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Gamoran, Adam. "The Challenge of Systemic Reform: Lessons from the New Futures Initiative for the CIJE", January 1992.

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THE CHALLENGE OF SYSTEMIC REFORM:  
LESSONS FROM THE NEW FUTURES INITIATIVE FOR THE CIJE

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A paper prepared for circulation within the  
Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education (CIJE).

January, 1992

## THE CHALLENGE OF SYSTEMIC REFORM: LESSONS FROM THE NEW FUTURES INITIATIVE FOR THE CIJE

In 1988, the Annie E. Casey Foundation committed about \$40 million over a five-year period to fund community-wide reforms in four mid-sized cities: Dayton, Ohio; Little Rock, Arkansas; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Savannah, Georgia.<sup>1</sup> The reforms were aimed at radically improving the life-chances of at-risk youth, and at the core of the agenda were changes in educational systems and in relations between schools and other social service agencies. Despite major investments, not only financial but in time, energy, and good will, from participants as well as the Foundation, the New Futures Initiative has made little headway in improving education.

According to a three-year evaluation:

The programs, policies, and structures implemented as part of New Futures have not begun to stimulate a fundamental restructuring of schools. For the most part, interventions were supplemental, leaving most of the basic activities and practices of schools unaltered. At best, these interventions have yet to produce more than superficial change (Wehlage, Smith, and Lipman, 1991, p. 51).

This is not a matter of failing to allow time for programs to take effect, nor is it the problem that weak outcome indicators prevented recognition of the benefits of innovative programs. Rather, the programs themselves have been weakly conceived and poorly implemented.

There are striking similarities between the action plans of New Futures and the CIJE's lead communities project. Consideration of the struggles of New Futures therefore provides important lessons for the CIJE which may allow us to avoid the pitfalls that New Futures has encountered. In this paper, I will describe the design and implementation of New Futures, and show its similarities to the CIJE's agenda. Next, I will summarize New Futures' successes and frustrations.<sup>2</sup> Finally, I will explore the implications of the New Futures experience for the CIJE.



### The Design of New Futures

Just as the CIJE was born out of dire concern for the fate of American Jewry, the New Futures Initiative emerged in response to a sense of crisis in urban America. Like the CIJE, New Futures is concentrating major assistance in a few locations, and emphasizing community-wide (or systemic) reform, rather than isolated improvements. At the heart of New Futures' organizational plan are community collaboratives: local boards created in each of the New Futures cities which are supposed to build consensus around goals and policies, coordinate the efforts of diverse agencies, and facilitate implementation of innovative programs. These collaboratives began with detailed self-studies which served both as part of their applications to become New Futures cities, and as the groundwork for the agendas they developed subsequently. Each city developed a management information system (MIS) that would gauge the welfare of youth and inform policy decisions. Like the CIJE, the Casey Foundation listed certain areas of reform that each city was required to address, and encouraged additional reforms that fit particular contexts.<sup>3</sup>

Another similarity between New Futures and the CIJE is the decision to play an active part in the development and implementation of reforms. Unlike the sideline role played by most grant-givers, New Futures provided policy guidelines, advice, and technical assistance. New Futures has a liaison for each city who visits frequently. According to the evaluators, "the Foundation attempted to walk a precarious line between prescribing and shaping New Futures efforts according to its own vision and encouraging local initiative and inventiveness" (Wehlage, Smith, and Lipman, 1991, p. 8).

The New Futures Initiative differed from the CIJE in that it began with clear ideas about what outcomes had to be changed. These included increased student attendance and achievement, better youth employment prospects, and reductions in suspensions, course failures, grade retentions, and teenage pregnancies. New Futures recognized, however, that these were

long-term goals, and they did not expect to see much change in these outcomes during the first few years. The three-year evaluation focused instead on intermediate goals, asking five main questions (Wehlage, Smith, and Lipman, 1991, p. 17):

1. Have the interventions stimulated school-wide changes that fundamentally affect all students' experiences, or have the interventions functioned more as "add-ons"...
2. Have the interventions contributed to...more supportive and positive social relations...throughout the school?
3. Have the interventions led to changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment...that generate higher levels of student engagement in academics, especially in problem solving and higher order thinking activities?
4. Have the interventions...give(n teachers and principals) more autonomy and responsibility...while also making them more accountable...?
5. Have the interventions brought to the schools additional material or human resources...?

Although Wehlage and his colleagues observed some successes, notably the establishment of management information systems, and exciting but isolated innovations in a few schools, by and large the intermediate goals were not met: interventions were supplemental rather than fundamental; social relations remained adversarial; there was virtually no change in curriculum and instruction; and autonomy, responsibility, and community resources evidenced but slight increases.

#### New Futures' Limited Success

New Futures' greatest achievement thus far may be the "improved capacity to gather data on youths" (Education Week, 9/25/91, p. 12). Prior to New Futures, the cities had little precise information on how the school systems were functioning. Basic data, such as dropout and achievement rates, were not calculated reliably. Establishing clear procedures for gathering information means that the cities will be able to identify key areas of need and keep track of progress. For example, the data pointed to sharp discrepancies between black and white



suspension rates, and this has made suspension policies an important issue. The outcome indicators showed little change over the first three years, but they were not expected to. New Futures participants anticipated that data-gathering will pay off in the future.

The intermediate outcomes, which were expected to show improvement from 1988 to 1991, have been the source of frustration. None of the five areas examined by Wehlage's team showed major improvement. For example, the most extensive structural change was the rearrangement of some Little Rock and Dayton middle schools into clusters of teachers and students. This plan was adopted to personalize the schooling experience for students, and to offer opportunities for collaboration among teachers. Yet no new curricula or instructional approaches resulted from this restructuring, and it has not led to more supportive teacher-student relations.

Observers reported:

(A)t cluster meetings teachers address either administrative details or individual students. When students are discussed, teachers tend to focus on personal problems and attempt to find idiosyncratic solutions to individual needs. They commonly perceive students' problems to be the result of personal character defects or the products of dysfunctional homes. "Problems" are usually seen as "inside" the student and his/her family; prescriptions or plans are designed to "fix" the student. Clusters have not been used as opportunities for collaboration and reflection in developing broad educational strategies that could potentially address institutional sources of student failure (Wehlage, Smith, and Lipman, 1991, p. 22).

The failure to take advantage of possibilities offered by clustering is symptomatic of what the Wehlage team saw as the fundamental reason for lack of progress: the absence of change in the culture of educational institutions in the New Futures cities. Educators continue to see the sources of failure as within the students; their ideas about improvement still refer to students' buckling down and doing the work. The notion that schools might change their practices to meet the needs of a changed student population has yet to permeate the school culture.

Another example of unchanged culture was manifested in strategies for dealing with the suspension problem. As New Futures began, it was not uncommon for a third of the student

body in a junior high school to receive suspensions during a given school year. In some cases, suspended students could not make up work they missed; this led them to fall further behind and increased their likelihood of failure. In response, several schools began programs of in-school suspensions. However, out-of-school suspensions remained common, and in-school suspensions were served in a harsh and punitive atmosphere that contradicted the goal of improving the schools' learning environments.

The newspaper account of New Futures' progress focused on a different source of frustration: the complexity of coordinating efforts among diverse social agencies, schools, and the Foundation. This task turned out to be much more difficult than anticipated. The article quotes James Van Vleck, chair of the collaborative in Dayton: "As we've sobered up and faced the issues, we have found that getting collaboration between those players is a much more complicated and difficult game than we expected" (p. 12). Part of the difficulty lay in not spending enough time and energy building coalitions and consensus at the outset. Otis Johnson, who leads the Savannah collaborative, is quoted as saying: "If we had used at least the first six months to plan and to do a lot of bridge-building and coordination that we had to struggle with through the first year, I think it would have been much smoother" (p. 13).

The push to get started led to an appearance of a top-down project, though that was not the intention. Teachers, principals, and social workers--those who have contact with the youth--were not heavily involved in generating programs. Both the news account and the evaluation report describe little progress in encouraging teachers and principals to develop new programs, and school staff appeared suspicious about whether their supposed empowerment was as real as it was made out to be (see Wehlage, Smith, and Lipman, 1991, p. 31).

Inherent tensions in an outside intervention contributed to these difficulties. The use of policy evaluation has made some participants feel "whip-sawed around" (Education Week, 9/25/91,



p. 15). A Dayton principal explained, "We were always responding to...either the collaborative or the foundation. It was very frustrating for teachers who were not understanding why the changes were occurring" (Education Week, 9/25/91, p. 15). Another tension emerged in the use of technical assistance: While some participants objected to top-down reforms, others complained that staff development efforts have been brief and limited, rather than sustained.

According to the evaluation team, the New Futures projects in the four cities have suffered from the lack of an overall vision of what needs to be changed. How, exactly, should students' and teachers' daily lives be different? There seem to be no answers to this question.

Implications: How Can the CIJE Avoid Similar Frustration?

The New Futures experience offers four critical lessons for the CIJE: (1) the need for a vision about the content of educational and community reforms; (2) the need to modify the culture of schools and other institutions along with their structures; (3) the importance of balancing enthusiasm and momentum with coalition-building and careful thinking about programs; and (4) the need for awareness of inherent tensions in an intervention stimulated in part by external sources.

The importance of content. Although New Futures provided general guidelines, no particular programs were specified. This plan may well have been appropriate in light of concerns about top-down reform. Yet the community collaboratives also failed to enact visions of educational restructuring, and most new programs were minor "add-ons" to existing structures. Wehlage and his colleagues concluded that reforms would remain isolated and ineffective without a clear vision of overall educational reform. Such a vision must be informed by current knowledge about education, yet at the same time emerge from participation of "street-level" educators--those who deal directly with youth.



This finding places the CIJE's "best practices" project at the center of its operation. Through a deliberate and wide-ranging planning process, each lead community must develop a broad vision of its desired educational programs and outcomes. Specific programs can then be developed in collaboration with the CIJE, drawing on knowledge generated by the best practices project. In addition to information about "what works," the best practices project can provide access to technical support outside the community and the CIJE. This support must be sustained rather than limited to brief interventions, and it must be desired by local educators rather than foisted from above. In short, each lead community must be able to answer the question, "how should students' and educators' daily lives be different?"; and the best practices project must provide access to knowledge that will help generate the answers.

Changing culture as well as structure. Jewish educators are no less likely than staff in secular schools to find sources of failure outside their institutions. Indeed, the diminished (though not eradicated) threat of anti-semitism, the rise in mixed-marriage families, disillusion with Israel, and the general reduction of spirituality in American public and private life,<sup>4</sup> all may lower the interests of youth in their Jewishness and raise the chances of failure for Jewish education. Thus, Jewish educators would be quite correct to claim that if North American youth fail to remain Jewish, it is largely due to circumstances beyond the educators' control. But this is besides the point. At issue is not external impediments, but how educational and social agencies can respond to changing external circumstances. In New Futures cities, educators have mainly attempted to get students to fit existing institutions. If CIJE communities do the same, their likelihood of failure is equally great. Instead, lead communities must consider changes in their organizational structures and underlying assumptions to meet the needs of a changing Jewish world.

How do CIJE plans address this concern? The intention to mobilize support for education, raising awareness of its centrality in all sectors of the community, is an important first step, particularly since it is expected to result in new lay leadership for education and community collaboration. New Futures' experience shows that this tactic is necessary but not sufficient. In New Futures cities, community collaboratives galvanized support and provided the moral authority under which change could take place. Yet little fundamental change occurred. Educators have not experimented much with new curricula, instructional methods, responsibilities or roles, because their basic beliefs about teaching and learning have not changed.

It is possible that the CIJE's strategy of building a profession of Jewish education address this problem. Perhaps unlike the secular educational world, where methods are well-entrenched, professionalization in Jewish education will carry with it an openness to alternatives, encouraging teachers to create and use new knowledge about effective programs. Professionalization may bring out the capacity to experiment with "best practices" and a willingness to adopt them when they appear to work.

Balance enthusiasm with careful planning. Those involved in New Futures believe they should have spent more time building coalitions and establishing strategies before introducing new programs. Douglas W. Nelson, executive director of the Casey Foundation, regrets that more time was not taken for planning. He observed: "We made it more difficult, in the interest of using the urgency of the moment and the excitement of commitment, to include and get ownership at more levels" (Education Week, 9/25/91, p. 13). Again, it is not just the structure that requires change--this can be mandated from above--but the unspoken assumptions and beliefs that guide everyday behavior which require redefinition. Institutional culture cannot be changed by fiat, but only through a slow process of mutual consultation and increasing commitment.



Lead communities also need a long planning period to develop new educational programs that are rich in content and far-reaching in impact. This process requires a thorough self-study, frank appraisal of current problems, discussions of goals with diverse members of the community, and careful consideration of existing knowledge. If "lead communities" is a twenty-year project, surely it is worth taking a year or more for preparation. Deliberation at the planning stage creates a risk that momentum will be lost, and it may be important to take steps to keep enthusiasm high, but the lesson of New Futures show that enthusiasm must not overtake careful planning. The current schedule for the lead communities project (as of January, 1992) appears to have taken account of these concerns.

Awareness of unavoidable tensions. New Futures' experience highlights tensions that are inherent to the process of an outside intervention, and the CIJE must be sensitive so the effects of such tensions can be mitigated. The CIJE must recognize the need for stability after dramatic initial changes take place. The CIJE's evaluation plan must be developed and agreed upon by all parties before the end of the lead communities' planning period. Technical support from the CIJE must be sustained, rather than haphazard. While the CIJE cannot hold back constructive criticism, it must balance criticism with support for honest efforts. Many of these tactics have been used by New Futures, and they may well account for the fact that New Futures is still ongoing and has hopes of eventual success, despite the frustrations of the early years.

### Conclusion

The New Futures Initiative, the Casey Foundation's effort to improve the lot of at-risk youth in four American cities, has been limited by supplemental rather than fundamental change, the inability to modify underlying beliefs even where structural changes occur, and by the complexities of coordinating the work of diverse agencies. Although it will be difficult for the CIJE to overcome these challenges, awareness of their likely emergence may help forestall them

or mitigate their consequences. In particular, the CIJE should help lead communities develop their visions of new educational programs; think about cultural as well as structural change; ensure a thorough self-study, wide-ranging participation, and careful planning; and remain sensitive to tensions that are unavoidable when an outside agent is the stimulus of change.

Lo alecha ha-m'lacha ligmor, v'lo ata ben horin l'hibatel mi-menah. Ha-yom katzar v'ha-m'lacha m'rubah, v'ha-poalim atzeylim, v'ha-sahar harbeh. U-va'al ha-bayit dohek --- Pirke Avot.

(It is not your responsibility to finish the task, but neither are you free to shirk it. The day is short and the task is large, the workers are lazy, and the reward is great. And the Master of the House is pressing --- Sayings of the Fathers.)

## AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Lawrence, Massachusetts, was originally included as well, with an additional \$10 million, but it was dropped during the second year after the community failed to reach consensus on how to proceed.
2. This account relies largely on two sources. One is an Education Week news report by Deborah L. Cohen, which appeared on Sept. 25, 1991. The second is an academic paper by the Casey Foundation's evaluation team: Gary G. Wehlage, Gregory Smith, and Pauline Lipman, "Restructuring Urban Schools: The New Futures Experience" (Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, May 1991).
3. The reforms required (or "strongly encouraged") by the Casey Foundation were site-based management, flexibility for teachers, individualized treatment of students, staff development, and community-wide collaboration. This list is longer than the CIJE's, whose required elements are building the educational profession and mobilizing community support.
4. On the decline of spirituality in America, see Robert N. Bellah et. al, Habits of the Heart (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).



# EDUCATION WEEK

American Education's Newspaper of Record

Volume XI, Number 4 • September 25, 1991

• 1991 Editorial Projects in Education / \$2.50

## Kozol Book Puts Human Face on Fiscal Inequities

*Property-Tax System Is Culprit, Author Says*

By Lynn Olson

"We have a school in East St. Louis named for Dr. King," the author Jonathan Kozol quotes a 14-year-old girl saying toward the beginning of his new book, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. "The school is full of sewer water and the doors are locked with chains. Every student in that school is black. It's like a terrible joke on history."

Such humor is bitter indeed, according to Mr. Kozol. He places most of the blame for such conditions on the "arcane machinery," based heavily on local property taxes, that is used to finance public education.

Drawing on visits to inner-city and suburban classrooms in some 30 neighborhoods around the country, the prominent

## Reality Tempers 'New Futures' Leaders' Optimism

By Deborah L. Cohen

Three years after the Annie E. Casey Foundation committed \$50 million to an ambitious five-year effort to raise student achievement and stem dropout rates, teenage pregnancy, and youth unemployment in five cities, project participants' initial enthusiasm and optimism has been tempered by a healthy dose of reality.

"This was the first time we had a five-year commitment and a sense of quite a bit of money to work with" to address youth issues comprehensively, recalled James Van Vleck, a retired Mead Corporation senior vice president and the chairman of the interagency collaborative overseeing the grant in Dayton, Ohio.

"It made us think it was going to be a piece of cake," he said. But Casey Foundation executives and project leaders now admit that the "piece of cake" was much bigger and more difficult to digest than they had first imagined.

They recount story after story about how complicated it has been to coordinate the efforts of a wide range of youth-serving institutions, including schools and human-service agencies.

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Mel Crafter, the principal at Roth Middle School in Dayton, Ohio, with students Chauiti Kirby, left, and Nikia Houston.

## Arizona's Chief in the Eye of Storm As Lawsuits and Allegations Swirl By

By Peter West

state is ineligible for impact-aid payments because of the inadequacy of its school-fi-

## New Mission Sought For Diffusion Network On 10th Anniversary

By Julie A. Miller



# Reality Tempers 'New Futures' Leaders' Optimism After 3 Years

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They talk about the difficulties of implementing change from the top down and of the price to be paid for not including educators fully in the process. And they tick off the problems that come with expecting results too quickly and now acknowledge that it will take much longer than originally anticipated to bring about lasting change.

"As we've sobered up and faced the issues," Mr. Van Vleck said, "we have found that getting collaboration between those players is a much more complicated and difficult game than we expected."

The "New Futures" grants were awarded in July 1988 to Dayton, Pittsburgh, Little Rock, Ark., Savannah, Ga., and Lawrence, Mass.

Collaborative organizations established under the grants were charged with developing a sophisticated management-information system to gather data on city youngsters and with setting strategies for reforming schools and coordinating services to more effectively aid troubled youths.

One city—Lawrence—was dropped from the project at the end of the second year, although the Casey Foundation continues to fund some related activities there. And officials elsewhere, while citing progress, acknowledge that their ultimate goals remain elusive.

"Anybody who doesn't admit to disappointment so far would not be realistic," Mr. Van Vleck said.

"An awful lot of things have taken longer to jell than we expected," said Ira Cutler, the associate director of the foundation and the director of the New Futures project.

Midway through the five-year timetable set under the program, evaluation data reveal only modest—and, in some cases, no—progress on key indicators, and im-

provements cannot necessarily be keyed to project interventions. (See related story, this page.)

In a draft paper under review for publication, researchers at the University of Wisconsin at Madison concluded that none of the sites has set in motion school reforms broad enough to substantially alter the outcomes for at-risk youths.

In most cases, project officials say, agencies are only now framing the agreements needed to ease bureaucratic barriers that have thwarted progress in providing aid.

"New Futures has not yet fundamentally influenced many of the factors that cause failure among youth," concluded a midpoint project review by the Washington-based Center for the Study of Social Policy.

## 'Starts and Restarts'

Project leaders, principals, teachers, and social workers in the New Futures cities sketch a scenario of a management structure that asked too much, too fast, and altered course too many times.

"The people who dealt with it on a front-line basis felt the most consistent thing we had was change," said Dale E. Frederick, one of three lead principals in the Dayton school district.

"We asked people to focus on a series of different problems, asked them to do it tomorrow, when there was no precedent for people doing this," Mr. Cutler said. "Each of the cities has had some false starts and restarts."

Lawrence was dropped from New Futures when it became apparent that the school department and the interagency board overseeing the project could not forge consensus. And officials in other cities, while reporting some success in forging collaboration and helping to mend the troubled lives of some youths

and families, say systemic change is still many years away.

"This is tough stuff—it's not going to be a quick fix," said Kathleen J. Emery, executive director of the New Futures project in Dayton.

But many key players still feel they are on the right course.

"I don't think anybody thinks we are on the wrong track," Mr. Van Vleck said.

"What has changed," according to a new plan for the second half of Dayton's New Futures project, "is our understanding and acceptance

*"New Futures has not yet fundamentally influenced many of the factors that cause failure among youth."*

—Center for the Study of Social Policy

that this is not a 5- or even 10-year effort, but a 15- to 20-year process of retooling and reshaping the youth-service system."

Program officials are hopeful that efforts to help cities gather extensive data on youths and that the dialogues that have begun, the agreements that have been forged, and the new plans that have been charted in recent months will reap long-term gains.

But while such accomplishments are "a big step forward," Mr. Van Vleck said, "I think we are going to continue to be frustrated with what

we can actually measure."

Since project weaknesses and strengths vary from site to site, no one city is representative of the entire effort. But Dayton's experience sheds light on many issues observers say are likely to influence the course for New Futures cities in the next two years.

## Numerical Goals

As at all the project sites, a collaborative organization was formed in Dayton to identify youth problems and barriers to service and to set goals for addressing them. The 20-member body, called New Futures for Dayton Area Youth, includes representatives of youth-serving agencies, the school system and teachers' union, community organizations, universities, hospitals, and businesses.

A nonprofit corporation, Community Connections, was formed to manage the social-services piece.

As in the other cities, the school-reform component is targeted at middle schools. The Nettie Lee Roth Middle School and the Wilbur Wright Middle School were initially selected as pilots, and the Kiser Middle School was added last year.

All three schools serve large numbers of students from poor, multi-problem families, and Wilbur Wright has the highest dropout, truancy, and juvenile-court-referral rates of any school in the city.

Broad goals set for the five years included raising to 80 percent the high-school graduation rate for students in the pilot schools from the district's estimated rate of 65 percent at the outset; lowering to 20 percent the dropout rate, which was 35 percent; reducing to 10 percent the teenage-pregnancy rate, which was 12 percent for the city; and raising to 80 percent the rate of youths considered "active"—employed or in school or the military—which was

roughly 65 percent.

Year-by-year goals were also set for raising test scores, reducing expulsions and suspensions, and improving attendance rates.

Elements of the plan included:

- The "clustering" of core-subject teachers to coordinate activities for a common group of students.
- Home-based guidance periods for greater interaction between teachers and small groups of students.
- Interdisciplinary units designed to focus on problem solving.
- After-school tutorial activities.
- A fund for incentives, such as T-shirts, pizza parties, and outings, for improvements in achievement, attendance, or behavior.
- Case managers, known as "community associates," for each student in the pilot schools to arrange support services and to track the student's needs through high school.
- Youth-service centers at the pilot schools.
- Full-time, school-based nurses.

## Beyond 'Add On' Programs

The youth-service centers never materialized beyond the assignment of some mental-health workers and the temporary placement of some child-welfare and juvenile-court personnel in schools. The home-based guidance period was dropped this year.

Other interventions, while beneficial to some students, have not fundamentally changed the way schools work or addressed the root causes of school failure, project evaluations say.

"The biggest challenge is to move beyond the 'add on' nature of many of these initiatives," concluded the midpoint project review conducted by the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

The analysis conducted by the University of Wisconsin researchers noted that the extended-day pro-

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## Improved Capacity To Gather Data on Youths May be 'Real Winner' of New Futures

By Deborah L. Cohen

City and agency officials overseeing the Annie E. Casey Foundation's \$50-million New Futures initiative have scaled back their expectations of transforming the landscape for at-risk youths within five years.

But long after the Casey grants end, the management-information systems set up to track students' progress will be generating data with the potential to help better guide efforts to serve disadvantaged youths and their families, project officials maintain.

New Futures, launched in 1988, focuses on building community partnerships of schools and other youth-serving agencies in four cities: Dayton, Ohio, Pittsburgh, Savannah, Ga., and Little Rock, Ark. (See related story, page 1.)

In addition to sparking interventions to raise student achievement and lower dropout, youth-unemployment, and teenage-pregnancy rates, a key project aim is to bolster the cities' capacity to gather detailed data on youths and to track students' progress.

"That will be one of the biggest benefits of this whole activity," said Otis Johnson, executive director of the Chatham-Savannah Youth-Futures Authority, the oversight body for New Futures in Savannah.

"If, in the next couple of years, we can get cities to become independent in their ability to process and develop good information to make decisions, it will be a real winner," said Stanley J. Schneider, senior vice president of Metis Associates, a consulting firm under contract with the Center for the Study of So-

cial Policy to evaluate New Futures.

Metis has prepared statistical reports on each of the cities and a draft report summarizing trends in all four cities over the first two years of the project, 1988-89 and 1989-90. The data, covering 61,977 6th through 12th graders the first year and 58,040 the second, show overall school-district trends rather than singling out New Futures pilot schools.

## Statistical Highlights

Some highlights include:

- Based on standardized tests, the average reading scores of students in the four cities, which ranged in the first year from the 42nd percentile in reading for 7th graders to the 52nd percentile for 11th graders, remained largely stable over the two years.

- Average mathematics achievement scores for 7th graders rose from the 44th percentile in the first year to the 48th percentile in the second year, but dropped from the 48th to the 44th percentile for 8th graders.

- Differences in the scores of black and white students were substantial. For example, black male 9th graders scored in the 33rd percentile in reading in the second year, while white male 9th graders scored in the 61st percentile.

- The total number of graduates in the four cities fell from 7,381 to 6,034 over the two years, an 18 percent decrease.

- The same proportion of 6th- through 12th-grade students, 11.6 percent, were retained in their grades during the first and second years of the project. But the rate for middle-school students fell from 8.8 percent to 6.6 percent and increased from 13.7 percent to

15.7 percent for high-school students.

- About 32 percent of students in grades 6 through 12 failed one or more courses in the first year, and nearly 41 percent failed in the second year, with the highest increases in the 9th through 12th grades.

- Black students failed courses at higher rates than whites both years: 36.9 percent failed one or more in the first year, compared with 26.7 percent of the white students.

- The high-school dropout rate, which factored in students unaccounted for as well as presumed dropouts, declined by 4.9 percentage points, from 18.1 percent in the first year to 13.2 percent in the second year, while the middle-school dropout rate declined by 1.4 percentage points, from 9.5 to 8.1.

- White students had higher dropout rates than blacks—a finding that Mr. Schneider said in some cities may reflect the lack of opportunities outside the schools for black youths—and male students had higher rates than female students.

- Average daily attendance rates in the four cities remained fairly stable over the two years, with slight improvements among middle-school students and slight declines among high-school students.

## 'Platform' for Policy

It is "premature," Mr. Schneider warned, to judge a five-year effort using data from the first two years. Third-year data isolating results from pilot New Futures schools will offer a better gauge, he said.

But he speculated that the focus on at-risk youths in the project cities and efforts to address their needs beyond the classroom

may have contributed to some modest gains.

"It is conceivable that, because of a greater awareness of needs, the general population may in fact be affected in positive ways," he said.

He cited, for example, the reduction in dropout rates across grades and better performance on some measures for middle-school students than for high-school students.

"Since this is largely a middle-school initiative," Mr. Schneider said, "it's a hopeful sign."

Pointing to the large disparities between black and white student achievement and the high numbers of students still failing, being retained, and dropping out, however, he said the most "powerful" role of the data has been to offer a "platform for the development of policies to address the need."

"What turned out to be most valuable," said Ira Cutler, the associate director of the foundation and the director of New Futures, "was how much attention [it] has focused on kids and their families and problems in the community that need to be fixed."

The data-collection effort may have also given project officials a more realistic view of how much they can accomplish in five years.

Kathy Emery, executive director of the collaborative managing the New Futures program in Dayton, noted that the Casey Foundation has "asked all the cities to relook at those numerical goals and decide whether we really want to hang on to the high numbers" they set initially.



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grams, while offering enrichment and less formal teacher-student interaction, did not "serve as the foundation upon which more fundamental school changes might arise."

The interdisciplinary units also "served mainly as a break from business as usual built around field trips or other special events," added the researchers, led by Gary Wehlage, the associate director of the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools and the head of the school part of the New Futures evaluation.

The draft paper said working relationships and grouping practices linked with clustering, which began in Dayton prior to New Futures, have offered more support for youths with academic problems.

But "it has not yet led teachers and administrators to introduce new forms of curricula and instruction nor to establish in a systematic way more supportive relations with students," the paper said.

While making valuable inroads in "turning around" the lives of some youths, the case-management part of the project has also suffered from growing pains, observers say.

#### Plan Revised

Faced with the unpredictability of student mobility, limited budgets to serve youths with multiple needs, and pressure from the foundation to build stronger interagency bonds, the collaborative revised the plan in the second year to limit the ratio of caseworkers to students and to refer more of those identified as having problems to other service agencies.

Mr. Wehlage's paper also noted that, while helping to raise schools' awareness of the impact of family problems on achievement, community associates have not been in a position to sway policy.

"Case managers typically have been asked by the school to help students adjust to unquestioned institutional policies and practices," the paper concluded.

James Williams, promoted from deputy superintendent to superintendent of the Dayton schools in June, said he "had a lot of confidence in the project from the beginning."

But he also had nagging doubts. Some of his reservations, he said, reflect "my frustrations about any at-risk program." Such programs, he said, often favor rewards over strict rules and discipline and require too many "labels" to qualify.

He also believes the project "took the wrong approach" in targeting middle-school students.

"If we're talking about long-term solutions," he said, "we must start at kindergarten or much earlier."

Mr. Williams met on his own recently with other agency leaders to discuss channeling existing funds to such interventions as health screening for young children and training for parents.

#### 'Blue in the Face'

But beyond his doubts about any one initiative, Mr. Williams voiced a deeper frustration about involving players from outside the schools in formulating education policy.

"Everyone is saying they can run education except the people who can do it," he said. "You can't just pull a group of people together from the community to try to tell educators what to do."

That approach, he maintained, runs counter to school reforms aimed at giving individual principals and teachers more autonomy.

"I'm trying to get rid of bureaucracy and we're building bureaucracy," said Mr. Williams, adding that he has aired his concerns with other members of the collaborative.

"I've fussed and argued until I'm blue in the face for four years," he said. "I would leave those meetings frustrated, with headaches."

While still "committed" to seeing through a new plan drafted for the remainder of the project, Mr. Williams said he would not stake his school district's success on the outcome of New Futures.

"I'm not running the school system based on the Casey grant," he said. "My interest is in 50 schools; I'm not looking at [only] two or three."

#### Push for Implementation

While other players in the New Futures initiative cast it in a more optimistic light, many issues raised by Mr. Williams surfaced in interviews with foundation and community leaders, parents, teachers, and social workers.

A common reason cited for why the program has not made more progress is that it moved too quickly.

"They wanted to see some positive numbers registered immediately," said Mr. Frederick, a lead principal overseeing the New Futures pilot schools in Dayton.

Susanne A. Weaver, a parent who serves on the New Futures collaborative, said pressure to put plans in place rapidly precluded a "total buy-in" from parents, teachers, students, social workers, and other grassroots players.

"There wasn't the luxury of sitting back and letting it grow and really sharing," she said.

Jewell K. Garrison, executive director of Community Connections, said community associates entered schools two weeks after being hired.

"We went into the building ill prepared for what the building had to offer," she said.

In Dayton and other project cities, officials also observed that teachers were not well prepared to collaborate with the social-services liaisons.

Donald Cray, executive director of the New Futures project in Little Rock, said "we ran into quite a bit of conflict" with teachers who wondered: "Who are these people and what are they going to do?"

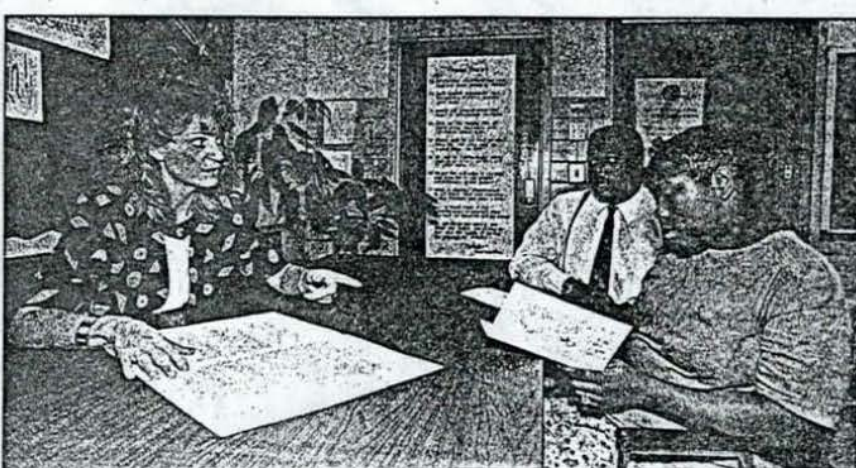
Ms. Emery, the executive director of the New Futures project in Dayton, said one pilot school there recently began working with the Center for Leadership in School Reform in Louisville, Ky., to develop a school-restructuring plan.

"If we could rewrite history," she said, "we would have done that the first year."

In Little Rock, too, noted Mr. Cray, "There was such a push early on to get this thing up and running... It's only been in the last year that the collaborative's been able to step back from that enough that it could really start looking at institutional reform."

"If we had used at least the first six months to plan and to do a lot of the bridge-building and coordination that we had to struggle with through the first year," added Otis Johnson, executive director of the board overseeing New Futures in Savannah, "I think it would have been much smoother."

In hindsight, said Douglas W. Nelson, executive director of the Casey Foundation, "We would have probably given a longer initial planning period."



Kathy Arquilla and Kevin Jackson, top, both of the Community Connections program, talk with Watscha Jackson, a student at Roth Middle School. Above, Shawn Michael Jackson, also a community associate, gives advice to Louis Christman, another Roth student. Left, Dale E. Frederick, principal of the Wilbur Wright Middle School, helps out one of his students.

"We made it more difficult, in the interest of using the urgency of the moment and the excitement of commitment, to include and get ownership at more levels," he said.

#### Top-Down Approach Cited

As a result, project participants say, New Futures was orchestrated by the foundation and collaboratives with little initial input from teachers, principals, and social workers.

The project organization essentially put a program together and wound up "giving it to the workers and telling them to go with it," said Robert French, a member of both the Dayton school board and the New Futures collaborative.

"As the foundation got more involved, its initial posture of 'You tell us how you want to do these things' changed and became 'Here's how we think you ought to be doing that,'" Mr. Frederick, the Dayton principal, said.

Dayton has a "pretty good history" of collaboration at the policy and executive-leadership level, Ms. Emery said, but less attention was paid to assuring collaboration among "the folks who work with the kids."

"It's a real tricky juggling act," Mr. Cutler of the Casey Foundation said. "You want to include everyone you possibly can; on the other hand, it gets unwieldy if it's too big."

Many also agree that schools should have been more involved.

"We knew our school was going to participate in this program, but none of the decisions as to how things would be done involved the people who were going to be working with the students on a day-to-day basis," said Anita E. Jones, an 8th-grade math teacher at Roth Middle School.

"We did not adequately involve

teachers in framing the program, and that was a mistake," Mr. Van Vleck of Dayton said.

Officials in other cities acknowledge similar missteps.

"There was very little conversation or buy-in obtained from the local school building," Mr. Cray of Little Rock said.

"We made a fundamental mistake in not bringing in principals in the original planning process," Mr. Johnson of Savannah said.

Barbara Zeimet, a former interim director of the New Futures project in Lawrence and now the deputy director of the city department of training and development, suggested that failure to garner the full backing of the school system contributed to the breakup of the project there.

School officials in Lawrence resented acting "at the behest of what they saw as people coming in from the outside," she observed.

There was also tension in some New Futures cities over how project resources should be spent.

In Lawrence, "principals had a certain set of expectations as to what the Casey dollars were to bring about... which weren't necessarily the same as what the Casey Foundation had," noted Pat Karl, program coordinator for the Lawrence Youth Commission, which is carrying out parent-training and youth-career activities still funded by the foundation.

The foundation was focused on systemic change and "wanted to see the model be successful before expanding it to all schools," she said, while principals "saw the need for day-to-day and immediate resources for their kids."

The pull between those two attitudes was never resolved, she added. At the other sites as well, some

also suggested that sometimes teachers lacked the time, if not the will, to devote to the undertaking.

"Even good teachers are essentially retreating to their own rooms and trying to do the best they can," Mr. Van Vleck of Dayton said.

#### 'Whip-Sawed Around'

Cheryl Rogers, a senior research associate with the Center for the Study of Social Policy, also noted that "there was no real concerted, sustained staff-development program" to bolster teachers' role in reform.

The Center for Leadership in School Reform led some institutes for school staff members and offered more intensive training, she said, but those plans "got caught up in the bureaucracy."

Leading players in New Futures also acknowledge that the numerical project goals were unrealistic.

"More of us know today that those projections were beyond what we could realistically expect to achieve in the original time frame," Mr. Nelson of the Casey Foundation said.

"I don't think anybody would deny that the measures set out at the beginning were not particularly appropriate," said Sue Elling, the executive director of the Dayton-Montgomery County Public Education Fund and a member of the collaborative's school-success committee.

"We tackled some very large systemic problems at a time when major agencies and systems are being challenged internally and externally," said Nancy K. Schiffer, the group vice president of the United Way of Dayton and a board of directors member of Community Connections.

"Constant evaluation" and re-

Continued on Page 15



# Complexity of Task Trips Up 'New Futures' Projects

Continued from Page 13

evaluation of project components also resulted in frequent policy shifts, Mr. Frederick of Dayton observed.

"We were always responding to... either the collaborative or the foundation," he said. "It was frustrating for teachers who were not understanding why the changes were occurring."

Others suggest that elements of the social-services component were not given enough time to work.

"We would have our plans organized and be ready to move, and the staff would respond, and then they'd have to switch gears and go in a different direction," Ms. Schiffer said. "The staff was feeling whip-sawed around."

## 'Dearly Needed Partner'

Mr. Cutler of the Casey Foundation maintained that the foundation "always saw two roles for case management"—one directed at forming ties with individual students and one aimed at forging links among agencies.

"Maybe we didn't communicate the latter as much," he said.

An April 1990 status report on Dayton from the Center for the Study

spent) trying to establish trust, establish boundaries, and come up with a common ground to operate on," Ms. Garrison of Community Connections said.

While school personnel were sometimes wary of outsiders, social-service personnel also described the rigors of working within the schools—a traditionally closed system.

"Involving people who look at issues from a different perspective has been difficult—and developing a level of trust between two sometimes competing systems," Ms. Garrison said.

Others hinted that not all members of the collaborative were equally receptive to joining forces.

"Some of the agency people will not acknowledge that they have their own barriers," said Kathy Arquilla, supervisor of Community Connections at Roth Middle School.

"You have to try to work through all those differences to build a common language, goals, values," Ms. Emery, the executive director of the New Futures project in Dayton, said.

## Second-Phase Plan

Despite the missteps and the disappointments, most involved with the effort say they are prepared to continue the process.

"We are more convinced than ever that we are struggling to do the appropriate thing," said Mr. Van Vleck, the Dayton New Futures collaborative chairman.

"I think we're on the right track—not to get great results in the next two years—but to putting a system in place," said Mr. Williams, the school superintendent.

Mr. Frederick, the lead principal, said the pilot schools have been much more involved in planning the project's second phase.

"They listen to us and hear some of what we have to say," said Moezelle Garcia, a vocational-education teacher at Roth Middle School. "If you can convince them this is for the good of kids, they will think about implementing it."

Mr. Nelson, Casey's executive director, also said moves by the foundation to transfer more authority to New Futures cities have increased the "degree of ownership, understanding, and participation."

A plan for the second phase of New Futures in Dayton calls for "creating a bottom-up, building-based reform effort," with interventions tailored to each pilot school.

A component has also been added assigning six case managers to work intensively for two years—between the 8th and 9th grades—with 200 chronically absent students at risk of dropping out.

In addition, the schools are putting in place "youth-service intervention teams" of school health and counseling personnel, administrators, and community associates, and a team of "service brokers" from youth agencies is being formed to help bridge barriers and ease referrals.

In June, 11 agencies serving youths and families in Dayton and Montgomery County—from schools and human-service organizations to the juvenile courts and police—signed interagency agreements establishing liaisons to help bridge barriers. They also agreed to participate in cross-training.

The Casey Foundation, meanwhile, has told New Futures cities that it is willing to extend for up to two years the five-year time frame for spending the grant money, and that it will offer some additional

funding "for those with the greatest momentum at the end of the five years," Mr. Nelson said.

## 'Learn as You Go'

Many who played central roles in New Futures maintain that mistakes made along the way have been part of the learning process.

"New Futures was always meant to be a demonstration to see how this works," Ms. Emery, the executive director of the New Futures project in Dayton, said.

"It was sort of a connect-the-dot process—learn as you go," Ms. Garrison, executive director of Community Connections, said.

The initial missteps and shifts, observed Mr. Nelson of the Casey Foundation, were "a symptom of the evolution of the kind of commitment" needed to spur meaningful change.

"The kind of difference we're going to need to make for poor kids and their families absolutely requires such an innovative and unprecedented scale of effort that lots of

them are going to fail," he said. But "nothing is going to make the difference short of that kind of effort."

Foundation and other project officials also praised the project for bringing new attention to youth issues and setting in motion a mechanism for long-term change, and teachers and caseworkers recounted student success stories.

"I've seen kids turn around academically... and families realize that they can do so many things for themselves that they were not aware of," Ms. Arquilla, also of Dayton's Community Connections, said.

"We found kids who could not see or could not hear" or lacked clothing and food, Ms. Garrison said.

"We helped kids not to run away from home, got families into treatment, and worked with kids who were suicidal or drug dependent," she added.

Ms. Jones, the teacher at Roth, said community associates had more success reaching parents "than we would have just on our own" and made them "more aware of

services in the community."

"I don't always know who to get in contact with," said Carolyn Pacey, whose community associate arranged tutorial help for her son.

Many say the effort has also improved interagency communication.

"Before New Futures was initiated, those conversations weren't happening," said Ms. Elling of the Dayton-Montgomery County Public Education Fund.

"Top leaders are coming together on regular basis, they haven't given up... and they haven't yet alienated the school systems," said Ms. Rogers of the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Because many indicators on which New Futures is being judged involve schools, Mr. Cutler of the Casey Foundation said, school systems in the project cities "have felt particularly in the spotlight."

"Each of them in various ways at various times either welcomed or resented all that attention," he said.

Nonetheless, he added, school superintendents and school-board members "have been consistently at the table and very much involved when they could walk away."

*"I think we're on the right track—not to get great results in the next two years—but to putting a system in place."*

—James Williams

of Social Policy said the shift in the community associates' role at first "caused some confusion and anxiety" among school staff members and families, who feared it would limit associates' contact with students.

Besides serving as counselors and role models, the community associates "also spent considerable time as teacher aides, helping out in classrooms, in the halls and lunchroom whenever they could," the report said.

The associates gave teachers "a partner they dearly needed," Ms. Garrison of Dayton's Community Connections said, and provided a base of sustained support for families.

"One of the things [troubled youths] need to prosper is a consistent adult—the families and students were given that promise," she said. "We had to go back to them every year with different interpretation of that promise."

Ms. Weaver, the parent serving on the New Futures board, also cited personnel shifts that hindered program continuity. The Wilbur Wright Middle School, for example, has had three principals in three years.

## Competing Systems

New Futures personnel also concede that getting the various systems to collaborate was far more time-consuming than they expected.

"The first couple of years [were



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