

**20**  
**YEARS**

**TRANSFORMATIVE,  
EVIDENCE-BASED  
IDEAS**

**20**  
**YEARS**

**CRPE**  
**REINVENTING**  
**PUBLIC EDUCATION**



# //OUR MISSION

**Our mission** is to find the most innovative, pragmatic, equitable, and successful ways to address the complex challenges in public education. Through our research and policy analysis, we offer evidence-based solutions that help educators and administrators do their best work so that every child can have access to an excellent education.

**We envision** a public education system that attracts and grows talented teachers and leaders, where all families have great neighborhood and citywide public school options to meet their children's unique needs, where public funds flow equitably to students, where all schools regularly innovate and problem-solve, and where those overseeing schools ensure that every child has access to excellent teachers and excellent schools.



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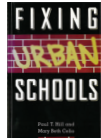
# //20 YEARS OF EXPERTISE

**1993**

Paul Hill founds Center on Reinventing Public Education at University of Washington

**1998**

*Fixing Urban Schools*



**2000-2004**

Leadership and Human Capital Project (part of Wallace Foundation's "Leaders Count" initiative)

**2003-2008**

School Finance Redesign Project

**2004**

National Charter School Research Project launched with support from consortium of funders

*How Within-District Spending Inequities Help Some Schools Fail*



**2008**

*Facing the Future: Financing Productive Schools*



**2009**

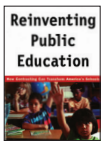
U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan uses CRPE fiscal analyses to bolster case for education stimulus funding

**2009-2012**

*Schools in Crisis: Making Ends Meet*- "Rapid Response" fiscal analysis series

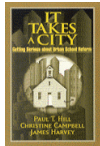
**1997**

*Reinventing Public Education: How Contracting Can Transform America's Schools*



**2000**

*It Takes a City*



**2002**

*Charter Schools and Accountability in Public Education*



**2004-2009**

Doing School Choice Right project

**2005-2013**

*Hopes, Fears, & Reality: A Balanced Look at American Charter Schools*



**2009**

Portfolio School District Network created; now includes over 40 localities

*Portfolio School Districts for Big Cities*



**2006-2010**

Inside Charter Schools initiative

**2010**

*Unique Schools Serving Unique Students: Charter Schools and Students with Special Needs*



*Educational Economics: Where Do School Funds Go?*



*Curing Baumol's Disease: In Search of Productivity Gains in K-12 Schooling*



**2013**

The Evidence Project launched

*District-Charter Collaboration Compact: Interim Report*



*Why the Gap? Special Education and NYC Charter Schools*



**2012**

Robin Lake becomes director of CRPE

*Strife and Progress: Portfolio Strategies for Managing Urban Schools*

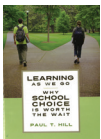


**2010**

*The National Study of Charter School Management Organization Effectiveness*



*Learning As We Go: Why School Choice Is Worth the Wait*



**2011**

*Inside Charter Schools: Unlocking Doors to Student Success*



**2012**

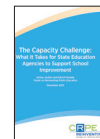
Marguerite Roza launches Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University; CRPE provides incubation support

*Tinkering Toward Transformation: A Look at Federal School Improvement Grant Implementation*



**2013**

*The Capacity Challenge: What It Takes for SEAs to Support School Improvement*



*HR with a Purpose: Building Talent for Distinct Schools and Networks*



TED names crpe.org one of its "100 websites you should know and use"

## “We Promise to Continue to Be Different”

Many years ago when all of us at CRPE were working on an organizational mission statement, I showed a draft to my husband, Matthew. He told me it was too generic—it made us sound indistinct from all the other evaluation and policy groups out there. “CRPE is different,” he said. “Show it.”

He was right. We rewrote the mission statement, and since then I often recall Matthew’s nudge when I think about what kinds of projects to take on and whether a report or paper meets CRPE standards for clarity, rigor, and relevance.

CRPE came into existence with a simple purpose. Our founder (and my mentor), Paul Hill, wanted to create a small center to think hard about how to create excellent schools at scale. He wanted to establish an intentional research agenda where we would propose new ideas about urban system reform and test them in the field.

We don’t just question others—we regularly question our own assumptions too. And we try to look around the corner to anticipate problems that no one else is thinking about.

As Paul writes in this volume, we’ve grown into something much more than he had imagined. This happened as people started implementing our ideas, as we hired a team of scary-smart people with nimble minds, and as we kept producing more provocative proposals and important evidence.

What really makes CRPE unique is that we start with an ideology about the nature of the problem, not an ideology about the solution. We believe that the problem with public education is the system. We believe that the rules, policies, and adult entitlements of urban school systems create inequalities for students. We believe that schools can’t truly be held accountable for breakthrough results if they have no control over their own staffing, instructional strategy, and budgets. We believe that schools need customized support, but that government-run central offices are not always in the best position to deliver it. We look to market-based initiatives like charter schools as a partial but incomplete solution. We see value in standards, refashioned teacher evaluation models, and school accountability systems, but we believe these policies won’t be successful

until schools are free from bureaucratic and capricious district policies.

Most importantly, we believe that *public education is a goal, not a particular set of institutions*. We are equal opportunity skeptics. Based on emerging evidence, we have critiqued charter authorizers, school districts, special-purpose turnaround districts, charter management organizations, teachers unions, reform advocates, and more. We don’t just question others—we regularly question our own assumptions too. And we try to look around the corner to anticipate problems that no one else is thinking about. That means sometimes we aren’t immersed in the current buzzwords or the hot issue of the day, at least as others frame it.

Our latest work is a good example. We’re studying a range of cities where every family nominally has choices, but many children are still in weak schools. Our surveys have found problems like inconsistent quality among both charter and district-run schools, lack of good information for families, lack of access for children with special needs, and high barriers to entry for promising new school providers. These findings stretch beyond the simpler debate on whether charter schools are better or worse than district-run schools. We’re reframing the problem to show that a sole focus on growing the charter sector can leave some children unserved.



These are the traditions that define CRPE and that make me proud to work here. But always remaining skeptical has its costs. Some dismiss us as advocates because we argue that cities should try portfolio reforms. Charter advocates often get upset with us for publicizing evidence about places like Detroit, where choice is not working very well. School board members get upset when we say that the current system cannot be fixed with more money and good intentions. More than once, we've made our funders unhappy by showing that their investments didn't work as they'd hoped. We're annoyingly unpredictable and hard to label.

Given how uncomfortable we make everyone, why has CRPE thrived for 20 years? I think our edge is just the one that my husband pushed me to focus on in our mission statement. We offer something unusual but reliably good. We are focused on evidence, and on progress toward better outcomes for students. Our pragmatism, analytic skills, candor, imaginativeness, and clarity are the defining characteristics that carry CRPE forward.

We'd rather close up shop than do work that doesn't matter. We only publish research reports that give clear recommendations for action. We say clearly what we mean so that policymakers and media

can easily digest even the most complex studies. We measure our success by whether people adopt our ideas and use information we produce to make better policy.

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We also believe that an organization like CRPE must justify its existence every day. For these reasons, we appreciate the essays in this volume that speak to the impact we've had, and we welcome the author's prods about what must be done next.

What's in store for our next 20 years of work? We're deep into studies on the next generation of accountability systems and new uses of technology in schools.

We're putting forth ideas about how charter and districts can come together to leverage the best worlds of choice and public oversight. We're studying how funding, staffing, and leadership can be organized in radically different ways. We're creating scalable, research-based tools to help more cities implement portfolio reforms. We're creating model laws for states that want to transform urban school systems. We're looking into how to create computerized urban school system reform simulation models, or "Sim Districts," so that decision makers can experiment with strategies and play out different scenarios based on evidence of what works.

We're grateful to the all the people in schools and agencies who have, over the years, agreed to give us their time for interviews to inform our studies, to the funders who invest in our work, to our affiliated research and policy partners, and to our many advisors (including our smart spouses) who push us to keep getting better. All of us at CRPE feel it's a privilege to do this work. We promise to continue to be different. //

*Robin Lake is Director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education and Affiliate Faculty at the University of Washington Bothell.*

## “Addicted to Their Work”

Journalism is a bad news business. People buy what we sell only if it is something they need to know, like threats to their well-being or wallets. We stock our shelves with hurricanes, crime waves, housing foreclosures, tainted restaurants, and school test score declines.

Early in my career as a reporter, I decided I didn't want to do that. I wasn't good at finding bad news. It made me sad. When I became interested in education reporting I saw a way to make a living on the sunny side of my beat. Instead of focusing on all the problems in schools, I would write about the solutions. The deeper I got into it the better I understood that the secret to successful schools was not budgeting or prettier buildings or elected school boards or the latest curricula, but good teachers. Most of my books and many of my articles in the last 30 years have been about geniuses leading classrooms. If I explained their methods in vivid and compelling terms, others educators could learn from that and we could finally get out of the doldrums, where our schools had been stuck for decades.

Professor Hill kept me grounded. While I wrote about what worked, I read his accounts of what didn't. I focused on individual teachers. He focused on organizations and leadership, policies and data. He and his colleagues at CRPE were remarkably intelligent about all the stuff I found confusing and depressing, and I became addicted to their work.

This worked for me, but I had to keep some grip on reality while I explored the best our schools had to offer. That is why I turned to the Center on Reinventing Public Education, particularly the work of Paul Hill. Professor Hill kept me grounded. While I wrote about what worked, I read his accounts of what didn't. I focused on individual teachers. He focused on organizations and leadership, policies and data. He and his colleagues at CRPE were remarkably intelligent about all the stuff I found confusing and depressing, and I became addicted to their work.

Hill's 1997 book, *Reinventing Public Education: How Contract Schools Can Transform American Education*, was an exercise in clairvoyance. Hill and his coauthors imagined the strange mixes of charters and traditional schools, vouchers and private funding, that we are beginning to see now. His 2000 book, *It Takes A City: Getting Serious About Urban School Reform*, written with James Harvey and Christine Campbell, illuminated every sort of reform strategy, and I could see how the aggressive teachers I followed might do in each one. I particularly liked *Curing Baumol's Disease: In Search of Productivity Gains in K-12 Schooling*, Hill's 2010 paper with Marguerite Roza. It patiently explained the financial costs of reform, an issue I tried to avoid in my own books because I had trouble understanding it—though not the way they presented it.

My favorite CRPE project was Hill's short 2010 work, *Learning as We Go: Why School Choice Is Worth the Wait*. As I said in my *Washington Post* review: “Many people get too excited about the latest hot education

innovation. They lose their sense of perspective. It has happened even to me once or twice. When we wander off like that, we need someone with a sharp intellect and strong character to pull us back.”

The year before, I had published my book *Work Hard. Be Nice: How Two Inspired Teachers Created the Most Promising Schools in America*. It was the story of the nation’s most successful charter school network, KIPP. I felt fully plugged in to the charter school movement, which seemed to me the most beneficial educational development in decades.

Then I read *Learning as We Go*. I realized that however impressive the success of KIPP and the spread of its “no excuses” methods were for raising achievement for low-income children, it and the other charters like it were going to be in for a long, hard slog, like every other worthy idea that creative teachers ever came up with.

I thought the quality of principals was key. Hill agreed with me, but detailed just how hard it was going to be to develop enough good school leaders to keep the momentum going. “Principals from district-run schools are often not ready to make the financing, hiring, firing, admissions, and self-assessment decisions that fall on them” when they move to charters, he wrote. “Some learn

but others don’t.” Teachers had the same problem, he said. Those who move to charter schools “become partners in an enterprise that must sink or swim depending on performance. Hours, assignments, pay, and job security can’t be guaranteed by a deep-pocket school district, but are products of collaborative effort at the school level,” he said.

Hill explained why charters could not compete with district-run schools unless they got as much money per pupil, something that has not happened in many areas. He pointed out how hard it was to reproduce the results of successful charters.

This did not dampen my enthusiasm for what I was seeing, but helped deepen my reporting so that readers could see how the great teachers I described fit, and sometimes did not fit, into the systems Hill analyzed. I don’t think I will ever have the patience and energy to go as deeply into those subjects as Hill and his colleagues at CRPE have, but I am trying, and I have them to thank for that. //

*Jay Mathews is an education reporter and online columnist for the Washington Post who has been writing about schools for more than 20 years.*

## “Check Your Assumptions”

When I was in my last year of graduate school at the University of Washington, finishing up my PhD in education and public policy, the professor of a course I was taking in cost-benefit analysis introduced me to Paul Hill. Paul was looking for a grad student to help over the summer with a financial analysis of labor unions. “I have this money—it allows us to think differently about this” he’d said. That totally appealed to me. Everywhere else I looked, everyone else around me in academia took the education system as a given and rarely questioned it.

We were looking into whether a viable system could be created where we’d still have labor unions in education, but without the monopoly effect. We wound up proposing a third national union, on top of the existing two. It wasn’t so much the specific question that excited me, or the answer, but rather the way we were looking

It’s not just that CRPE has come up with futuristic ideas—it’s that the center uses models and evidence to test their viability and impact on the education system.

forward at what was possible, instead of analyzing what already existed. Most research in education is backward-looking—*there was this policy, and here’s what happened*—or it looks at the way things are now. Paul was willing to look forward, to totally reimagine elements of the delivery model, and I found this thrilling.

Two decades later, I’ve started my own research center, but I am still involved with CRPE. They’re still the same way and so am I. I’m always suggesting ideas that don’t exist, and people get frustrated—*that’s not even possible*, they’ll say. When I was on a leave of absence working at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, I took a test that identifies your personality traits. One of my main traits was “futuristic,” which I was told is pretty unusual. I’m 100 percent certain Paul would fall into that group as well. It’s not just that CRPE has come up with futuristic ideas—it’s that the center uses models and evidence to test their viability and impact on the education system.

This approach can make the work harder—that’s been clear from the start. When I was writing my dissertation, I would seek input from Paul. I was writing about state finance, using nice clean data sets and metrics other people had developed. He pushed me to go further. “Nobody’s studied school or district spending,” he said. I was locked into studying what the field had already decided to study. That’s where the data were. But that never mattered to Paul. With Paul, you’d decide what questions should be asked, not what questions were already being asked, and plot your work accordingly .

I left Seattle for two years after finishing my PhD, and when I came back, the first thing I did was call Paul to see if he had any work. I was part-time when I was having my kids, then I built up to full-time. All along, any time Paul gave me a project, he’d always start with, “Think about this issue for a while.” Part of his mission for CRPE was to always check the assumptions inherent in whatever topic we were studying. In 2002, we got some money to quantify the big teacher shortage in California. We could have just jumped right in and done a large-scale study, measure where the shortage was the worst, that sort of thing. But Paul said, “Think about it. Check your assumptions.” Of course there’s a teacher shortage, right? There were billboards all over Los Angeles advertising for teachers. We didn’t have any real evidence, though. We sent out a survey asking how

many applicants there were for every opening, whether positions were being left open, and so on. While some schools in Los Angeles were definitely hurting—some so bad that they couldn't find a teacher to hire if life depended on it—there were other schools only five miles away in the same district that had far more applicants than openings. There didn't appear to be a shortage of teachers, but rather a maldistribution. There were teachers out there, they just didn't want to work in certain schools. In typical CRPE fashion, we checked our assumptions, and that gave us the space to look at an issue in a fresh way.

CRPE is very much a learning organization. The talent strategy has never been about plugging people in to get some work done, or transmitting the veterans' wisdom to the newcomers—it's about being a place where they can shape their own ideas. I definitely benefited from this; I was given the space to build my own thinking. My early projects might not have gone in the directions that Paul thought they would, but they were still supported.

It's notable that CRPE is not an ideological shop. There's never pressure to satisfy certain people, nor to be provocative just to be provocative. CRPE seeks out

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not just fresh angles but critical responses—the center builds that in to everything they do and is stronger because of it. Paul would send our work to people we knew wouldn't like it. Once when I was looking for a research assistant, he suggested somebody I knew hated our work. He hated every thought I ever had. I told Paul that, and he said, "That would be good for us, don't you think?"

Most of the people who are brought on board at CRPE don't believe they know all the answers but think the fun is in coming up with ideas. They want to test those ideas and recognize where the ideas fall apart. Sometimes people there are told they are too "out of the box." That's what we heard about our work on Baumol's Disease, our ideas about

mining education for productivity improvements. Six months later, the recession hit, and it didn't seem so radical after all.

Six months is actually a relatively short time when you think about how long it sometimes takes people to come around to CRPE's ideas. And that's okay. The organization has an enormous amount of patience for that. In the world of education policy it would be very easy to think this was about your ideas winning the moment. Paul set the stage for us to understand that the thrill is in conceiving the ideas. If they aren't implemented, people at CRPE don't take it personally, as long as some better idea can do more for kids. Nobody there is going to double down on an unproductive idea. Paul created the concept of a "zone of wishful thinking," and I think that's great. Our assumptions about reform require something to happen, but do we actually know it will? When you're looking at the future as much as CRPE does, you deal with that a lot. By calling out those zones of wishful thinking, we learned to be a lot more humble about what we thought would happen.

As the education field becomes more polarized, CRPE will continue to define the issues with a fresh perspective. CRPE is a model

Now, under Robin Lake, they've become leaders in thinking about governance, and they're expanding from a primary influence on big thinkers and policymakers to productive relationships with practitioners.

for continuous improvement: they'll never run out of new ways to look at public education. Now, under Robin Lake, they've become leaders in thinking about governance, and they're expanding from a primary influence on big thinkers and policymakers to productive relationships with practitioners. In recent years we've seen a lot of talented people land in educational leadership positions where there's no playbook. They're calling CRPE for help. They are interested in tapping into CRPE's expertise—not because CRPE has a prescription but because they think about what's possible. //

*Marguerite Roza is Director of the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University. She is also a Senior Research Affiliate at CRPE, where she first worked in 1994.*



## How CRPE Builds Ideas That Stick

CRPE is committed to reinventing public education by researching and disseminating bold, unconventional policy options and working to improve current promising practices. It is—and always has been—different from the many other research organizations that focus on one sliver of the education landscape: ways to better implement systemic standards-based reform, for example, or the promotion of market mechanisms as the main way to improve schools. CRPE does work in both of these domains, but it became primarily a third

As the context of education policy and politics has changed, CRPE has led the way in setting new agendas in diverse domains.

party between two poles. While other organizations were pressing for changes in policy based on economic theory, assuming good schools would automatically flourish in a choice landscape, CRPE understood the need to design policies, including choice, in ways that help schools be coherent, effective, and stable.

When CRPE began in 1993, federal, state, and local business roundtables and other business groups were its prime audience, but by 2000 this was no longer the case. By then, CRPE's audience was a broad mix of policymakers, foundations, opinion makers, academics, politicians, education leaders, the media, and others. The research agendas and approaches of CRPE staff are likewise varied: from school finance to educational leadership, from school choice to governance systems,

through both qualitative and quantitative lenses. As the context of education policy and politics has changed, CRPE has led the way in setting new agendas in diverse domains such as portfolio district management, human capital management, technology design and use, and the redesign of state education agencies. CRPE brings a critical perspective to broad national debates about policy at the same time it works with specific localities on implementation issues. At other policy centers, this kind of diversity can fragment the central mission, but CRPE has remained focused on a singular goal: how to square the necessity of public oversight with the freedom of action that schools need to innovate and meet students' needs.

When I conducted a review of CRPE's first decade in 2004, documents and conversations made clear that the center was viewed as nonpartisan and working well with policymakers of both political parties—an important distinction amid a landscape of dueling, philosophically oriented think tanks. CRPE fulfilled a unique niche: While other organizations worked on developing specific policy options, CRPE focused on evidence-based conclusions. It contributed both conceptual ideas—for example, “zones of wishful thinking,” the concept that theory-driven policy proposals are logically incomplete, assuming events that they alone can't cause—and practical ones, like the idea that school leaders can make better decisions on hiring and professional development than a district central office can. CRPE could be more cutting-edge than most university policy centers because it did not rely as much on tenured faculty, and it developed dissemination channels well beyond the usual academic journals.

CRPE initially published its most important books and reports through the Brookings Institution, and relied on its communications vehicles. But given the diverse audience for the work—a mayor was unlikely to read an entire book out of the Brookings library—Paul Hill had to spread his and CRPE's name through other means too, such as op-eds and speeches. In the early days the ideas came from a Professor Hill at the University of Washington. It took some work, and time, for CRPE to move beyond “Paul Hill's shop” to become the



## While other organizations worked on developing specific policy options, CRPE focused on evidence-based conclusions.

multifaceted organization it is recognized as today.

As education policy has become more complex and the need has grown to demonstrate improvement in student outcomes, policy research has expanded rapidly, as has its influence. Education policy stories in large U.S. newspapers almost always include some comment by a policy analyst at a university or independent think tank. Frequently, legislators introducing proposals will include research-based studies as evidence that their ideas are promising and necessary. U.S. foundations have poured millions of dollars into education policy research organizations.

It has never been a given that education policy research would have much of an impact on legislators, bureaucrats, interest groups, professional associations, and so on. Some analyses have found major communication problems between policymakers and researchers, since the two groups live in different worlds with differing languages, values, and professional rewards. Researchers

are focused on refereed journals that stress theory and technical advances, and legislators need information applicable to a specific set of circumstances. Education policy research is unlike research in the hard sciences, where the outcomes are more certain and predictable. Often it identifies probable outcomes and general principles that seem to apply in various social settings, then policymakers apply the general social science information to specific contexts.

Still, education research penetrates policy decisions. Sophisticated studies have probed the indirect and subtle impacts of research and policy analysis. For instance, the late Harvard education professor Carol Weiss contended that it is not the findings of a study, nor those of a body of related studies, that directly affect policy. Rather, she postulated that findings, concepts, and theoretical perspectives derived in research permeate and creep into the policymaking process. Research findings then percolate through that process and shape the way in which legislators think about educational issues.

CRPE's work over the past two decades follows this pattern, as the center has shown policymakers new options they were not aware of, gained media attention for education policy alternatives, published opinion pieces, attracted the attention of the general public, and addressed larger numbers of public and professional audiences.

This has only been possible because the policy analysis CRPE does is high-quality and based on data. Recent years have seen the proliferation of philosophically oriented think tanks, which are often situated in opposition to each other. Their approaches tend to be based in ideology: pro- or anti-voucher, pro- or anti-union. Some policy research organizations are little more than advertising firms. Consequently, policymakers are presented with studies that all claim to be grounded in data and research yet come to opposite conclusions. This tends to undermine the legitimacy of all education policy research. Because it is affiliated with a university, poses questions that don't come from a pro or con affiliation, and then answers them through rigorous academic research, CRPE substantially mitigates these problems.

CRPE finds—or creates—networks of researchers, academic

intermediaries, research brokers, and policymakers in an issue area, creates relationships, and convenes meetings. It makes its findings accessible online through brief, concrete, and

**CRPE has made a real difference, both in what policymakers consider and do and in how other researchers approach their work.**

jargon-free publications, and holds briefings and luncheons to share ideas with policymakers and others. CRPE stimulates interest through traditional media, such as newspaper op-eds, and new media, including Facebook, Twitter, and a new blog. Staff cultivates

relationships with members of the media, who are eager for input from a university-based, independent think-tank.

One of the greatest growth areas for CRPE in recent years has been in influencing school systems directly. There have always been district leaders who have picked up the phone to seek advice from CRPE's principals. But now those relationships have been systemized into formal consultancies, especially for districts pursuing the portfolio strategy. CRPE has built the Portfolio School District Network from a handful of individuals around a table in 2008 to an organization with conferences of hundreds of people from more than two dozen districts, including many superintendents. CRPE staff work directly and regularly with district leaders and their staff, mayoral staff, foundations, and other civic organizations in all of the portfolio cities, providing expert consultation, technical

assistance, assessments of their progress, and other resources.

CRPE is not the only effective source of new ideas and credible studies, but it has a focus and approach of its own. It has made a real difference, both in what policymakers consider and do and in how other researchers approach their work. //

*Michael W. Kirst is Professor Emeritus of Education and Business Administration at Stanford University. He is also President of the California State Board of Education. He served as a strategy consultant to CRPE from 2002 to 2004.*



## To Improve Teachers, Look Beyond the Classroom

Much of the work on human capital in education in the last decade has focused on teachers and their effectiveness. Pressure from federal policies, such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, and the availability of state data systems that can track a student's academic growth over time and link it to individual teachers have led researchers to develop measures of a teacher's productivity. These value-added measures, as they're called, compare the performance gains of students in a teacher's class with the performance gains achieved by other teachers with similar students. Value-added research has resulted in four key findings:

- Teachers are the most important in-school factor affecting student performance.
- The variation in productivity among teachers is large. Students whose teachers are at the top of the distribution gain a year and a half of learning in a year's time, compared to only a half-year for students whose teachers are at the bottom of the distribution.
- The variation among teachers within schools is at least as large as variation between schools.
- A teacher's education level and years of experience do not closely correlate with student growth.

The policies initiated as a consequence of this research, perhaps not surprisingly, focus on individual teachers: evaluating their productivity, rewarding high performers, and assigning sanctions for low performers. At least 35 states and the District of Columbia now weigh improvement in student achievement in their individual teacher evaluation policies.

As these changes have developed, the Center on Reinventing Public Education—influenced by the thinking, field experience, and orientation of founder Paul Hill—has provided an important theoretical lens into human capital issues that is different from, and complementary to, the more micro approach that is most common in recent research on teachers.

CRPE's framing has always gone beyond the individual teacher. Teachers often work in schools that have special missions and unique challenges and require people with special characteristics and orientations in order to fit into the school's culture and promote its particular mission. And these schools are guided by policies that operate under the umbrella of a wider, complex, and ever-changing political and governance system. The degree to which individual performance-based teacher policies will persist, be weakened, and be strengthened depends heavily on their context. To what extent do governance structures and the resulting school management practices create different, and perhaps stronger, conditions in support of productivity?

Several examples of CRPE work illustrate the center's distinctive contribution to the wider research literature on teacher productivity and principal effectiveness. In their 2013 working paper, "HR With a Purpose: Building Talent for Distinct Schools and Networks" (a chapter in the forthcoming American Enterprise Institute book *Teacher Quality 2.0: Will Today's Reforms Hold Back Tomorrow's Schools?*), Betheny Gross and Michael DeArmond argued that teacher performance is not dependent solely on the characteristics of the teacher, but also the fit between the school's context and the teachers who work there. School context and teacher match, along a number of dimensions, are no doubt important in any school, but they are particularly important in a mission-driven school. In such schools, teacher quality is contextualized—it is affected by student characteristics and student needs, the skills and attributes of colleagues, and the orientation and improvement strategy of the school. What may be of key importance in one school may be a low priority in another.

Half of the schools analyzed in the paper were charter schools; this is one of several CRPE works that highlight lessons, for the benefit of all types of schools, in how the most successful charter schools have developed effective talent management systems. In the mission-driven schools Gross and DeArmond discussed, at every point in the human resources matching process—recruitment, hiring, development, and retention—school leaders worked to ensure not just that they had high-quality teachers, but that they fit the particular needs and strategic orientation of the school. These schools went well beyond a compliance-oriented system based on input like degrees, experiences, and certification. Rather, they used a customized, performance-driven system that heavily weighed the behavior and accomplishments of teachers on the job.

In short, in addition to seeking certain individual characteristics, the schools went to considerable effort to identify fit right from the start. When done successfully, a school environment was created where “every employee understands what it means to be a high-quality employee” in the school, the authors wrote, and these shared perceptions reinforced appropriate teacher behavior and promoted

the school’s key goals and expectations.

In one school cited, for example, efforts to explain the school’s ethos and a teacher’s responsibility within the school

**CRPE’s focus is on how to set the stage for improvements, rather than what those improvements should look like specifically.**

began early. After an initial interview, candidates gave a demonstration lesson to possible future colleagues and received feedback, and then were asked to critique the performance of a current teacher. They ended the day with little doubt that collaboration, collegial feedback, and improvement in practice would be an integral part of their professional development in that school. Ongoing teacher development in the schools was purposeful and involved all teachers. Instruction in these schools was a public matter, with ongoing classroom observation and individual feedback. Everyone was responsible for providing feedback and reflecting on

their own and their colleagues’ instructional practice. These schools also took probationary periods seriously: teachers who were not up to the job were let go.

Candidates uncomfortable with this process or the professional expectations were unlikely to want to join the school; those who were comfortable knew what they were getting into and would go the next step and self-select as candidates. In all the schools Gross and DeArmond studied, the hiring process sent clear and intentional messages about what the school was trying to accomplish, and how it would go about it.

### GOING BEYOND SCHOOLS, AND BEYOND POLICIES

“HR With a Purpose” raised concerns that recent state teacher policies requiring ratings of teacher performance—partly based on student test score gains and formal classroom observations—might undercut school-based teacher policies that are more tightly linked to a teacher’s practice and the school’s particular mission, culture, and daily workings. This is a consistent theme in CRPE’s work: that you don’t fix the human capital problem by replacing one top-down talent management system with another. Evidence had led

CRPE researchers to a conviction that personnel decisions should be made in the school building, by strong and thoughtful leaders. To them, teacher quality is really a matter of principal quality—which is why recent CRPE work has focused on assessing states’ principal pipelines and suggesting ways to cultivate effective leaders.

This is in line with CRPE’s regular commitment to go beyond the school, and even beyond individual policies, and instead focus on how systems and certain governance models do or don’t foster innovation. In the field of human capital management, CRPE certainly analyzed important policy questions: What does the teacher shortage really look like? What is the effect of seniority-based layoffs? Should teachers be paid more if they hold master’s degrees? But especially recently, CRPE’s focus is on how to set the stage for improvements, rather than what those improvements should look like specifically. In their forthcoming book, *A Democratic Constitution for Public Education* (University of Chicago Press, forthcoming fall 2014), Hill and Ashley Jochim write:

*Many well-informed citizens frown upon proposals for performance accountability, charter schools, vouchers, and other governance changes, saying that students don’t learn*

*from laws and regulations, they learn from teachers. Just give every child a good teacher, and the problems of public schools would go away. They would be right, of course, if only it were possible to give every child a better teacher without changing the rules by which public schools are governed.*

Throughout his career, Hill has argued persuasively that

**CRPE is never short of creative and well-thought-through ideas based on what happens in the field.**

education governance and performance in the United States are typically intricately linked in ways that affect performance. If schools are run by a centralized bureaucracy like a school district, then issues of school-level performance get intertwined with the interests of local stakeholder groups concerned with issues apart from, and sometimes in conflict with, performance. For example, decisions about who teaches and where, and who gets laid off, are typically made on the basis of laws, regulations, and agreements that have little, if any, relationship to classroom or school performance.

CRPE’s development of the portfolio strategy of governance has important implications for human capital management. In portfolio management, a central authority, like a school district, contracts with and oversees a “portfolio” of schools, which are held accountable for their performance. Schools can be run by diverse providers, including charter organizations, for-profit groups, teacher teams, universities, parents, or the school district itself. School leaders directly control the key inputs related to school performance, including the recruitment, hiring, and professional development of teachers, as well as the staffing structure and compensation.

The basic idea is that schools would be less regulated, more adaptable, and incentivized for higher performance. Presumably, individual schools would also function as beacons of innovation, made possible because of the autonomy they were granted. In addition, an authority would hold schools directly accountable for performance in a transparent way that would inform parents and, through school choice, reinforce accountability.

CRPE is never short of creative and well-thought-through ideas based on what happens in the field, and Hill and Jochim have done so recently by extending the portfolio

The key policy question is how to get the best people we can into the classroom, especially in schools serving the most needy students. CRPE researchers persuasively argue that the solution lies heavily in the governance arrangements of schools.

concept to one of “constitutional” governance. The intent is to devise a governance system that acknowledges that politics is inherent in public governance, but it must “be managed, constrained, and transformed” with checks and balances to ensure effective schools. They propose a vision of governance that “fundamentally alters the missions and powers that local school boards and other levels of government can exercise... and lead to a more flexible, adaptive, and performance-driven educational system.”

Central to this thinking is limiting the scope of local governance while increasing the freedoms of school operators. Authority for hiring and managing school personnel would lie with the school, not the local governance unit. The local superintendent would oversee the performance-based opening and closing of schools, but not dictate its instructional efforts.

With teachers being the most important school factor affecting student achievement, the key policy question is how to get the best people we can into the classroom, especially in schools serving the most needy students. CRPE researchers persuasively argue that the solution lies heavily in the governance arrangements of schools. Performance-based governance models are highly

likely to lead to the hiring, development, and retention of strong teachers. They also have found models of how individual schools striving for high performance build expectations and support for effective teaching performance into their daily routines, cultures, and management practices. //

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## Not All Choice Systems Are Created Equal

Over its 20 years, CRPE has defined a clear path to reinventing public education through a theory of change based on school choice and competition. Its work has helped education reformers address these issues more productively, added knowledge to the field, caused people to question assumptions, and been ahead of common thinking.

Paul Hill's groundbreaking book *Reinventing Public Education* emphasizes two important points, among others. First, public education is not a particular institutional arrangement, but a set of purposes to be achieved. The institutional arrangement to which we are accustomed—a centrally controlled district with government employees working in schools financed, owned, operated, and overseen by that district—is a *means* we've created to achieve the *ends* of public education: preparing young people to live, work, and compete in today's world. But there are other potential means to achieve these ends, including several based on providing families with choices of schools that aren't centrally controlled by a "district." A second and related insight: the primary legal mechanism that ensures the ends of a public education are achieved is a performance agreement—a contract—between the agency responsible for public oversight of schools and those who operate schools. Today, we would call that agency an authorizer, the contract agreement a charter, and the resulting institution a charter school.

On a conceptual level, CRPE has been integral in developing this point of view and those conceptual frameworks that have shaped much of the K-12 reform discussion since Hill's book was published. It has also helped considerably with the successful development of charter schools and the systems that sustain them on a practical level. This is an important contribution, given that when creating choice programs, the devil is in the details. CRPE has been focused on choice not as an ideology to promote, but a system of arrangements that fit together well or poorly.

A decade ago, Hill chaired the National Working Commission on Choice in K-12, a group of 14 scholars of various backgrounds and persuasions. The commission spent nearly three years analyzing "how choice works and ... how communities interested in the benefits of new school options could obtain them while avoiding choice's damage," as it wrote in *School Choice: Doing It the Right Way Makes a Difference*, published in 2003. Its starting point was the idea that school choice is neither a "panacea" nor "the death" of K-12 education. From the commission's perspective, choice is a new way of providing public education where schools demonstrate performance or lose out to competitors.

In creating choice programs, there are a host of important factors to consider, including:

- *Student targeting*: A system must specify that poor and disadvantaged students, especially those trapped in the worst schools, are first in line for new options.
- *Funding*: Money should follow students to the school they choose to attend and be weighted so that schools receive more money to educate a student with greater needs—for example, a low-income, disabled, or non-English-speaking student.

CRPE has always understood that reforming K-12 involves a complex set of changes, from policymaking to administrative behavior to classrooms.



- *Performance measurement:* Parents need ways to compare schools and determine whether theirs are improving, and government needs good information by which to ensure that schools are providing quality options to educate students.
- *Parent information:* While information won't guarantee good choices, the absence of it certainly can lead to poorly informed decisions.
- *Student access:* Admission processes must be fair, open, and not limited by factors such as transportation.
- *Regulation:* There are *some* reasonable minimum standards and benchmarks regarding safety, health, and academic outcomes that ensure children get a good education.
- *Accountability:* Schools need to answer to parents and to government and face consequences when they aren't achieving good outcomes.

We can see in these individual items the early articulation of a set of market enablers—factors that are necessary to create a functioning public and social market in K-12 education. We also see the framework of CRPE's practical efforts to promote effective choice systems. Through

books, its regular *Hopes, Fears, & Reality* compilations, and other publications, as well as support and tools for district and charter leaders, CRPE has focused on how to design smart choice systems and remove the barriers to them. The organization has worked to hold the charter sector accountable by promoting effective authorizing and information systems that allow everyone—from families to authorizers—to make smart decisions about school options. It analyzed the sector's successes so that they are understood and emulated, especially when it comes to the leadership development and human capital management strategies that characterize the best charter schools. It has also tackled the complicated issues of student enrollment, to make sure as many students as possible, including those with special needs, can exercise choice in an equitable manner.

CRPE has always understood that reforming K-12 involves a complex set of changes, from policymaking to administrative behavior to classrooms. Its first book after *Reinventing Public Education*, called *Fixing Urban Schools*, showed that no reform strategy—standards, increased professional development, family

choice, or school contracting, among others—could, in itself, cause all the changes needed to improve student outcomes. While each of them proposed necessary changes, they also involved wishful thinking—that is, that desirable things would somehow happen spontaneously. For example, it's wishful thinking to expect that once standards are set, educators would have the incentive and freedom of action to change their practice so children meet the new standards. It's wishful thinking to expect that when families are given choices, the supply of options available would improve enough to ensure that children would benefit.

As *Fixing Urban Schools* concluded, a complete reform strategy must have three elements: incentives for improved school performance, freedom of action so that schools are not blocked from changing, and investments in new capacities, such as new schools, better materials, and better-prepared teachers. On a personal level, this formulation informed my thinking—and I know many others' thinking as well—about the need for reform proposals to be well thought out and logically complete. In the jargon of today, these proposals need a fully developed theory of change. In my work at the Annie E. Casey

Foundation, I used CRPE's three-part formulation to assess requests for funding. Applicants needed to spell out in direct and simple terms their general theory of change along with the relevant strategies they would execute to achieve success, in essence describing how they changed incentives,

**CRPE has provided intellectual leadership, looking around the corner for the challenges that no one else can see coming.**

developed freedom of action, and supported investments in new capacity development.

On another front, when a coalition of funders sought to create a charter research initiative in 2004, they were drawn by CRPE's insistence on nuanced assessment of all the aspects of a reform strategy. CRPE, chosen to create the National Charter School Research Program, provided the research and analysis for that endeavor. The organization became one of the best and most candid of the "knowledge managers" for the charter movement, calling attention to accomplishments, problems, and missed opportunities in equal measure. CRPE's work

also established valid standards for assessing charter school performance, which have led to great improvement in research. *Hopes, Fears, & Reality* has driven steady improvement in charter school policy, philanthropy, practice, and performance.

Finally, building a system of good options for families is one of the primary elements of the portfolio strategy, which has developed from Hill's ideas 20 years ago into a reality for many of today's districts. Portfolio districts are systems of schools that live or die on the basis of performance. A portfolio approach is a promising path forward for school system renewal and a plausible way to ensure that all students have access to a quality education and can choose from among a variety of quality schools. In short, a focus on performance, charters, and choice has been linked to a broader reform strategy and district transformation. School districts would benefit from viewing charters as potential partners, and all public schools would benefit from having characteristics similar to those of successful charters and charter networks. This transforms the governance task of public education into what CRPE calls a "civic enterprise."

CRPE's work over the last 20-plus years has helped policymakers, the general public, and a host of

other audiences make a balanced assessment of K-12 reform progress, grounding debates in facts, not ideology. It has not been timid about exposing weaknesses in the K-12 reform sector. It has provided intellectual leadership, looking around the corner for the challenges that no one else can see coming. It also constantly asks how its own ideas fall short and how they can be made more valid and useful. Not a bad record to build on for the next 20 years. //

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“CRPE has played a profound role in shaping our approach to building the Achievement School District. Regulating vs. operating schools, pushing the vast majority of the per-student funding to the campus level, and giving schools the autonomy to make decisions about people, program, budget, and time — these are all ideas that CRPE has embraced for the last 20 years, and we have an incredible opportunity in the ASD to operationalize these concepts in order to best serve our students and families across Tennessee.”

–Chris Barbic  
Superintendent  
Tennessee’s Achievement School District

## Real Students, Real Data, Real Change

In June 2003, *Oakland Tribune* writer Jill Tucker introduced the public to two California middle-school students: Gerry, who grew up in poverty in Oakland, and Alexene, who lived in the affluent suburb of Pleasanton. Tucker's multi-day series, "Our Public Schools: Separate and Unequal," showed how Gerry's school had less of everything that made Alexene's school great: algebra for all eighth-graders, honors math and English classes, top-notch labs and sporting facilities, and award-winning musical bands.

What struck me most was how Alexene's school spent thousands more per pupil on the most critical resource—teachers—than Gerry's school did. "Public schools were supposed to be the great equalizer," Tucker wrote. Instead, "It's a two-tiered system maintained by a convoluted funding formula that doesn't spend more based on where it will really matter and fails to place the best teachers—or even simply qualified teachers—with the children who need them the most."

At the time, as founding executive director of the Education Trust-West and vice president of the Education Trust, I knew that research made it unequivocally clear that teachers mattered more for student learning than

**CRPE's work helped launch a transformative, research-backed conversation that continues to inform policymaking to this day.**

any other in-school factor. I hoped that the kinds of disparities Tucker wrote about were an anomaly. But in Seattle, researchers were already finding that this was very much the norm.

It was typical at the time for research to compare spending *between* districts. Paul Hill, then director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, thought there might be more important disparities among schools *within* districts, fueled by differences in teacher experience and, thus, salary levels. The differences, however, were not evident, because school system budgets reported teacher salaries at a given school by multiplying a districtwide salary average by the number of teachers (no matter how much teachers at the school actually made).

Hill's colleague Marguerite Roza asked Seattle Public Schools for spending data on individual teacher salaries—not averages—at two schools in the working-class, mostly minority south end of the city and two schools in the affluent, heavily white north end. The findings revealed troubling inequities. Roza requested the same data citywide, suspecting deep differences between low-poverty and high-poverty schools. She was told, essentially, *We don't have that problem*. Districts rarely even knew how much they spent in real salaries per school. CRPE researchers sought salary files and matched the data with staff assignment by school to calculate salary differences by school. Seattle did have that problem, as did the other states and districts Roza pursued over the following years.

In February 2004, CRPE published *How Within-District Inequities Help Some Schools Fail*, which showed how in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Cincinnati, and Seattle, low-income schools were basically subsidizing affluent schools. Roza and Hill's groundbreaking study showed that despite public opinion that more money constantly flowed to schools serving mostly students growing up in poverty—not to mention federal laws that actually required that—the exact opposite occurred. These differences weren't about property values or tax rates, but rather were hard-wired into district policies through staffing compensation, and assignment

practices. CRPE’s work helped launch a transformative, research-backed conversation that continues to inform policymaking to this day.

## LIFTING THE VEIL IN CALIFORNIA

My EdTrust-West colleagues and I suspected that such intra-district inequities might exist in California. We had no idea that California’s educational finance data and reporting system routinely, intentionally, and systematically misled the public. But we knew parents and the public had a right to know more than we could find out. We built a database to conduct an analysis similar to what CRPE had done, but far bigger in scope—including every California district—and developed reliable estimates of the teacher salary dollars spent in every school in California. Our goals were clear: reveal the teacher spending gaps and expose the state and federal policies that allowed the gaps to exist and stay hidden from public purview. In virtually every district, we found that per-student dollars that were supposed to flow to communities and schools serving the most disadvantaged students were not spent on teaching them, but rather on teaching their more advantaged counterparts across town.

In 2005, we launched a full-scale statewide campaign to share this hidden information with our report, *California’s Hidden Teaching Spending Gap: How State and District Budgeting Practices Shortchange Poor and Minority Students and Their Schools*. The report included a statewide analysis and a deep-dive into the 12 largest districts in California. Latino, African American, and low-income students and their schools were being shortchanged on school funding, in some cases by almost \$1 million every year. Worse, those patterns were hidden by California’s deceptive budgeting and reporting practices—the salary cost-averaging practice first uncovered by CRPE. School Accountability Report Cards in California falsely portrayed a fair distribution of each district’s funding. Alongside the report, we released a web-based tool so that the public would be empowered to find the teacher-spending gap at any public school in the state.

By the end of the first week of the *Hidden Gap* release, nearly every major newspaper in the state wrote stories about it and discussed the findings on their editorial pages. Television and radio coverage was unprecedented for seemingly wonky school finance data. Some superintendents responded in

outrage. They felt blamed for something they had no control over—after all, they were restricted by the single salary schedule, the education code, and collectively bargained teacher contracts that governed hiring, tenure, and dismissal, including last-in, first-out practices. Other leaders worried that even if they had the power to load poor schools with expensive, veteran teachers, it may do little to solve achievement problems since, they said, veteran teachers don’t always guarantee better results for children. For others still, the teacher spending gaps exposed through this new research were simple manifestations of salary schedules that reward teachers for longevity instead of effectiveness or any other factor. While the knowledge of the dollar amounts of the spending gaps might be new, the underlying patterns were not.

But that was the point: to shine a bright spotlight on and challenge outmoded practices and old bargains that protected and perpetuated an inequitable system—one that did so at the expense of parents’ right to critical information about their children’s schooling.

## ENSURING THE PUBLIC'S RIGHT TO KNOW

In short order, policymakers took notice. In September 2005, Senate Bill 687, which was supported by EdTrust-West and a broad coalition of education advocates and leaders throughout the state, passed into law. The first-of-its-kind legislation required schools to use actual teacher salaries when they reported expenditures instead of simply estimates based on salary cost averaging. The bill drew widespread support across party lines, based on the common-sense notion that good government and genuine accountability for results meant telling Californians the truth about school finance.

In 2009, I was privileged to become assistant secretary for civil rights in the U.S. Department of Education under Secretary Arne Duncan. From that national perch, I could see that California and its new requirement was the exception. Most states and districts continued to report spending in terms of salary cost averaging—that is, if they reported data on teacher spending at all. That would soon change.

As part of the \$100 billion America Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which brought unprecedented federal dollars to our nation's schools, states were required for the first time to report school-by-school expenditure

data using actual teacher salaries. This one-time reporting served to prod states to develop the data systems and know-how to examine spending at the school level.

Later, in 2010, the mandatory reporting mechanism of the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) provided the vehicle to ensure ongoing reporting and more reliable school finance data over time, and a means of continuous improvement and accountability moving forward. Through intensive technical assistance, clear notice, and regulations, my colleagues and I at the Office for Civil Rights and its 12 regional offices worked with states and districts across the country to ensure compliance with reinvigorated enforcement of the nation's education civil rights laws and these new equity data reporting requirements.

By 2012, the Office for Civil Rights published the most comprehensive trove of educational opportunity and equity data ever released to the public, representing over 85 percent of the nation's public school students and over 72,000 schools. The CRDC painted a disturbing picture of inequality in America's schools and, with detailed expenditure data, made clear that the problem of teacher spending inequities existed in almost every district in the country.

CRPE had been on to something—and was still on the case. Roza

testified in state legislatures and on Capitol Hill about the nature of these inequitable spending patterns, conducted analyses for districts that wanted to fix the problem, and created materials to help school and district leaders think about alternative ways to approach human resource allocation.

Despite the action the research triggered, the problem persists in many places. As of this March, according to the U.S. Department of Education, nearly a quarter of the country's school districts reported a teacher spending gap of more than \$5,000 per teacher between high schools serving the greatest number of Latino and African American students and those that serve the fewest. For a typical comprehensive high school with 115 teachers, that's a difference of \$575,000 every year.

## THE PUSH FOR TRANSFORMATIVE RESULTS

While the data uncovered the issue, the issue can't be solved without important changes to the policies and practices that give rise to the problems. In this case, as CRPE had revealed and the *Hidden Gap* amplified, federal law allows and arguably encourages the teacher spending gaps in the first place, through the "comparability loophole" of Title I

in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Title I requires that federal monies supplement the education of low-income students, rather than supplant other spending on them or fill the gaps created by inequitable distribution of state and local dollars. But it determines whether state and local expenditures are comparable between high-poverty and low-poverty schools by looking at the number of teachers in schools, not their salaries. Backed by more strong research and advocacy from groups like the Center for American Progress and the continued work of the Education Trust, legislative proposals—including the Fiscal Fairness Act of 2010, authored by Rep. Chaka Fattah of Pennsylvania, and the 2011 No Child Left Behind reauthorization proposal by Sen. Tom Harkin, chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions—required honest reporting of teacher salary differentials in order to close the comparability loophole.

Although those proposals have yet to succeed at the federal level, and Congress continues to stall on the reauthorization of ESEA, I remain hopeful, because I know advocates and courageous policymakers, armed with data and compelling research, are poised to ensure a fix to the comparability loophole.

And California is finally seeking to remediate the inequities the *Hidden Gap* helped to expose—a truth codified by SB687—through implementation of its landmark 2013 Local Control Funding Formula, designed to ensure that schools serving the most at-risk students get their fair share of state and local dollars.

Research is a critical catalyst, along with good policymaking and loud advocacy, in bringing about change. Researchers digging for data unearthed a problem that's still making its way into policy today. I am inspired that the U.S. Department of Education and its Office for Civil Rights have not waned in their commitment to better transparency and data, and vigorous civil rights enforcement and monitoring backed by good qualitative and quantitative data. And every Californian should be proud of the state's commitment to resource equity and its consistent, honest report cards about teacher spending at the school level.

Still, even with new systems of school finance, new honest reporting, and a public desperate for results, the promise of equity and fundamental fairness has not yet been realized. Indeed, given the tradition of burying critical information about what's happening in schools, innovative researchers like those at CRPE, and the community members,

advocates, and policymakers they inform and inspire, have a lot of work to do to reveal truths, change pervasive patterns, transform schools, and help grow strong communities. //

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# //JOHN WHITE & ADAM HAWF

## A Playbook for a New Approach in New Orleans

The tragedy of Hurricane Katrina presented the opportunity for dedicated citizens to rebuild the physical and civic infrastructure of New Orleans with the support of an influx of people, ideas, and resources from around the world. The improvements of the last decade are manifest throughout the city, but nowhere more so than in the educational system. As a result of the hard work and collaboration among public education, business leadership, and community-based organizations, the city's schools are serving students dramatically better than they were before the storm. The public education model of today's New Orleans has garnered national acclaim not just for its initial results, but also for the inventiveness of its tenets and structure.

Many people have dedicated time to analyzing the actions, actors, and circumstances that enabled this sea change. They rightly credit the Louisiana state legislature and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education for creating and expanding the authority of the Recovery School District (RSD), and the creative people and organizations that emerged after the storm—Leslie Jacobs at BESE and Educate Now, Sarah Usdin and Neerav Kingsland at New Schools for New Orleans, and Caroline Roemer at the Louisiana Association of Public Charter Schools. But we should also give credit to an idea that informed the developments in New Orleans: the portfolio strategy articulated by Paul Hill and the Center on Reinventing Public Education.

The portfolio strategy has guided our work in New Orleans in part because it aligns with what we and others in New Orleans already believed: that parents should have a say in where their children attend school, educators should work in environments that give them the freedom to focus on the needs of children, and government should ensure equitable access to schools for all students and a minimum standard of performance for all schools.

Having observed these principles at work in New York City and in New Orleans in the years after Katrina, in 2011 we joined the administration of the RSD—at that time an improving district of traditional and charter public schools with significant promise but also significant gaps in achievement and equity. John came to New Orleans from New York City, where he had served as deputy chancellor and led efforts to turn around failing schools, develop new educational models, and launch new charter schools. Adam had returned to New Orleans months earlier to resume the work in schools that he had begun in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

We were motivated by the opportunity to continue the successful reforms in New Orleans and ensure that government struck the right balance of empowering schools and the social sector while also ensuring transparency and accountability to the public. Over the last three years, we have had the opportunity to further the portfolio strategy in New Orleans and throughout Louisiana, building on the trailblazing work of our predecessors at the RSD and the Louisiana Department of Education, superintendents Paul Pastorek and Paul Vallas. The results—both inspiring and humbling—are a testament to the strategy and a valuable case study for other cities.

Hill articulated a clear set of beliefs and codified them into a cohesive framework. In doing so, he made the strategy comprehensible and compelling, especially to civic leaders often not engaged in a city's educational system.



When Paul Hill first introduced the portfolio strategy two decades ago, the idea that governments should govern systems of education rather than operate schools seemed contentious to some and crazy to others. Today it is an important motif in American public policy, thanks in part to strong academic results in Denver, New Orleans, New York, and other cities. Hill articulated a clear set of beliefs and codified them into a cohesive framework. In doing so, he made the strategy comprehensible and compelling, especially to civic leaders often not engaged in a city’s educational system.

Whereas many strategies last only as long as a superintendent’s tenure, portfolio has persevered in almost every district in which it has taken root. It has changed how local leaders think about the role of government in public education. The spread of portfolio models has changed the national conversation by normalizing ideas about parental choice and who makes decisions in a school. In our own state, we are gratified to see this conversation spread from New Orleans to Baton Rouge, where Chris Meyer of New Schools Baton Rouge is working with faith and civic leaders to expand access to high-quality schools in the most underserved area of the city.

Over the last two decades, the team at CRPE has turned the portfolio concepts into a playbook for practitioners, transmitted and reinforced through their writings, conferences, and advising. By now, many people take the principles behind the portfolio strategy for granted.

### CHANGING HOW PRACTITIONERS VIEW THE WORLD

In 1992, David Osborne and Ted Gaebler outlined in *Reinventing Government* how bureaucracy can impede innovation and how government is better suited to steering, rather than rowing, the boat. In *Reinventing Public Education*, Hill made a persuasive case for applying those principles to schooling. Over the last two decades, the team at CRPE has turned the portfolio concepts into a playbook for practitioners, transmitted and reinforced through their writings, conferences, and advising. By now, many people take the principles behind the portfolio strategy for granted.

CRPE has taught us that the district can do more by doing less, and challenged us to demand more for and from parents,

educators, and government. CRPE reminds us that parent choice is a right rather than a luxury, and a strategy to drive academic achievement rather than a political position. Government must work together with schools and the broader social sector to establish and enforce the rules and routines that make choice fair, transparent, and efficient.

CRPE has taught us that the operation of schools is not a birthright for the local district but a privilege one must earn and re-earn. We must use data to provide a fair, objective, and consistent cycle of performance-based accountability to determine who deserves this privilege.

CRPE brought to the mainstream the idea that school autonomy—where principals make decisions about staffing, curriculum, and use of time and resources—is something that enables success rather than just something school

leaders deserve because of having achieved success. Across the country, there are many examples of autonomy as a reward for compliance, collegiality, or good performance, and this autonomy is preferable to no autonomy at all. But our experience in Louisiana shows that a better system is one that gives schools autonomy as a contractual right of their existence, and holds them accountable for specific outcomes on a tight timeline.

Finally, CRPE reminds us that the work of educating our children should not be constrained to professional educators alone; non-educators, including disenfranchised and nontraditional stakeholders, have the right and responsibility to engage in public education. The portfolio strategy is effective because it invites the participation of parents, the business community, and others into the hard work of running schools and districts.

## THE PORTFOLIO STRATEGY IN NEW ORLEANS

Over the last three years, we have deepened New Orleans' commitment to the portfolio strategy around three key elements:

- Government as the guarantor of equity
- The necessity of recruiting and supporting a diverse set of individuals and organizations

- Performance-based accountability for all schools

Above all, the portfolio strategy establishes an essential role for government as the portfolio manager and guarantor of equity for children. One way we put this into practice was through the implementation of a single application system for all schools: because a decentralized enrollment system made it difficult for low-income parents to seek seats in good schools for their children, we established a streamlined, transparent common enrollment system, called OneApp. Many of our most important policy changes, including a decision to centralize the expulsion process, have come directly from charter school leaders in New Orleans.

The portfolio strategy also fueled our efforts to recruit and develop a diverse pool of individuals and nonprofit organizations to govern, run, and support our schools. Through creative use of existing state and federal dollars, we have magnified the impact of the philanthropic capital dedicated to New Orleans and accelerated the pace of change throughout Louisiana. The effect of welcoming new talent to New Orleans has spilled over into other sectors of the economy—many of the young people called to New Orleans to teach now lead the broader revitalization of our city and state.

In New Orleans, the process for replacing struggling school

operators often caught parents and educators by surprise. In line with the portfolio strategy, we established a simple, clear default school closure framework, which the RSD, under the leadership of Superintendent Patrick Dobard, has worked to more clearly communicate to the public. We perform an annual process of closing schools that do not meet the bar, and government works with the nonprofit sector to facilitate the launch of new options and the expansion of schools and networks that are performing well. Our improvements in this arena owe no small debt to Chris Barbic and his team, our constant partners at the Tennessee Achievement School District.

Overall, New Orleans may be the most dramatic example of the portfolio strategy in action. In the year before Hurricane Katrina, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) educated almost 90 percent of public school students in New Orleans. Today, more than 90 percent of public school students are in charter schools run by almost 50 organizations, while OPSB and the RSD operate only a handful of schools. The public at large has seized the opportunity for direct involvement in the creation and governance of our schools—today, more than 300 people serve on charter school boards in New Orleans.

These structural changes have enabled significant improvements

in the experience of students and parents. In the year before Katrina, 78 public schools met the definition of “failing;” today, only 9 do. New Orleans ranked 67th out of 68 Louisiana districts in 2005, and now it is 38th. Over that time, the proficiency rate for the public schools in New Orleans has increased from 35 percent to 63 percent.

**No one is better poised than CRPE to partner with cities as they wrestle with these difficult governance questions.**

Above all, the lesson of New Orleans is that people rise to the occasion. The citizens of New Orleans have played an invaluable role in changing the city’s educational landscape—the portfolio strategy challenges all of the major stakeholders in education to accept accountability for the future of our children. In New Orleans, educators make the most of autonomy, parents use school choice to the advantage of their children, and government achieves more by doing less. At the heart of all of these changes is a commitment to collaboration and continuous improvement. While the city’s educational system has made

significant gains in the nearly 10 years since Hurricane Katrina, we still have a lot of work to do.

### CRPE AND THE FUTURE

New Orleans’ experiences shed light on the influence of the portfolio strategy and raise important questions about its future. How do we ensure that a performance-based accountability system works for the wide variety of schools a portfolio district is meant to comprise—including schools for students with profound special needs? How do we adapt the portfolio strategy for places like Cleveland and Detroit, which have underperforming charter sectors and fractured governance systems? Each city presents unique challenges that will continue to push CRPE and the portfolio strategy.

Every city needs a portfolio manager, governmental or otherwise, and a strong actor to guarantee equity for students and parents. This entity must ensure that autonomy and new schools lead to the sort of programmatic diversity that fulfills the original promise of portfolio: a set of schools that are as diverse as the needs of our learners. No one is better poised than CRPE to partner with cities as they wrestle with these difficult governance questions.

Finally, while CRPE has provided a road map for protecting schools and educators from the weaknesses and overreach of traditional

school systems, the next step is to protect the districts and district leaders from the state and from the bureaucracy rolling downhill from the federal government. Perhaps CRPE can help us to imagine a world in which the federal government plays a clear, limited, and relevant role in public education. That may sound utopian, but 20 years ago so did the portfolio strategy. //

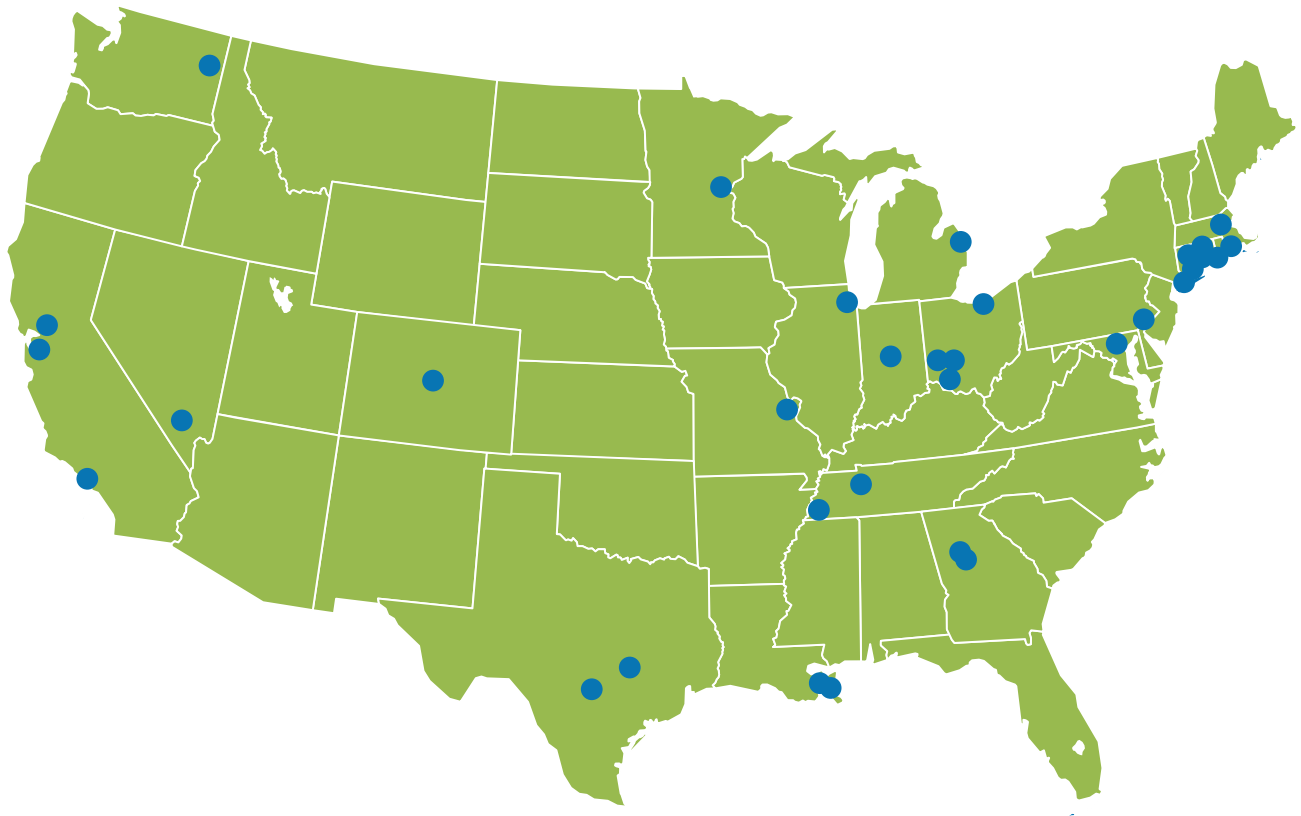
*John White is Louisiana State Superintendent of Education. Previously, he was superintendent of the Louisiana Recovery School District. Before that, he worked in New York City first as Chief Executive Officer, Portfolio Division, then as Deputy Chancellor of Talent, Labor, and Innovation.*

*Adam Hawf is Assistant Superintendent, Portfolio, at the Louisiana Department of Education. Previously, he worked on portfolio and performance issues at the Louisiana Recovery School District and cofounded the NOLA fund.*

# //PORTFOLIO NETWORK

## A great school for every child in every neighborhood

The Portfolio Network is a group of the nation's leading school systems, mayor's offices, charter school leaders, community leaders and funders who are interested in implementing the portfolio strategy in order to improve their community's public school system. The network officially launched in 2009 and now includes over 40 localities around the country.



**2003**  
New York City, NY  
Oakland, CA

**2004**  
Chicago, IL

**2005**  
Denver, CO  
New Orleans, LA

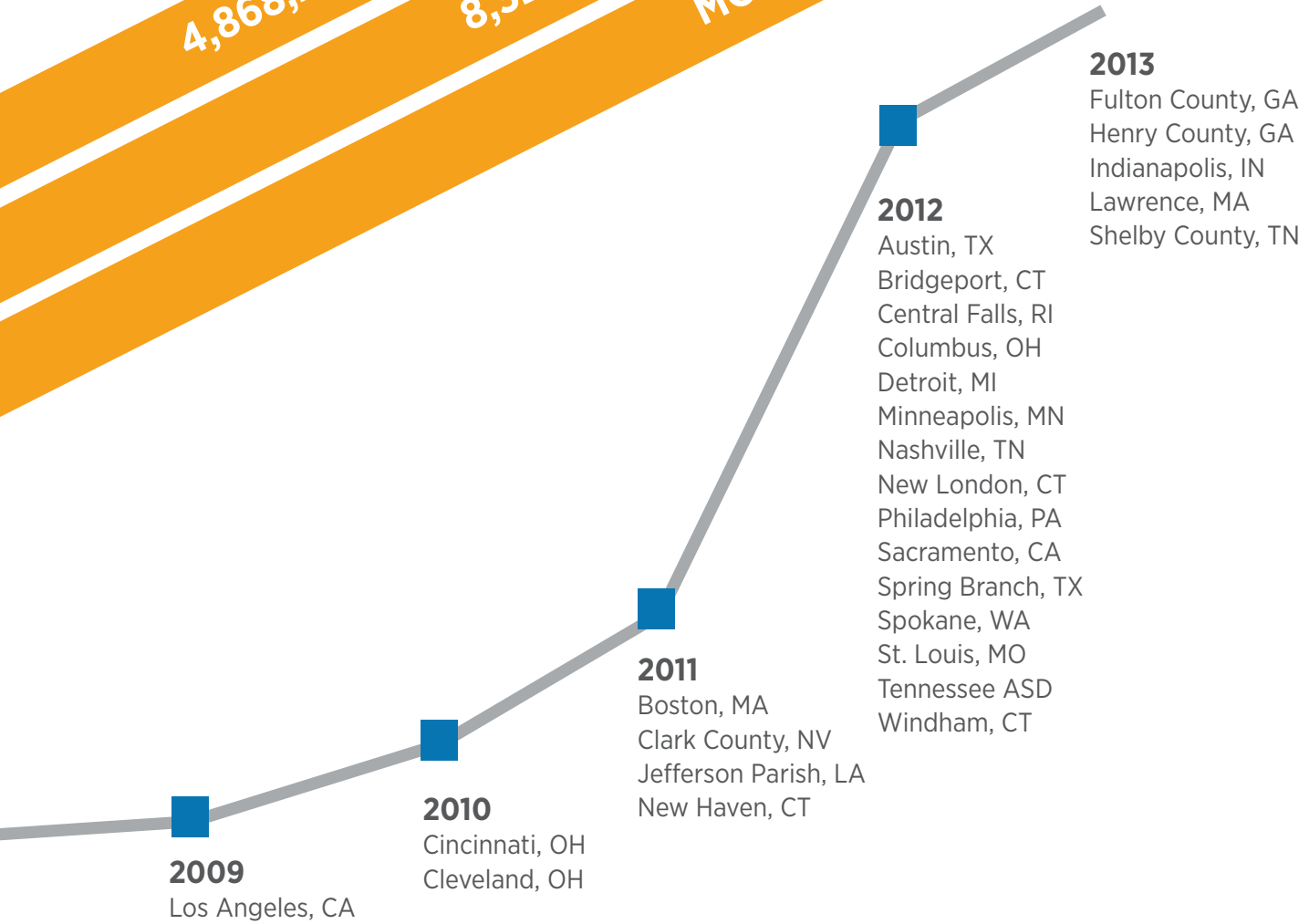
**2007**  
Baltimore, MD  
Hartford, CT  
Reynoldsburg, OH

The Portfolio Network currently represents...

4,868,280 STUDENTS

8,329 SCHOOLS

MORE THAN 405,498 EMPLOYEES



## “Sure of the Work I Needed to Do”

My wife, Alice, thought I was a little crazy leaving a stable organization, and a reasonably successful life in D.C., to start my own venture 20 years ago. She had a point. But I was fired up, and sure of the work I needed to do.

I had been at RAND for 17 years. There I had studied a lot of organizations, both private and public, in fields from education to immigration to national security, and I saw that every one was governed in a way to guarantee some outcomes and leave other results to chance. Public K-12 education, especially in big cities, was organized around bargains made among adults. Somehow the results of these deals were supposed to trickle down to benefit kids, but whether that actually happened seemed accidental.

I thought that relationship could be turned on its head. *Reinventing Public Education: How Contracting Can Transform America's Schools* (the third and best-developed of my publications on a similar theme) argued for giving school leaders freedom to define how children would learn. There could be as many kinds of public schools as there were kids' needs and ideas about how to meet them. If a school wasn't effective, families could send their children elsewhere. The local school board would be obligated to withdraw support from an unproductive school and contract with another group to offer a school.

When I was first publishing my thoughts on this, I hadn't heard of charter schools, which were emerging in Minnesota at the time. The ideas were complementary, but not the same: I was proposing that all, not just some, public schools operate under contract, that all teachers would be employed by schools rather than districts, and that all public funds follow children to the schools they attend.

I thought this concept could particularly improve options for low-income children in big cities, whose schools were the most weakened by politics and regulation. But I knew it would be a hard sell. Schools and districts that were not achieving the goals of public education (to prepare all children for citizenship and economic independence) were safely insulated by the criticism that a new delivery system—even one that did a better job of meeting these goals—was an abandonment of public education and, by extension, American ideals.

I also knew that the concept would require a lot of testing and refinement. My work at RAND had taught me that whole systems of factors could intrude between a good theory and its results. I had questions of my own about how the ideas in *Reinventing* would work out, and I felt obligated to pursue the answers. When public schools got control of real dollars, would they spend them strategically or carelessly? What would happen to teacher quality when schools could hire on the basis of best fit and every teacher could choose the school that offered the best pay and working conditions? What would it take for parents who had never exercised school choice to do so knowledgeably? Could local governance bodies prune out weak schools and attract better providers?

My hope was to encourage localities to try out the concept, and to work with them to see where implementation got stalled or the core ideas needed amendment. Colleagues warned that it would be difficult to both promote the use of my ideas and honestly analyze the results. Others warned that philanthropies would not look favorably on an initiative that neither buttressed the existing system nor pressed for a pure market. But I thought the work could be done and was determined to try.

Of course, my worried friends and mentors had good points. It's not easy to tell a city or state leader, "You should try this out—but I am not sure it will work, so we should stay in touch so I can learn with you." But many leaders know how difficult the problems of K-12 education are, and don't believe there is a simple surefire solution. Nor has it been easy to fund the work, as some foundations consider it too radical and others consider

There are funders who believe in pragmatic problem-solving and appreciate our willingness to question common assumptions. For those who took a chance on me when there was nothing, and who have continued to sustain CRPE as it attacks issues in its own distinctive way, I am very grateful.

it too hedged and conditional—the province (to quote one) of “pencil necks.” But again, there are funders who believe in pragmatic problem-solving and appreciate our willingness to question common assumptions. For those who took a chance on me when there was nothing, and who have continued to sustain CRPE as it attacks issues in its own distinctive way, I am very grateful.

I am grateful as well for the many bright people who worked alongside me—people I didn’t at first think I’d need but now can’t imagine having done without. When I came to the University of Washington and started CRPE, I called it a “center” but really thought of it as a solitary endeavor. I expected to do most of my work in collaboration with researchers elsewhere and tried to avoid students who wanted jobs. One day after lunch I came back to my locked office to find Laura Kohn inside waiting for me. She was the first of the amazing young people who made me think, “If I can’t work productively with this person, there must be something wrong with me.” I kept meeting such people at UW—individuals who

were willing to think openly, who asked new questions and realized the answers weren’t obvious—and before long found myself with a center that conducted many studies, each in the hands of a brilliant young person who, with a little light mentoring, could do fine work.

Some of those people are still at CRPE—Robin Lake, Christine Campbell, and Michael DeArmond—but they are now running the place and doing the mentoring. Some, like Marguerite Roza, are on their own but still working closely with CRPE. Others are farther afield and remain brilliant and productive. The development of those young people, particularly the ones who have become CRPE’s effective new leaders, has been a great source of joy for me.

Thank goodness for them. Thank goodness, too, for the state and local leaders and funders who are willing to take on new ideas and don’t expect an initiative to work perfectly the first time, or even for a long time. (It took nearly two decades for the ideas I founded CRPE on to become the way several major school districts do

business.) For every sure answer we find, five more puzzles appear in front of us. Though I wish for students’ sake we could, I don’t foresee any time that we will say, “It’s all been resolved—CRPE’s work is done.” //

*Paul Hill is Founder of the Center on Reinventing Public Education and Research Professor at the University of Washington Bothell.*

“When I took leadership of the Recovery School District, Paul Hill quickly became my thought partner. Over the next several years I relied on his counsel to help the RSD become one of the more advanced examples of what portfolio management looks like in an entire urban district.”

–Paul Pastorek  
Former Louisiana State Superintendent



“When I was superintendent in Milwaukee, Paul Hill’s book *Reinventing Public Education* gave me a vision of how public schools could work for all kids. As I’ve fought for choice over the years, CRPE’s work keeps giving me new ideas about what’s working and what needs to be tried to make a powerful education possible for every kid.”

–Howard Fuller  
Founder and Director  
Institute for the Transformation of Learning  
Marquette University



# EDUCATION WEEK

FEBRUARY 16, 1994

## New Center To Explore Governance Alternatives

By Ann Bradley

The RAND Corporation and the University of Washington's Institute for Public Policy and Management have jointly established a new center that will explore alternatives to the current system of education governance, particularly in urban areas.

Paul Hill, a senior social scientist with RAND and a professor at the university, is heading the center, known as the Program on Reinventing Public Education.

"I've become convinced that the marginal, inside-the-system changes we've been talking about—decentralization, site-based management—are all much too gentle," Mr. Hill said in an interview. "They are experimental projects that leave the core of the bureaucratic system intact."

Instead, Mr. Hill and his colleagues plan to explore how school boards could create "contract schools" that would be legal entities operating under specific agreements with local boards. Such schools would have a strong sense of mission and a cohesive faculty, and would have to meet certain criteria to continue to operate.

The idea differs from the popular "charter schools" concept, Mr. Hill said, because school boards' primary mission would be to create contract schools. Under the charter approach, boards react to people who want to open schools, rather than seek them out.

Contract schools, in Mr. Hill's conception, also would be different in that they would operate under legal contracts that would hold them accountable for student performance and give them an assurance that they could continue as long as they were successful. Charter schools, he said, are subject to "political vagaries."

...

The Seattle-based center will try to build a national network of local business, civic, and political leaders who are interested in changing the governance of their schools and help them link up with people in education who have similar interests.

"I'm trying to be both a researcher and provocateur to make the ideas as concrete and understandable as possible and to try to help localities and state legislatures to do something," Mr. Hill said.

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