FREEWAY SEGREGATION, COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND THE URBAN POOR

Pat Williams-Boyd
College of Education, Eastern Michigan University
Professor, Department of Teacher Education
313 Porter
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197 USA
E mail: patwilliamsboyd@aol.com

Mary Margaret Sweeten
Eastern Michigan University
Adjunct, Department of Teacher Education
313 Porter
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197 USA
E mail: rgsmms@sbcglobal.net

Abstract

Although the charge to educate all United States students equitably is decades old, the reality of good schools particularly in high poverty urban settings is sporadic and random, born of acts of individual honor rather than norms of consistent excellence. High poverty urban schools present a contextual layering of challenges that coupled with the changes in economics, politics and demographics suggest that alone, schools cannot meet the needs presented by the most vulnerable students and families. However, collaboratively integrating the work of health and human service agencies, businesses and faith-based organizations, the nonacademic barriers to learning students experience can be removed. Using an ecological framework, this paper will examine aspects of two national community school models being used in conjunction with Detroit Public Schools, an urban center which has been characterized as rife with racial division, distrust and deeply-held animosity.

Key Words: *poverty, urban schools, community schools*

JEL Classification: 139

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Historical Context

The legacy of race and class taints the backdrop of the nation's understanding of Detroit, a city which is a picture of the rise and fall of America's middle class. Housing and neighborhood schools have been symbols of the city's persistent segregation. Prior to the waves of migration in the late 1800s, there appeared to be little contention between whites and blacks as long as blacks 'knew their place'. Immigrant waves of the 1920s brought newcomers from overseas who built and lived in homogenous ethnic neighborhoods while the 1940s brought southern white farmers who were scattered throughout the city. However between 1916 and 1930 an estimated one million black southern migrant workers came north with their dreams of equality and a better life; but they were met with stark social, political and economic inequities in education, in the work place and in their daily lives which denied the fulfillment of their hopes. By the 1950s segregation and restrictive covenants in housing excluded them from white neighborhoods, forcing them into older, more dilapidated inner city dwellings, those unwanted by white workers. Real estate agents did not show them houses in 'white' areas and those blacks who attempted to cross these somewhat invisible but indelible racial lines were met with open violence and hostility. (Sugrue,2011) Additionally, federal policy, which would not give loans to black workers who lived in racially diverse neighborhoods, since they were considered bad loan risks, did not encourage home ownership, only allowing black workers to rent rooms. Therefore, they were sent to an area that became known as Paradise Valley, soon a cultural hub of all black businesses that included churches, banks, newspapers, hotels, restaurants, clubs and other establishments. Black Bottom was the segregated next-door area in which they lived in substandard housing.

1.2 The Illusive Dream

In the main, the southern Blacks, skilled or otherwise, who came to Henry Ford's Detroit, were reluctantly and grudgingly hired but only for low-paying jobs. Their attempts at racial integration and equal opportunity in housing and in education were met with shared and open animosity and virulence. For the southern Whites who came brought with them their racial bigotry and distrust that were only nurtured by the separatist ideology that Ford nurtured in the unequal and inequitable towns he built which remain today, Inkster for the black folks and Dearborn for the Whites.

Yet the very industry that brought added vitality to Detroit aided in writing its requiem. In 1942 with the rise of the automobile, the city government built the nation's first freeway and a series of highways and deemed it necessary to take land from the least powerful to benefit the 'greater good'. Black Bottom, Paradise Valley and all the Black residences and establishments were bulldozed and Interstate 75 was constructed. Like a 'bridge to nowhere' for the people of these two areas, they were left homeless, without jobs or places of commerce, with people in government who were unconcerned. This was a stark initiation of 1960s desegregation, complete with the relative absence of planning.

The white middle class began fleeing to the suburbs for residential apartheid in Detroit was and is pervasive. The issues during these prosperous times were as politically complex as they were fragmented and as Thompson notes (2001) the auto plants, which were hotbeds of political and racial divisiveness in the 1950s, were in many ways harbingers of the future.

1.3 Downsizing, Deindustrialization and Decline of a City

What became a booming city of two million in the 1950s, fell to a population of 713,777 in 2010 with the exodus of whites followed by successful blacks to the suburbs. (U.S. Bureau of Census,2010) The automotive industry's downsizing, outsourcing, digitalization and deindustrialization caused the biggest fallout of foreclosures the city had ever seen. In one decade Detroit lost 185,393 students. (Seeyle & Katherine,2011) The once vibrant schools were closed, factories vacant, the streets strewn with rubbish, businesses boarded up and lots left vacant. The decentralization of the auto industry caused those neighborhoods closest to the large plants to lose nearly ninety percent of their population. Combined with the recent national and international economic downturn those families least able to leave the city for the suburbs remained, and they were left in the direst of living conditions.

1.4 A City's Needs

Writing about the late 1800's, historian Martin says, "The future of not only the migrants but of the city as a whole, depended on how the institutions of Detroit responded to the needs of the city's newest citizens." (Martin 2011) The same is true of Detroit today, but of the citizens who now remain. How are the institutions in the inner city responding to the complex and overlapping needs that are presented, particularly as this paper examines them through the lens of education? The place race and class play in the historical past as well as in the present must

not be ignored in the study of inner city poverty and in the examination of educating inner city youth.

2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

2.1 Urban Education

In general urban schools which are predominantly comprised of poor students of color, lag far behind students in the suburbs. Given the social construct of poverty, contemporary urban school bureaucracies have chosen not to respond to school personnel's, vis-à-vis teachers, organizational demands for new forms of governance and decision-making, nor to the curricular demands for reform and engagement, or to the parental and communal calls for responsiveness that would change the landscape of the neighborhood school. Thus studies such as "Urban Schools: The Challenge of Location and Poverty" continue to find the following: 1) Students in urban public schools compared less favorably than students in suburban schools on all education outcomes; 2) young adults who attend high poverty urban schools are much more likely to be living in poverty later in life than those who attend high poverty schools in other locations; and 3) school poverty concentration is consistently related to lower performance on every education outcome. (National Center for Education Statistics,1996:20)

For the first half of the twentieth century, perhaps urban students needed only enough education to prepare them to work on an assembly line. But because of decreased manufacturing demands at the turn of the twenty-first century, urban students found themselves without jobs, without skills, without the basic knowledge to support themselves or their families. (Mead and Rotherham,2007) Being born poor and living in the inner city have themselves become crimes for as public apathy increases and as the deficit model of reform continues to flourish, urban students and their schools continue to be underfunded, isolated spheres of transient note and obdurate neglect that bear little resemblance to a free and equal education for all.

2.2 Urban Students

A U.S. Department of Education report stated that in 1996 urban schools had larger enrollments than suburban or rural schools, that the teachers had fewer resources, less comparable levels of experiences and higher levels of absenteeism, a situation that has steadily declined. (Lippman and Burns,1996) Urban students present a contextual layering of challenges such as absenteeism, pregnancy, a lack

of classroom discipline, a defiance of authority, weapons possession, less attention to homework and more time spent watching television.

Many marginalized students in high poverty inner city schools like Detroit find themselves in communities of hopelessness and random violence, alienated from a safe cultural American mainstream to the extent that they feel unsafe in school and often also in the local neighborhood. Over 100,000 students bring weapons to school each day and more than forty students are killed or wounded with these weapons annually. (Sprague and Walker,2000) A study by the National Institute of Education showed that 40% of juvenile robberies and 36% of assaults against urban youth took place in schools. (Crowe,1991:3) Half of the students who do bring weapons to school indicate they do so for protection. How do urban schools protect their students beyond the current metal detectors, security guards and administrative staff? Further, with one-in-seven Americans living in or below poverty, can schools alone meet the complex needs presented by the most vulnerable students and families in our inner city neighborhoods? A local political commentator recently wrote, "We need to think seriously about what society needs to do for children who are born into non-nurturing environments." (Lessenberry,2010) To date, the greater society has responded to children who display antisocial, violent and overly aggressive behavior by punishing them which often leads down the pathway through the juvenile court, to school failure, dropping out of high school and further to becoming a social drop out.

This paper examines some of the work of two national models of a different kind of school--community schools, in particular the Children's Aid Society and Communities In Schools, as ways in which communities may collaboratively leverage resources and culturally and responsively engage the family in different avenues of reinvesting in their children, in their safety and in their education.

3. INTEGRATED SERVICES

3.1 Community Schools

Community schools address the nonacademic as well as academic barriers to teaching and learning by forming partnerships with the local school and community stakeholders. They access, join and collaboratively integrate needed services for the student and for the family seen as a whole through the school. The school becomes a hub of services from community- to health-, faith-, and service-based organizations that augment the work of the school. Often called 'wraparound' service--because they provide services such as employability, housing, medical care, early child care, tutoring, and social supports for the entire

family--community schools use the ecological model of school reform which sees each child-family as important and not as part of the problem, but rather as part of the solution.
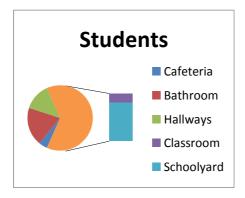
3.2 Children's Aid Society

Begun in Detroit in 1862 as the Home of the Friendless, today's Children's Aid Society (CAS) has some 3500 national and international community school sites. They collaborate with various health, human, medical, dental, immigration and social service agencies along with businesses, faith-based organizations, and in Detroit with the Detroit Public Schools and the Detroit Police Department to provide services to five schools and numerous other programs. According to CAS' Executive Director Billie Christian the Society services the largest number of youth in the city. (Interview May 10, 2010) CAS' primary goal is to promote student learning and development in order to prepare them for productive adulthood. When the organization is first asked to become engaged in the work of a school or an individual student-family, a needs assessment is initiated. With the national rise in gang violence, one of Detroit CAS' premier programs, the Anti-Gang Initiative administered a needs assessment of the local schools.
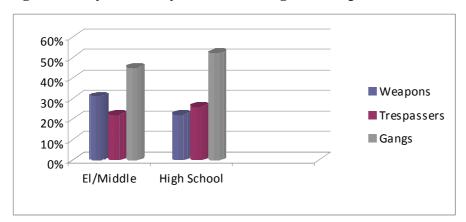
3.3 Assessing the Need

In this mixed-methods survey written by Detroit CAS'Gang Awareness Prevention Program (GAPP) and the Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative's Donciella Floyd-Jones, the issue of students' perceptions of safety while in school was pursued. The survey reflected n=726 from seven elementary/middle schools and five high schools. The first question asked whether students felt safe and while 66% of the elementary/middle and high school students indicated they did feel safe, over one-third of the students said they did not feel safe at school. When asked where they felt least safe: Figure 1: As hypothesized they felt least safe on the schoolyard where they are not protected by security guards or more adults.

Figure-1:Where do you feel least safe?

Then when asked, "In your opinion, what was the biggest problem in your school?" 38% of the students stated fights, followed by a distant 17% responding bad manners. They were then queried as to what they felt were any other problems, to which 45% answered gangs, 31 % weapons and 22% trespassers as represented in Figure 2.

Figure-2:Do you feel any of the following are also problems?

Confirming the survey data, CAS' Billie Christian notes that the young people with whom she and her staff work, "tell us their biggest fear is safety. So I'm not going to stay after school. I've got to get home while it's still daylight, because I know I have to get on two or three buses to get to the other side of town." (Interview August 20, 2010) Representative responses from the elementary/middle school survey were: "I don't feel safe there because anyone that I don't know can grab me up." "Because kids are so violent now-a-days that

its not safe to be in school anymore." "We are open to any action at any cost." "Because the bad people hang out in the school yard." "Because somebody can just shoot at our school and kill some of us." "Because somebody can be anywhere just to kill you or take you away why (sic) the staffe are not watching you." "Cause you can get kidnapped, raped and etc." "Because someone could snach (sic) you run with you and never come back." "Because I don't like the outside." And, "people have a need to kill." This is playing outside in the inner city.

The fear for safety changes with age, for by the time students are high school age, they feel unprepared for the world beyond. In her work with inner city youth, Christian observes we are not teaching them to grow and to develop. "They are not being taught to reach out to the world, but rather how to be governed. It's that jailhouse mentality. Not to stretch out; rather how to sit and be quiet." (Interview August 20, 2010) Yet they share many of the same fears with the younger students.
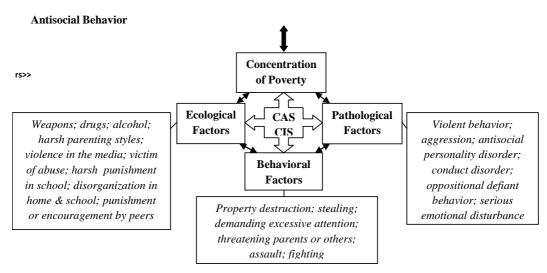
From the high school surveys, the students also indicate the school yard is the most unsafe place because: "Drugs, police coming and lots of older men waiting at the corner to talk to young girls." "Because anything can happen such as other people coming up here shooting." "The reason I say this is because this is a high school and all different kinds of gangs come up here to fight." "You can't trust nobody around here. You always have to watch your back." "the schoolyard is so open an unknown to outside predators, but also delusional males in your school." "Because you never know what's going through peoples minds." "The reason is because when people get into (it) at this school they call all they family members up here and they try to bring weapons." "I don't feel safe at school at all. I feel safe at home why cause I no (sic) for shore I got my mother." "That's where it all go down." (sic)

3.4 Service Provision

For the most part, teachers are professionally trained neither in the methods and skills of cultural competency nor of social intervention, although students speak of feeling relatively safe when they are with teachers. However, students' fears go beyond the realm of the classroom teacher's expertise. A recent Harvard study (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard 2010) suggested that persistent exposure to situations that produce fear and chronic anxiety can have lifelong disruptive consequences on the development of how a child learns, solves problems and relates to others. The attendance to these fears calls for a

collaborative approach. This paper suggests that the prevalence of antisocial behavior, i.e. gangs and violence, is a resultant construct of the interplay of ecological, pathological and behavioral factors as suggested in Figure 3 below and to effectively work with students who come to school with this layering of vulnerabilities demands a team of expertise, one common to professionals in community schools. (Mayer,1995; Reid,1993)

Figure-3:Precipitant Risk Factors for Antisocial Behavior

Antisocial Behavior

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Concentration of Poverty

Ecological Factors

CAS CIS

Pathological Factors

Behavioral Factors

Weapons; drugs; alcohol; harsh parenting styles; violence in the media; victim of abuse; harsh punishment in school; disorganization in home & school; punishment or encouragement by peers

Property destruction; stealing; demanding excessive attention; threatening parents or others; assault; fighting

Violent behavior; aggression; antisocial personality disorder; conduct disorder; oppositional defiant behavior; serious emotional disturbance

But Christian contends the crux of the problem is, "(The kids) don't read at grade level and they've never read at grade level. There's nobody there to pull them up to the grade level. They just pass them along. And the kids feel like they are failures...So they go into gangs to find that place of belonging" (Interview August 20, 2010). And as the adults in their lives fall short on the rent or can't pay the bills and they begin the cycle of moving from place to place, from one closed school to another, gangs offer the only place of stability the kids have. Because they also present the violent statistics: about twenty percent of all teens know someone who was killed or injured by gang members and in some cities as many as seventy percent of teens killed by guns are gang members. (BLR Student Life,2008) So CAS has formed what has become a nationally-recognized, federally-funded anti-gang initiative in partnership with the Detroit Police Department, reading programs designed specifically for male adolescents, and other support programs in which youth acquire, among many other things, anger management, peer mediation, job, employability and life skills. As they partner with other agencies in the city, it is not each agency working in isolation, but a

collaboration of agencies and the schools pooling resources, talents, information and clients in the service of healthy families and strong neighborhoods. It is what Farmer (2000) calls a 'systems-of-care' service that involves the coordination of all forms of education with community agencies (Kutash and Duchnowski,1997:3) along with prevention programs that also embrace the ecological model on behalf of the student-family. (Bierman, Cole, Dodge, Greenberg, Lochman and McMahon,1992:2)

3.5 Communities In Schools (CIS)

As the nation's leader in high school drop-out prevention, CIS was established in 1977 on the premise that students would be successful when nonacademic barriers were mitigated and targeted community resources were focused and available. Like CAS, CIS is a non-profit organization that serves close to 1.3 million young people in 3400 schools located in twenty-five states.

CIS Detroit specifically focuses on students up to age thirteen and in addition to providing a variety of services, they broker resources in the community by connecting families in times of critical need such as supplying emergency food, clothing, eye glasses and assisting in securing housing, all done in the service of keeping students in school. (Communities In Schools, 2005)   Says Celia Williams the Coordinator of Comprehensive Services, "We focus on basic needs so the students can focus on education..." (Interview September 17, 2010) While the model focuses on the lowest performing schools, Williams contends everyone deserves a caring adult, a safe place to learn and grow, a healthy start and a healthy future, a marketable skill to use upon graduation, and a chance to give back to peers and to community.
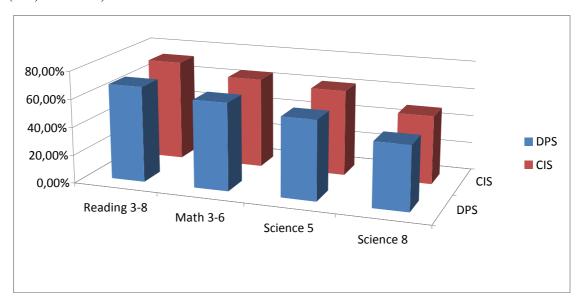
The Community Schools Division of CIS has a variety of academic enrichment programs it offers its partners. Monthly each student's progress is reassessed and the learning plan reevaluated. Such was the case with eight-year-older Tavian. From the first grading period, the classroom teacher recognized he was neither working according to his capabilities nor parallel to his work from the previous year. The school asked CIS to make a home visit. A subsequent individualized educational plan was collaboratively designed involving the family, school and CIS staff and monthly assessed by CIS. Table 1 shows the result:

Table-1: Tavian's Comparative Grades by Quarters

Quarters

	1	2	3	4	Final
Math	3	4	4	4	4
Reading	4	5	4	5	5
English	3	5	5	5	5
Science	4	4	4	4	4
Social Studies	2	5	5	5	5
Final GPA	-	-	-	-	3.235

In nearly every content area, his grades improved with continued academic support. This can be extrapolated to Figure 4 where during the same time frame, 2009-2010, students in grades three through eight in CIS affiliated schools scored 4.2% higher on the required state criterion-referenced reading test and 2.3% higher for grades three through six on the math test than did the Detroit Public Schools students. And fifth grade students or ten-year-olds, in CIS schools scored 5.0% higher and eighth-graders scored 3.2% higher on the science test than non-CIS affiliated schools.

Figure-4: Comparative Test Scores: Detroit Public Schools (DPS), Communities In Schools, (CIS) 2009-2010, Grades 3-8

Where CIS offers services in schools, 77% of the teachers felt they were more effective in the classroom, 77% of the students expressed more positive attitudes toward learning and 68% of the students came to school better prepared to learn. (Communities In Schools, 2010) In general where urban schools have partnered with other community agencies, the work of the school—the students in academic progress, the faculty in pedagogical effectiveness, the family in support—appears to be healthier.

CONCLUSION

Coupling the historically deep seated racial divisions with scarce resources created by the economic downturn, the inequalities and inequities that face students in inner city Detroit are indicative of other U.S. urban cities but are even more intensified than other urban centers due to the reliance on a single-product industry. Although demonstrative improvement in Detroit's inner city schools may not solve the abject crime rates or social challenges faced by the city, policymakers will be unable to make substantive changes without intensive rethinking, reculturing and reshaping in the schools. However, in the shape of collaborative community schools, unheralded changes are already changing lives. As Christian notes of Detroit school administrators and schools, "They are going to have to address our kids' fears. They are going to have to make our schools the hub of the community...I can't go back and change anything that has already happened to them (the students). I can't take away the pain, but from this day forward, we need to move forward, make better decisions. These kids are smart and resilient." (Interview August 20, 2010) But unless we, through the integrated services of community schools, address the causes of their fears-- their sense of despair, lack of future, a profound insecurity, a lack of stability in the family, in the home, in the school and in the neighborhood, a lack of education which denies them access to resources and to participate in the discourse of the majority culture--we will perpetuate their sense of hopelessness that historical memory has so indelibly written across our nation's history.

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