most effective?

A. Richard Riley, by a landslide.

Q. The least effective?

A. Lauro Cavazos—in over his head while education was run from the White House.

Q. The meanest?

A. I'll take the Fifth on that, but William Bennett was capable of saying very harsh things.

Q. Biggest changes since 1974?

A. P.L. 94-142 brought children with disabilities fully into our schools.

Q. What's your favorite saying?

A. We need a system that asks each child, "How are you intelligent?" not "How intelligent are you?"

Q. Lesson from NCLB?

A. The lesson was clear: Washington can't run public education, but Democrats concluded, 'Republicans can't, but WE can.'

Q. What lies ahead?

A. Common Core is embedded in states, albeit under different names. The opt-out movement is not going to go away unless leaders change approach. Tying teacher evaluations to testing was Arne Duncan's biggest mistake.

Q. What's your biggest regret?

A. The inability to pry loose the documents that would have proven Michelle Rhee's D.C. schools engaged in the same test-fixing practices that Atlanta prosecuted.

Q. Biggest fear?

A. Schools will remain isolated from the larger society and expected to solve problems for which they are not equipped. Stop blathering about the "achievement gap" while isolating children by race and economics. Community schools and the like are essential.

Thinking out loud during question time: Merrow thought that education journalism had improved but acknowledged room for improvement. . . We can't fix our problems with cheap tests that cost 15 cents per 100. Hartz spends 10 times as much testing flea powder. . . Part of Secretary Duncan's legacy will be to see Congress clip the wings of his successors.

This award-winning journalist concluded his impressive presentation by predicting a major scandal erupting around charter schools in the not-too-distant future.

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THE CHALLENGES FACING TODAY'S STUDENTS

The Roundtable's groundbreaking *Iceberg Effect* report, issued with the Horace Mann League in January 2015, illuminated an America with startlingly high rates of childhood poverty, inequity, and social stress and very low levels of support for young families. The October meeting offered an opportunity to explore these dynamics at the local level, with presentations that provided troubling insights into the depths of homelessness, hunger, and even child trafficking in major American cities.

Homeless Elementary Children
Sherrie Gahn, principal of Whitney Elementary in Las Vegas, presides over a student population in which 80% of kindergarten to 5th-graders are homeless—living with relatives, in homeless motels or shelters, or even on the streets, and in cars. Her school, as representative of schools dealing with nearly one million homeless children, has been featured on CBS Evening News. Whitney, with a transiency rate of 32%, enrolls about 600 students, nearly 90% of them eligible for free- and reduced-price meals, and almost 80% children of color, primarily Hispanic.

CBS link: <http://tinyurl.com/hhclcbcr>

In a gripping presentation, Gahn described the challenges she faced in meeting students' health, nutrition, and hygienic needs, the school's commitment to get these kids through school, and her fear about what happens to these children when they leave Whitney, when they will be exposed to the predations of the streets and the fact that some parents feel they need to engage in drug-dealing or prostitution to put food on the table.

A city on edge

Gregory Thornton, relatively newly arrived in Baltimore City presides

over a school system with a budget of \$1.34 billion, 5,200 teachers, and about 85,000 students, 90% of them students of color, and 80% eligible for free- and reduced-price meals. Chronic absenteeism is a challenge, with a rate of between 20% and 24% in recent years. The on-time graduation rate is about 70%.

Thornton described a city on edge following the April 2015 death of Freddie Gray, Jr. while in policy custody—a death that provoked major street demonstrations, school closings, and indictments against six police officers. Already providing free breakfasts and lunches to most, BCPS is expanding its offerings to include dinners and meals, 12 months a year, for the entire family. It hopes to work out an agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to permit parents and guardians to participate in the meals program, since so many families, living in “food deserts” without access to fresh and wholesome meats and produce, are destitute.

Adolescents on the street

Patricia Talton, president and CEO of the faith-based Northwest Leadership Foundation in Tacoma, a gritty community that is one of the largest ports on the Pacific coast, works with dispossessed youth to give them better pathways and hope for the future.



Sherrie Gahn, Whitney Elementary, Las Vegas, and Greg Thornton, Baltimore City, address meeting the needs of urban children

The examples she cited elicited worried frowns throughout the Roundtable attendees. There were homeless teenagers on the street, many abused adolescents who have fled their parents. One, in particular, stood out: Ginger, abused by a step-father took to the streets, where it is clear a young pimp is grooming her, promising Ginger, a girl who has never had anyone care for her, meals, clothes, and a warm hotel room.

John Merrow is correct. Blathering on about an “achievement gap” and pretending to care about children while belittling educators, ignoring these brutal realities, and cutting funds for the state and local agencies charged with dealing with these problems, enables and fosters the sorts of inequalities outlined in *The Iceberg Effect*.

EDUCATION AS A CIVIL RIGHT

Attorney Jack Jennings spent three decades helping write major school legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives before going on to establish the highly regarded Center on Education Policy. His 2015 book, *Presidents, Congress, and the Public Schools* (Harvard Education Press), draws on that rich experience and suggests new directions for the future.

At the October meeting, Jennings spent an afternoon with the Roundtable to lay out his thinking. His views are grounded in the belief that in the United States, perhaps the most diverse nation in history, public schools are one of the few common experiences shared by most Americans. More than 90% of the nation's children attend public schools, and the overwhelming majority of tomorrow's leaders, workers, and other citizens will have been educated in these institutions.

Three Strategies

Three major movements have defined national efforts to improve schools in the last half century, said Jennings — equity, school choice, and standards-based accountability. Equity approaches included Title I, Bilingual Education, Title IX, P. L. 94-142 and IDEA. Choice included magnet schools and support for charters. Standards-based accountability is represented both by *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top*.

Not one of the three approaches has met the hopes of its sponsors, said Jennings, and standards and accountability wound up, in his phrase, being “hi-jacked by testing.”

The most effective programs in achieving their goals, those promoting equity for women and for students with disabilities, point the way ahead, he argued. It is time, he said, that access to an education of high quality be

A Primer on School Aid

National support for education has a long history. Milestones include:

Northwest Ordinance (1787)—set aside land in northwest territories (today's midwest) for schools

Morrill Act (1862)—signed into law by President Lincoln to establish land-grant universities

Second Morrill Act (1890)—established black land-grant universities

Smith-Hughes Act (1917)—Federal support for vocational programs

G.I. Bill (1944)—funded college education for 8 million veterans.

National Defense Education Act (1958)—supports college loans and math, science, and foreign language instruction.

Impact Aid (1960)—provides payments to ease burden on districts with Federal facilities

Civil Rights Act (1964)—prohibits discrimination based on race.

Elementary and Secondary Act (1965)—major program of aid for disadvantaged students.

Higher Education Act (1965)—authorizes loans, grants, & work-study programs, and Upward Bound

Higher Education Amendments (1972)—establishes Pell Grants and a new Title IX to guarantee equal opportunities for women.

P.L. 94-142 (1975)—promised Federal support for “excess costs” of educating children with disabilities

Department of Education (1980)—established education as a cabinet-level department.

No Child Left Behind (2001)—redefines Title I of ESEA around accountability and testing.

Race to the Top (2009)—promoted Common Core and accountability with \$4 billion in stimulus funding

Every Student Succeeds Act (2015)—extends ESEA while reining in testing and accountability provisions of NCLB and Race to the Top

understood as a civil right that students and parents could defend in Federal court. By this strategy, education would become not a program or a funding stream, but a constitutionally protected right.



Jack Jennings

Changing Course

Whether achieved through a constitutional amendment (a slow and laborious process), a U.S. Supreme Court decision, or legislative enactment as in Title IX, the objective would be to outline national priorities in education and then make Federal funding contingent on states buying in to these Federal purposes.

Such an approach offers several attractive possibilities: opening up states as laboratories for invention, getting Federal, state, and local governments all marching in the same direction, and ridding education of the compulsion of Federal officials to dictate how states and localities function. Federal funds would flow in support of Federal purposes, while accountability would be enforced from the bottom-up by parents intent on seeing their children's constitutional rights upheld.

COALITION OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

The Coalition for Community Schools is an alliance of national, state and local organizations in education, youth development, family support, health and human services, government and philanthropy. Offering a place to start thinking about school-community collaboration, the Coalition includes a number of models sharing a common set of principles: fostering strong partnerships, accountability for results, high expectations, building on community strengths, and embracing diversity and innovative solutions.

In a compelling keynote address, Martin Blank, president of the Institute for Educational Leadership, described the Coalition.

A Strategy, not a Program

"It's a strategy," he emphasized, "not a program," one aimed at helping lead-

ers work across boundaries by connecting schools, families, and communities. Established in 1997, the Coalition network of 200 partners works to establish "schools as centers of flourishing communities."

Responding directly to the issues laid out in *The Iceberg Effect*—child poverty, family stress, homelessness, and disparate outcomes in terms of discipline and health, Blank emphasized the importance of a "web of support" for distressed families. The partnerships, he said, build on opportunities and support, expanded learning, and family and community engagement.

Citing examples in Baltimore and Oakland, Blank argued that community school approaches lead to high quality instructional programs, comprehensive learning supports, and engaged families producing graduates

who are ready for college, careers, and citizenship. A properly scaled-up local system, he said, requires leadership from schools, communities, and intermediary organizations. It's a tall order, but the results are (*cont'd p. 7*)



Martin Blank

REAUTHORIZING ESEA



(l to r) Allie Kimmel, Sen. Murray's staff; James Harvey, Roundtable staff; and William Knudsen, Sen. Alexander's staff, discuss ESEA renewal

As the Roundtable gathered last October in Washington, an air of gloom hung over the education community about the prospects for reauthorizing the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, especially Title I of the legislation, known as *No Child Left Behind* since 2001.

NCLB had expired in 2007, but, despite bipartisan agreement that it was a failure, Congress and the White House had been unable to agree on legislation to renew

it. Several issues complicated finding a way forward: Many members of the House and Senate were concerned about over-testing and inappropriate sanctions levied by "annual yearly progress" requirements. Democrats wanted to maintain pressure on schools for performance metrics, which conservative Republicans thought of as Federal over-reach. Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, supported by civil rights groups, was intent on maintaining as much of the power accumulated through *Race to the Top* as he could—a situation that had led Senator Lamar Alexander (R.-Tenn), himself a former Secretary of Education, to charge that the department was acting like a national school board. All of this was complicated by a Congress that seemed unable to pass legislation and was dysfunctional to a remarkable degree—shutting down government at one point, with a GOP minority in the House that had succeeded (just days before the Roundtable met) in forcing the resignation, mid-Congress, of the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

In this environment, two Senate leaders were on the verge of working a legislative miracle. (*cont'd p. 7*)

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

As enlightening and provocative as these presentations were, they left undefined a role for the Roundtable—or for superintendents—in this complex and challenging environment. How to connect schools to the community? How to define a role for a small non-profit such as the Roundtable? Should NSR follow up on *The Iceberg Effect*? Were there other substantive issues to which we should pay attention? What about NSR's experience in examining education abroad?

On the closing morning a series of excellent discussions helped members work their way through these issues.

Education Policy Fellows Program

Helen Malone of the Institute for Educational Leadership described a state-based EPFP program operating in some 17 states that focuses on policy, leadership development, and networking to improve school outcomes. The program includes state-based programming and a national conference.

Global EPFP

An offshoot of the state-based program, the Global EPFP program provides a year-long on-line seminar on a single nation combined with a site visit to each year's nation. In the past, GEFPF has examined the United Kingdom and China and plans on visiting Bhutan in 2016.

Student Trauma

Sunil Mansukhani of Raben Associates, a DC-based public affairs firm, drew our attention to *Paper Tigers* (<https://vimeo.com/110821029>), a documentary about success in addressing high school students' trauma. He asked for Roundtable backing in drafting a letter supporting community-based programming in ESSA and to join a new coalition, Futures without Violence, that planned to insist that presidential candidates address the trauma of ACE (adverse childhood experiences).



Sunil Mansukhani

Challenging the Isolation of Program Silos

Michael Usdan, former IEL president, made the case that education has traditionally operated in self-imposed isolation from other units of government and that the silos of government programs need to be integrated.



Michael Usdan

Cuba

Roundtable member Claire Sheff-Cohn offered a presentation on Cuba, suggesting that the renewal of diplomatic relations offered us an opportunity to lend American expertise to Cuban schools and to learn how this impoverished nation had developed universal literacy.

NAEP's Proficiency Benchmark

Director James Harvey reminded members of the analysis members supported in July (in Chicago) to explore how many students in foreign nations could meet the NAEP proficiency benchmark. NSR members continue to be intrigued with the question.

Next Steps

The members agreed to support the trauma initiative, to orient the July 2016 meeting in San Francisco around challenging program isolation, to look into a study mission to Cuba, and to continue with the NAEP analysis.

After exploring options for Cuba, it became clear that the Spring of 2017 was the earliest feasible date to mount a study mission to Cuba.

Roundtable staff helped edit the letter to presidential campaigns, which was mailed on February 2, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/jrgtvk7>

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS (CONT'D)

impressive:

- children ready to enter school;
- consistent attendance;
- engaged learning;
- engaged families and engaged schools;
- academic success;
- improved physical, social, and emotional health of students;
- safe, supportive, and stable learning environments;
- communities as desirable places to live; and
- graduates prepared for college, work, and citizenship.

Research, including the Coalition's case studies and recent evaluations from ChildTrends, supports the power of the community schools model. The challenge now is to move from talking the talk to walking the walk.

Blank's complete presentation is available at:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/vrh79v55tovfate/M.Blank.pptx?dl=0>



Talisa Dixon, superintendent Cleveland Heights-University Heights, Ohio, leads discussion of community schools and other responses to "Iceberg Effect"

RE-AUTHORIZING ESEA (CONT'D)

Alexander and Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash), chair and ranking member, respectively, of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, had worked assiduously to develop a bipartisan solution to the ESEA renewal dilemma. As the Roundtable met, the Senate was in conference with the House, to iron out differences between the Senate bill and the much more partisan House bill.



Charles Fowler, Lead Schools, makes a point about ESEA renewal to Senate staff

Because of the delicate political environment, William Knudsen from Senator Alexander's staff and Allie Kimmel from Senator Murray's provided an off-the-record briefing to the Roundtable. They were optimistic about the legislative situation, reasonably confident the conferees could agree on a compromise that would do away with the most punitive aspects of NCLB, maintain "guard rails" to require continued disaggregation of data, and reinforce Congressional opposition to executive department over-reach.

Roundtable members agreed on a statement of support for this bipartisan effort and forwarded it to the conferees.

As it turned out, the optimism of Knudsen and Kimmel was justified. At the 11th hour, the House and Senate provided overwhelming bipartisan approval to the compromise, which President Obama gladly signed into law on December 10.

Here and There

Twitter

Follow the Roundtable on Twitter (right). Here are some "tweet" highlights of recent months:

- Just 2 students worldwide got perfect score in AP Physics. Jimmy Qin Seminole High School in Florida is one of them <http://fw.to/iJwTymm>
- Cedrick Argueta, Los Angeles senior, gets perfect score on AP Calculus, just one of 12 in world <http://tinyurl.com/jycvbd>
- VAM: A flawed policy fiasco, says former AERA president David Berliner <http://tinyurl.com/jqmccfb>
- 60% of superintendents expect more opt-outs and opposition to Common Core <http://tinyurl.com/hpg5f7w>

New Members

New members in 2016 include: Jeffrey Baier, Los Altos, CA; Yvonne Caamal Canul, Lansing, MI; Charles Dumais, Woodbridge, CT; Mary Kay Going, Moreland, CA; Laura Kagy, Attica, OH; John Kopicki, Altoona, PA; Tammy Mangus, Monticellos, NY; Ralph Marino, Jr., Hewlett, NY; Thomas McMorran, Easton-Redding, CT; Thomas Parker, Ecorse, MI; Alan Peterson, Merced, CA; Elizabeth Polito, Woodside, CA; Kathleen Smith, Brockton, MA; Nikki Woodson, Indianapolis, IN; Paul Zinni, Avon, MA

WELCOME!!

Calendar & Contact

July 15-17

Summer Meeting, San Francisco, CA
Getting Organized to Help Kids

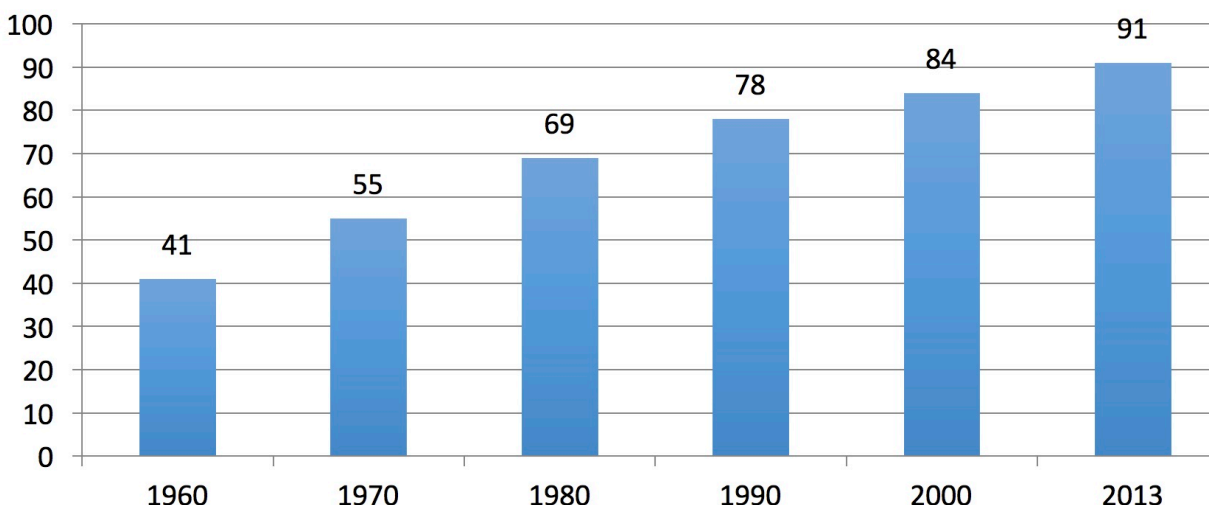
October 7-9

Fall Meeting, Washington, DC
School Governance

The Roundtable:

National Superintendents Roundtable
9425 35th Avenue, NE, Suite E
Seattle, WA 98115
206-526-5336
harvey324@earthlink.net
superintendentsforum.org
Twitter: @natsupers

Proportion of Americans 25-29 with a High School Diploma, 1960-2013



Source: National Center on Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2014