(continued from front flap)

7

THE AGE OF RESISTANCE

In the summer of 2015, a group of middle-aged and elderly Black community members in Chicago announced they were going to wage a hunger strike. This, they said, was the only way left open for them to draw attention to their struggles with educational officials working with the Chicago public schools. Maybe, they hoped, publicly starving themselves would elicit a response from school administrators who they said ignored, disrespected, and denied them a governing voice in the education of their sons, daughters, grandchildren, and neighbors. Calling themselves the Coalition to Revitalize Dyett High School, the twelve participants demanded that district administrators reopen a beloved neighborhood high school. It had been closed because of chronically low scores on standardized tests.

A statement released by an advocacy nonprofit named the Network for Public Education made it clear that standardized tests were impacting education in Chicago beyond just the one school. It charged that in low-income communities of color, such tests were used to "rank, sort, label, and punish" Black and Latino children, that though the exams were often extolled as a means to allow education officials to document racial and economic achievement gaps, they often instead became a justification for a larger agenda aimed at further destabilizing poor communities of color, a conclusion reached because "thousands of predominantly poor and minority neighborhood schools—the anchors of communities—have been closed" as a result of the scores. Surely

(continued from front flap)

those sentiments resonated with the hunger strikers as, according to one, "the city has sabotaged our community, which we know is undergoing gentrification. Why would they close the only neighborhood high school left for our children?"[1]

At the same time that the drama surrounding the Chicago high school was unfolding, groups of white and Asian parents and students were also responding quite forcefully to the ways that federally mandated tests circumscribed their lives. They were publicly protesting by joining in with what came to be known as the opt-out movement and beginning to take a stand to tell schools that their children would not take state and federally prescribed high-stakes tests. In the spring of 2015, New York State had one of the highest test-refusal rates in the nation when more than 20 percent, about 240,000 students, opted not to take the state exams. The use, overuse, purpose, and practicality of testing has spawned a sustained movement in communities that were wealthy and in those that were poor, both educationally and economically. However, despite the testing being a common enemy, so to speak, against which both communities could organize, for students of color in failing schools testing was just one of a number of concerns against which they began to organize.[2]

This chapter explores community activism and protests against educational policies and practices communities believe to be harmful to their educational futures. Across the country, those most impacted by segrenomic-dependent educational schemes and practices are raising their voices to push back. Some decry how tests are used to circumscribe their futures or impact the teachers and schools in their communities. Others direct their activism toward ending abusive disciplinary practices found in poor schools, though almost completely absent from those that are wealthy. In both instances, people whose lives are harmed by educational policies are finding ways to resist. In wealthy white communities, lessening the frequency of standardized tests is the goal of protest. In communities of color, in addition to decrying

the frequency of tests, the conversation has expanded to include critiques of how tests are used to pave the way for school closures, shrinking education budgets, community destabilization, and abusive discipline practices in schools. For students, protesting is one of very few ways in which they are able to add their voices to discussions about educational policies impacting their schools.

Do standardized achievement tests unfairly advantage white, Asian, and wealthy students and disadvantage everyone else? According to a group of educational advocacy organizations and civil rights groups, such as the NAACP and the Advancement Project, the answer is yes. In 2012, they jointly filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education pointing out that Black and Latino students in New York score below whites and Asians on standardized tests so consistently that, although they are almost 70 percent of the overall student body in the system, they make up only 11 percent of students enrolled at elite public schools. As a result, the complaint argues that New York City is in violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act because schools rely on a test that consistently advantages one racial group over another.[3]

Opinions differ as to why, on K–12 achievement tests and college entrance exams, lower-income students as well as Black and Latino students consistently score below privileged white and Asian students. These gaps persist despite decades of research and numerous studies attempting to explain and close them. One theory posits that students with grandparents who have graduated from college always score higher, suggesting that the tests unfairly penalize students who are the first in their family to attend college. Whatever the explanation, it is difficult to reconcile why we rely on such tests when there is plenty of evidence showing that they heavily advantage some districts and students and greatly disadvantage others.[4]

While the standardized testing gap between people of color and whites and Asian Americans is bad, it's nothing compared to the gap between the poor and the wealthy. A 2014 study by the

EDUCATION $26.95 U.S. (continued from front flap)

Annie E. Casey Foundation found that the gap for achievement test scores between rich and poor had grown by almost 60 percent between the 1960s and 2014 to be almost twice as large as the gap between white students and children of other races. The playing field is far from level when we continue to use tests that we know at the outset will show that wealthy students do better than less wealthy students and that white and Asian students outperform everyone else. But the research shows us that the issues are with how we use these tests. That is the history of standardized tests, which—according to Columbia University professor Nicholas Lemann's history of the Educational Testing Service, *The Big Test: The Secret History of American Meritocracy*—were first developed in the 1940s as a way to exclude Jewish students from Ivy League campuses. Kaplan, today one of the largest test-preparation organizations, got its start when Stanley Kaplan resolved to come up with test-taking techniques to "beat the test" and ensure that such students did well in admissions to elite schools.[5]

Today, acknowledging the inherent racial and economic inequity of standardized achievement tests, hundreds of colleges have already stopped requiring the SAT for college admission decisions. However, the same cannot be said for K–12, where scores on standardized tests are used for everything from admitting students to prestigious public schools to placing students in gifted programs, relegating them to remedial ones, allocating federal funding, evaluating teachers, and closing schools. In response, a growing number of parents, school boards, teachers, and civil rights organizations are beginning to question the fairness of our overreliance on standardized tests.

In 2014, over three hundred groups, including the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, signed a petition to ask Congress to ban the use of such tests. Nothing came of the petition, and, as a result, parents and students in low-income communities of color are more often than not left to their own devices when searching for the most productive path to protect themselves from

the financial and emotional consequences of high-stakes tests—and the uses to which they are put. They ask why there is not more money to fund proven methods that will help their children learn. They want to know why test scores are used to hurt their children, close their schools, and add to the instability in their communities. In the twenty-first century, standardized tests are a key feature of how wealthy educational investors and school reformers ensure that highly racially and economically segregated apartheid school districts remain lucrative. This has been true since President Bush announced his intention to use them this way.[6]

At the 91st Annual National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Convention held in 2000, President George W. Bush announced what would almost amount to a declaration of war on unequal education and explained the necessity of using standardized tests as a primary tool in the nation's arsenal. Though he used no such phrasing in his speech announcing No Child Left Behind, in many ways the bill's promise to devote the full resources of the United States government to the project of equalizing the racial and economic achievement and opportunity gaps in public education was, at the least, an acknowledgment of what it would take to accomplish such a feat. In addition to the bill's shining a light on the ways that race and poverty shape educational outcomes, it introduced standardized testing as a key component of how communities of color might actually achieve educational equality. But before focusing specifically on the test, Bush began his remarks by acknowledging that there was a tense history between the Republican party and organizations focused on Black freedom, but he said, "For our nation, there is no denying the truth that slavery is a blight on our history and that racism, despite all the progress, still exists today. For my party, there is no escaping the reality that the party of Lincoln has not always carried the mantle of Lincoln. . . . Transcending our history is essential."

The president went on to tell the assembled group that it was time that the nation, in a nod toward such transcendence, made

a new commitment to those who found themselves living in what he called "prosperity's shadow." He added, "The purpose of prosperity is to ensure the American Dream touches every willing heart . . . we cannot afford to have an America segregated by class, by race, or by aspiration." As he called on America to close the "gap of hope between communities of prosperity and communities of poverty" the audience rose to applaud. As he extolled the efforts of previous generations of "men and women once victimized by Jim Crow [who] have risen to leadership in the halls of Congress" they cheered. When he acknowledged that we had to do more to enforce civil rights laws and pledged that his administration would do so because, he said, today, "instead of separate but equal, there is separate and forgotten," the group erupted in full-throated and appreciative affirmation. Finally, he got to his point, and the oft-quoted "tagline" of the speech. He said that we had to "confront another form of bias: the soft bigotry of low expectations."

With that pronouncement, the president pivoted to his core concerns for the day—the fact that poor children who are also Black and Latino are not as well served by our nation's educational system. In particular, he noted that there then existed "a tremendous gap of achievement between rich and poor, white and minority" and a form of discrimination that produced a group of Americans "imprisoned by illiteracy, abandoned to frustration and the darkness of self-doubt." He announced that he was linking the unfinished struggle for civil rights to the unfinished struggle for educational equality and making a commitment to hold the nation accountable for ending the centuries of educational inequality that had so long existed. He pledged to call out those educators who fail our nation's youth and to also provide parents with a broader array of educational choices. Testing was central to this plan, as objective criteria and tools, he said, were the most potent weapon we had to finally turn the educational tide toward justice. He added:

> All students must be measured. We must test to know. And low-performing schools, those schools that won't teach and won't change, will have three years to produce results, three years to meet standards, three years to make sure the very faces of our future are not mired in mediocrity. And if they're unable to do so, the resources must go to the parents so that parents can make a different choice. . . . Education helps the young. Empowerment lifts the able.[7]

President Bush linked the new No Child Left Behind bill with parental empowerment and the politically popular and financially lucrative school choice movement. Not only would tests alert educational officials to yawning gaps between students based on race and economics, but they would also be responsible for determining which schools would remain open, which testing companies should be hired, and whether districts needed to spend the money to hire outside consultants. By 2008, President Obama upped the testing stakes with the institution of another educational bill called Race to the Top. That bill opened the door to the use of testing to evaluate and potentially fire teachers and to hold them personally responsible for the shortcomings of their students.

It is doubtful that either president could have imagined that by 2015 parents and students; suburban and urban; white, Asian, and Black; wealthy, middle class, and poor; those who had choices as to where their children attended school and those who did not would rise up to vigorously protest both the amount and uses of testing. For some parents, the issue was the individual well-being of their children; for others, it was the way that tests led to school closures and created an environment rife with harsh disciplinary practices. Some parents decried the effort to distill the essence of true learning down to an easily manageable test score, while others complained of the undue stress and strain such tests put on the

still-forming psyches of young children. Some opposed the very idea that a test, a snapshot of performance on one day, could come to shape the future of an individual, an entire school, a whole neighborhood.

Far from the first or only action that those fed up with the overreliance on testing cited, an opening salvo in the developing battle took place in November of 2013. The secretary of education at the time, Arne Duncan, ignited a firestorm of protest when he told a gathering of the Council of Chief State School Officers that he believed much of the pushback against the administration's imposition of a new round of mandatory tests called the Common Core was occurring because "white suburban moms are discovering that their children are not as brilliant as they thought and their schools are not as good as they thought." While he apologized for the remark within a day or so, the white, suburban-led organized resistance to overtesting has continued to grow. And it's not just parents who are concerned and pushing back against what they believe to be burdensome levels of testing. Students have joined the fray as well.[8]

In 2015, over one hundred students in Bloomington, Indiana, staged a walkout from their classes to protest their fatigue with the regime of standardized testing. Instead of attending school that day, one of the organizers, Ankur Singh, planned a screening of a film called *Listen*, a feature-length documentary he said shows that "behind every one of those test scores is a living, breathing child who has dreams and aspirations that may or may not align with what's being measured on standardized tests." Between 2014 and 2016, parents and students alike organized similar walkouts, protests, and demonstrations in communities from Maryland to Massachusetts. In some schools in California in 2015 over 50 percent of students opted out of standardized tests. On the whole, parents and students who opt out of standardized tests are white or Asian and range from middle class to wealthy. State legislatures, as well as the federal government, are responsive to these constituents. According to an article on CNN's website, in 2015 New Jersey lawmakers approved a measure requiring schools to accommodate parents who opt out of testing by providing alternative activities, such as independent reading, for their children. Also in 2015, in Indiana, the state's superintendent recommended that parents homeschool their children during the testing weeks instead of having them take the tests. However, in perhaps the most significant endorsement of their concerns, in October 2015, President Obama posted a video message to Facebook calling for schools to reduce the amount of standardized testing taking place in classrooms.[9]

The response to complaints coming from communities of color about testing in particular, or education in general, is not always as positive, nor are those communities' educational concerns solely about the tests themselves. Instead, for Black and Latino students in underfunded districts, student activism often revolves around the use of high-stakes testing to dismantle their public schools and also includes a focus on how they are harshly disciplined in schools and classrooms.

In her award-winning book *Unequal City: Race, Schools, and Perceptions of Injustice*, educational sociologist Carla Shedd points out that many of us who are educators, researchers, politicians, and cultural critics spend little time talking *to*, as opposed to *about*, young people when doing work on topics that impact that demographic. She says,

> Teenagers have remarkable vantage points on the cities they live in—not only on how their city functions but also on how it does not. They are a walking experiment in the effects that city agencies—in this case, the board of education and the city policing apparatus—can have on a generation of people who are especially vulnerable and may even be harmed by the policies and procedures that seek to ensure their safety. It is long past time to let their voices be heard.[10]

When we listen to the concerns of students educated in America's apartheid schools, we get a full accounting of the specific ways they believe their humanity is under attack as well as advice for what should be done to fix education policy. One of the most impactful student groups is named the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU). It was founded in 1995 by a group of young people who were concerned about not receiving the quality of education that they deserved. According to its website, the group's guiding principles are organized around a belief that not just parents and guardians, but also students themselves, would have to be involved in setting policy if school reform were ever going to be successful. In the past few years, it has expanded across the country, opening chapters in Newark, Chicago, and Detroit.

Though it was founded in 1995, it wasn't until 2001 that PSU began to attract widespread local and national attention as one of the leading and most vocal organizations at the forefront of the fight against the takeover and privatization of the schools in Philadelphia. In response to mounting deficits and continued low student performance on standardized tests, the Commonwealth, as the state of Pennsylvania is often dubbed, announced it would wrest control of Philadelphia's system from local authority. In preparation, the first step state officials took was to commission a study from an educational management organization—Edison Schools. Education officials asked Edison to conduct an evaluation and to make recommendations for how to improve the educational conditions in the city. Edison's report proposed that the city's one hundred lowest-performing schools, as well as most central administration functions, should be taken from city control and contracted out to a private provider. Its conclusions were hardly surprising. At the time, Edison's business model relied on managing failing or struggling schools. It recommended that its company be given the job.

Before Governor Mark Schweiker could proceed with these or

any other recommendations, Mayor John Street negotiated with him to work out a compromise. The mayor wanted more control over the appointment of new district leadership, and, in return, the deal he endorsed eliminated the plan to turn the running of the school district's central office over to a private company and committed the state to providing the district with a one-time infusion of $75 million. What that meant was that administrative jobs were saved, though schools and students were still threatened. Working in concert with the governor, in late 2001 Street suspended educational democracy in the city and replaced the publicly elected school board with a five-member School Reform Commission. Governor Schweiker appointed James Nevels, a businessman from the suburbs, as chair. Nevels immediately began implementing what became known as the "diverse provider" model. This meant that the commission identified forty-five of the district's most-troubled schools and assigned them to private providers, including Edison Inc. and others. Of course, these were the schools where children were struggling most immediately with poverty and other forms of social and economic instability. Having lost faith in the adults charged with educating them, the students themselves stood up and pushed back.[11]

The opposition to the educational plans supported by elected officials was as immediate as it was fierce. Joined by Youth United for Change, the Philadelphia Student Union staged protests, marches, candlelight vigils, and blockades of the school district's headquarters to show its opposition. The results were impressive. On November 20, 2001, eight hundred students from Philadelphia gathered at the state capital in Harrisburg for a day of protests. Their primary demand was that the governor withdraw his support for any plan involving Edison Schools' taking over the struggling school district of Philadelphia. According to the group's website, the students were deeply concerned because, as far as anyone outside of the company could confirm, Edison had little

EDUCATION $26.95 U.S.

to no track record of success. They were also against the plan for the state to take over the school district and disband the school board.

Hundreds of students walked out of class in protest of the pending takeover, and hundreds more staged a rally both at the school district headquarters and at City Hall. At the district headquarters, the students held hands, encircling the entire building. This, organizers said, was to symbolize their desire to keep private companies out. Despite their efforts, plans for the state takeover of the district and for Edison Schools to take over twenty or so of the lowest-performing schools in the district continued apace. In response, a few weeks after their first action, more than a thousand high school students from all over the city descended on City Hall, staying there for almost three hours. Building upon those earlier actions, the PSU has launched campaigns for changes on a wide variety of school issues, including school underfunding, which has left Philly students without counselors, nurses, or after school programs; pushing back against the increase in charter schools; fighting for funding at the state level; pushing for the School Reform Commission members to be elected rather than appointed so they are accountable to students and parents; school policing; and ending the school-to-prison pipeline.

Though schools in Philadelphia were not returned to local control, one of the things that came out of all this was that the group and its tactics expanded to other cities where similar changes were under way. This included Newark, New Jersey. Similar to students in Philadelphia, the Newark chapter of the Student Union rose to prominence as it refused to quietly accept the fact that the school district was under state control. The state provided what the Student Union believed was a lack of adequate funding for traditional community schools, preferring to fund the growth of charter schools run by free market–inspired organizations or private companies using taxpayer dollars. Tanaisa Brown, who in 2015 at the time of the strike was seventeen years old and the

secretary of the Newark Student Union, explained, "Our schools are crumbling . . . so we want our education to be fully funded, and that's what we're fighting for today." She added, "Some of these reformers never really think about how they may affect the students individually. They're just thinking about their personal benefit." She ended with, "I think students stepping up to the plate are showing that they do care about urban education, about their schools, and about learning through a school that helps them emotionally as well."[12]

When asked by a reporter what she and the other students hoped to accomplish, one seventeen-year-old student named Olivia Owens-Culver said, "Most people walk around this world, thinking that they can't get nowhere . . . but us, as young people, we have a voice. We need to speak for ourselves." This protest ended up being one of the largest student protests in Newark's history, as students from various high schools marched while waving signs with messages like "Save Our Schools" and "We Have Rights." The group's president, eighteen-year-old Kristin Towkaniuk, told the crowd, "We did not come here . . . to play a game. . . . We're done playing games with our education." As the students locked arms, Towkaniuk led the crowd in a chant of "We have a duty to fight. We have a duty to win. We must love and protect one another. We have nothing to lose but our chains."[13]

The charges of district starvation lobbed by students, parents, and activists consistently point out the substandard condition of the buildings in which students are expected to learn. Today, one American city stands out in terms of the decayed and chaotic nature of both its buildings and the educations found, and not found, in them. That city is Detroit. The state of traditional public schools in the district offers a clear example of the run-down, underfunded, apartheid educational conditions students are protesting. The buildings have decayed to the point of being unsafe, failing by every statistical measure, and the district is consistently threatening to cross the line from minimal solvency to outright

bankruptcy. As an example of what they see as problematic, teachers, students, and parents report heating systems that do not work, leaky roofs, unsafe levels of mold, odors described as rancid, and cockroaches as long as three inches that scuttle about "until they are squashed by a student who volunteers for the task." One teacher reported "rodents out in the middle of the day, like they're coming to class." In 2000, Detroit public schools had close to 150,000 students, but by 2016 that number had dipped drastically to fewer than 45,000. While in recent decades large numbers of people left Detroit for either the suburbs or other states, many of those who stayed chose to enroll their children in charter schools, which more than half of school-age children from Detroit now attend. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, about 20 percent of school-age children in Detroit attended charter schools in 2006. By 2014, less than ten years later, that number had shot up to 55 percent, and it continues to rise. The 2009 appointment of an emergency manager to take charge of the struggling school district has not turned the finances or achievement around. "We're on our fourth emergency manager here," said Craig Thiel, a senior research associate for the Citizens Research Council. "They each seem to be borrowing from the same playbook: figure out a way to get through the current year, end the year without going insolvent, and then push costs onto the next year in the hopes that things will improve in some way."[14] In order to address these failings, many people in Detroit said they wanted a locally elected school board to make the decisions about district schools as well as an end to state-appointed emergency management. They also called for more immediate intervention to address the deteriorating state of school buildings. No voices are raised more loudly than those of students attending the city schools.[15]

In April of 2016, at Martin Luther King, Jr. High School, between forty-five and fifty students walked out to protest

conditions. Detroit student leaders talked to the *World Socialist Web Site* about their cause: "There are rodents and there is no pest control. . . . It's either too hot or too cold." Another student added, "In most of my classes . . . there are less than half the books we need. . . . I have no books in world history, Algebra II, vocals, and student government. . . . In my main structured class, physics, we have no books and have to download the material online." In response to a question about why she was out there that day, she answered, "We are fighting for our education, for victory. It's not just a fight for teachers, it's not just a fight for students, it's a fight for education." Ashley Ray, another Detroit student, addressed the reasons for the student protests, saying, "Education is the most important thing, and for anyone to try and take that from us is wrong." Though not receiving much attention, student-led movements for a quality education continue to spread across the country.[16]

In Chicago and Portland, Oregon, students have joined together to form student unions. In those cities, as was true elsewhere, they did so to protest budget cuts, teacher layoffs, school closings, and high-stakes testing. The Chicago group got its start after the Chicago Teachers Union strike in 2012. Then, a Chicago high school student named Israel Muñoz says he began to wonder, "Where is the student voice in this? Why haven't we been consulted when it comes to any decisions regarding education?" He began to think that if the teachers had a union, then it only made sense that students should have one too. When interviewed for an online article, Muñoz and Ian Jackson of the Portland Student Union both stressed that it was important for the students to develop a voice and empower themselves if they wanted to see change come. Muñoz remarked, "Young people are given this notion that if you want to make a change you have to wait until you're eighteen so you can be an adult and you can vote." He adds, "But the reality is that someone's age shouldn't determine whether

or not they can speak out, whether or not they want to make a change, whether or not they want to organize to make that change a reality."[17]

From New York to Chicago to San Francisco, whether in relation to traditional public schools or to charter schools, students are organizing both to complain and to offer solutions and policies that they believe are more humane and go far beyond concerns with the number, use, and frequency of taking standardized tests. As one of the youth organizations in California argues on its website, the creation of a "two-tiered education system has left a significant number of students with very few options for their future, and essentially condemned to another generation of low-wage work or prison."[18] They say that these inequities are perpetuated and intensified by a range of aggressive, unregulated, and biased disciplinary practices that disproportionately impact low-income Black and Latino children, thus "depriving them of their fundamental right to education and in many cases pushing students permanently out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems."[19]

One of the leading educational locations where harsh discipline takes place is in many of the free market–inspired and taxpayer-supported charter schools popular in poor urban school districts. Support for the damaging perspectives against which students are arguing, one that advocates what is known as "zero tolerance" in terms of violating any expectations or school rules, was summed up in an April 2015 think piece written by the founder of the Success Academy chain of charter schools, Eva S. Moskowitz. She published her views in the *Wall Street Journal*. Though offering no support for her thinking, Moskowitz says she believes "zero tolerance" discipline policies are linked to higher learning outcomes. According to her charter chain's 2012 code of conduct, there are over sixty infractions—including bullying, spotty attendance, dress-code violations, littering, and failing to be "in a ready-to-succeed position"—that might lead to a violation.

Enough violations, and students are suspended. Because of these policies, the suspension rates at Success Academy Charter schools are almost three times higher than those in regular New York City K–12 public schools. Moskowitz defends her school's policies, saying, "Anyone who wants students to succeed in life should focus on better education, not on more lax discipline." She says others who support such lax policies are in opposition to scholarship and are moving in opposition to what is recommended as a best practice. However, there is a lot of scholarship, not just students, that disagrees with her.[20]

Educational researchers who study school discipline policies point out that restorative justice may substantially reduce disruptive behavior, enhance learning, promote positive school climate, and destroy the school-to-prison pipeline that exacerbates inequality and disadvantage for minority students.[21] Though Moskowitz refers to such practices as a "campaign to diminish the school discipline needed to ensure a nurturing and productive learning environment," the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Department of Justice, civil rights and civil liberties organizations, researchers, foundations, and advocacy coalitions all agree that suspensions and expulsions are used excessively in urban schools, often for such minor infractions as "talking back," and that such practices should be reduced. Indeed, based on research conducted by a wide range of organizations, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, and the School Discipline Consensus Project of the Council of State Governments, it is clear that zero-tolerance policies are harmful. In turn, restorative justice policies are supported by those organizations, as well as, perhaps most important, by the children who actually attend the schools. Though they have an overwhelming amount of evidence on their side, some educators and administrators nonetheless continue to utilize policies that put them at a severe disadvantage. In response, students of color attending urban schools feel the need to band together and sometimes even

unionize. For them, discipline in both traditional public schools and the free market–inspired public charter schools is often as negatively impactful as excessive test taking is in schools that are predominantly wealthy and contain few students who are Black and Latino. Their activism is a form of self-protection. It is sorely needed.[22]

The students are getting results. If not so much in the areas of reducing testing, increasing budget allocations, or getting their districts out from under state control, they are at the forefront of making change possible for future generations in the area of harsh disciplinary measures. For example, in 2015 in Chicago, high school–aged activists helped to pass state Senate Bill 100, which prohibits schools from adopting so called zero-tolerance disciplinary policies. In NYC, student activists who attended low-income, low-performing schools were instrumental in pushing the Bill de Blasio administration toward supporting "The Roadmap to Promote Safe Schools," which was his plan for providing training in de-escalation techniques to police and school safety officers, as well as promoting restorative justice techniques in a bid to end overly punitive school discipline policies. It focused in part on the problematic role of school safety officers in public schools.[23]

A familiar presence in low-income urban schools, though far less present in well-resourced schools, school resource officers are a form of security guard who work in public schools. In practice, some say, they are worsening the situation and hastening how quickly children become embroiled in the "school-to-prison pipeline" rather than curbing its impact. Thanks to inconsistent training models and a lack of clear standards, critics contend school officers are "introducing children to the criminal justice system unnecessarily by doling out harsh punishments for classroom misbehavior." As an example of why students are focusing so specifically on discipline in their schools, one need look no further than a videotaped May 2016 encounter between a school safety officer

and a high school student in Philadelphia. Brian Burney, a member of the Philadelphia Student Union, says he was headed to the third-floor bathroom between classes when he was confronted by a school police officer and was told he didn't have the proper hall pass. Burney says, "We got into an argument. I threw an orange at the wall, but not at the officer. He punched me in the face. He knocked me down, brought me down to the ground, and put me in a chokehold." Burney sustained a concussion during the struggle, which school officials said was caused by him banging his own head on the ground, not by the attack perpetrated on him by the safety officer. Burney said, "School officers, they're just dealing with us like criminals. It's sad that a lot of the students are accustomed to this." Sadly, that is a sentiment that seems to be all too true.[24]

Maria Fernandez, the senior coordinator for the Urban Youth Collaborative, a citywide coalition of New York City students of color fighting for comprehensive education reform in city public schools, also has a story to tell about school safety officers. She recalls the day when, as a sixteen-year-old public school student in New York City, the "student safety officer grabbed me, threw me on the stairs, twisted my arms, called for more cops, and then handcuffed me. I had to go to court. I had bruises all over my body. I felt worthless." Motivated by this event as well as others, in 2012 Maria became a lead organizer of a group called Journey for Justice, a national intergenerational alliance of parents and students "working to fight back against the privatization of education and to stop the disruptive school closures in communities of color." In recalling the violence directed at her in school that day during a hearing with education officials about excessive force in public schools, she asked, "Are Black students or students with special needs more disruptive, or more dangerous than their white peers? No, our *response* to these students is the danger!"[25]

The group she works with, the Urban Youth Collaborative, is

specifically interested in making sure district schools in NYC rely far less on the use of harsh disciplinary practices like zero-tolerance policies, which they say involve the police in minor incidents and lead to school-based arrests, referrals to juvenile detention, and sometimes even incarceration. They also advocate for the elimination of suspensions for the vague category of "defying authority" and call for the funding and implementation of district-wide restorative justice approaches to discipline instead of suspensions as well as the elimination of the position of school safety officer and of their right to handcuff students on school grounds. Though the sight of handcuff-wielding police officers arresting students is rare in wealthy schools with few students of color, in poor schools it is regrettably common.

Though Fernandez's experience was in New York City, it mirrors a viral video of an incident in South Carolina that made its way around the Internet in the fall of 2015. It showed a white police officer brutally attacking a young Black girl sitting in her classroom seat. On the video, we see the school safety officer storm into the classroom, grab the student, and hurl her to the floor before picking her up, handcuffing her, and leading her from the room. Her name was Shakara. Another student who yelled at the officer to stop was also attacked and led from the room in handcuffs. Her name was Niya. They and not the officer ended up facing criminal charges for "disturbing the school." Across the country, that same charge is leveled at students who receive summonses for a similar charge, "disorderly conduct." This charge can encompass everything from "refusing an order to leave a classroom to being excessively loud." As a result of such incidents, outside of free market–supported school reform circles, few agree about the educational utility of such harsh disciplinary methods. Black and Latino students are doing something about it. Though these measures are a clear step in the right direction, they may be a case of too little too late as, having already seen enough, many Black parents are leaving schools entirely behind.

There's No Place Like Home

Given the problems in districts like New York, San Francisco, Newark, and Detroit, it should perhaps not be too surprising that across the country, in order to try to keep their children safe, many Black parents are voting with their feet and opting for homeschooling. According to the National Home Education Research Institute, by 2015 Black parents were homeschooling an estimated 220,000 children instead of sending them to schools where they were often undereducated and harshly disciplined. Black families are one of the fastest-growing demographics in homeschooling, with—according to the National Center for Education Statistics—Black students making up an estimated 10 percent of the total homeschooling population. At present, that group makes up only 16 percent of all public-school students nationwide. One such student's parent is Vanessa Robinson, who pulled her son, Marvell, out of public school in San Diego following a number of incidents where students at his elementary school regularly harassed him.

While white homeschooling families generally cite religious or moral disagreements with public schools in their decision to pull their children out of traditional classroom settings, in a 2012 article published in the *Journal of Black Studies* called "African American Homeschooling as Racial Protection," Temple University professor of education Ama Mazama surveyed Black homeschooling families from around the country. She found that most chose to educate their children at home at least in part to avoid school-related racism; she notes, "We have all heard that the American education system is not the best and is falling behind in terms of international standards. But this is compounded for Black children, who are treated as though they are not as intelligent and cannot perform as well, and therefore the standards for them should be lower." Mazama acknowledges that homeschooling is

controversial because, particularly for "African Americans[,] there is a sense of betrayal when you leave public schools in particular because the struggle to get into those schools was so harsh and so long, there is this sense of loyalty to the public schools. People say, 'We fought to get into these schools, and now you are just going to leave?' "[26]

In a 2015 *Atlantic* article on the rise of homeschooling among African Americans, Paula Penn-Nabrit, who homeschooled her children in the 1990s, acknowledges that concerns with betrayal of the type Mazama describes hit particularly close to home. Indeed, in her case they involve her own family. Her husband's uncle, James Nabrit, was a central figure in the Washington, D.C., case that was bundled into *Brown v. Board* and actually argued *Brown v. Board of Education* in front of the Supreme Court alongside Thurgood Marshall. When Penn-Nabrit and her husband finally decided to pull their three sons from public school, she said, "A lot of people felt that because my family was intimately involved in the effort to integrate schools, that for me to pull my children out of schools was a betrayal of all that work." She said that, in the end, she concluded that ultimately *Brown v. Board* actually had nothing to do with what she as a parent might think her child needed. Rather, "that decision meant the state can't decide to give me less than, but I can decide I want more than." In 2003, Penn-Nabrit published her first book, *Morning by Morning: How We Home-Schooled Our African-American Sons to the Ivy League,* as a resource for other Black parents who might want to replicate her success with homeschooling. Her eldest attended Princeton while her youngest son went to Amherst College.[27]

For students who are poor and of color, America's schools are in crisis. The infrastructure, ideology, progress, and promises all fall more than a little short if the goal is equality. As the structure has crumbled, the rationale for why has focused far less on the structure or system itself and much more on the failures of those it is designed to educate. We focus far more on how and why it is that

America's urban youth can't learn and have families that don't value education, as well as why Black children in particular are so damaged that many believe that to do well in school, to aspire at all, is akin to "acting white." At the same time, as we play a cynical game of blame the victim, we are short on solutions.

Support for current segrenomic educational policies crosses traditional party lines, and their expansion found favor in the federal policies begun under President Clinton, refined under President Bush during his eight years in office, and greatly expanded during the Obama presidency. But even as political, economic, and social leaders continue to support increasingly narrow educational policies that do nothing to lessen the caste-creating apartheid schools, Black community members protest them by resorting to hunger campaigns in order to attract attention; Black and Latino youth ask education officials for protection from the intended and unintended consequences that are raining down on their heads, hearts, and bodies; and some parents make the choice to leave the public education system behind entirely. These communities are engaged, organized, and mobilized to make relevant the educational systems that seek to make their futures irrelevant. In the process, they may save us all.