

Chapter 3: BRT's Co-optation of Educators and Parents

Introduction

In 1989 and again in 1995, the national Business Roundtable defined an educational agenda that consists of state content/performance standards, a state-mandated test, rewards and sanctions based on test scores, school site-councils composed of administrators, teachers, and parents, professional development focused on using test scores to drive instructional decisions, and phonics instruction in pre-kindergarten. Since 1989, a network of public and private organizations promoting the BRT agenda of systemic reform has developed through persistent lobbying, overlapping memberships, common funding sources, and partnerships. Operating within such a powerful, national network, teachers, parents, and educational researchers have succumbed to the rhetoric of reform without closely questioning the content. The leadership of both national teacher unions, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, has expressed support for state standards and school deregulation. One of the *Nine Essential Components* of systemic reform is “school autonomy.” This is part of the larger design by which teachers are expected to work with administrators and parents in site councils to figure out the means by which to raise student test scores. By agreeing to support this definition of “autonomy,” the national union leadership has implicitly accepted the BRT agenda and relinquished any rights to be a part of deciding what the goals of education should be. Many of the union’s rank and file, however, continue to object to systemic reform. Seeing the threat of a potential parent/teacher alliance, standards advocates continue to use the rhetoric of “high standards for all” to drive a wedge between parents and teachers. Educational researchers have also been drawn into supporting systemic reform by the web-like network of corporate funding sources. Universities, regional laboratories, and think tanks are increasingly dependent on corporate and federal funding for their existence. Many of the areas of research available to those who wish to influence public policy are confined by the goals set by systemic reformers.

Co-optation Of Teacher Union Leadership

Under pressure, the two national teachers unions, the National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT), have agreed to a division of labor in which teachers have the “autonomy” to devise the means by which the goals established by others will be achieved. In the language of systemic reform, this is called “site-based decision management” (SBDM). The NEA adopted SBDM as a bargaining goal in 1991 (Gelberg, 1997; p. 148). Perhaps they did so because they thought that the “autonomy” of SBDM would finally allow them to have some say in what they were expected to teach in the classroom. This, however, was a shibboleth. In agreeing to SBDM, the NEA leadership put its members in the position of accepting responsibility for increasing student achievement while relinquishing all power to do so. In 1997, Bob Chase, president of the

NEA, spoke to the teachers gathered at the annual convention. He encouraged them to support the BRT agenda – rigid standardization, deregulation, and parental support of expert teachers.

The fact is that while NEA does not control curriculum, set funding levels, or hire and fire, we cannot go on denying responsibility for school quality. . . . The fact is that *no group knows more about the solutions that will work in our schools than America's teachers.*¹ We know what our schools need: higher academic standards; stricter discipline; an end to social promotions; less bureaucracy; more resources where they count, in the classroom; schools that are richly connected to parents and to the communities that surround them (Chase, 1999).
[my italics]

Chase did not explain *how* teachers were to implement those “solutions that will work in our schools” without the power to “control curriculum, set funding levels . . . hire and fire” and decide on textbook selections or assessment tools.

The history of SBDM in Montgomery Maryland, suggests that the NEA leadership, in promoting the BRT agenda, is perhaps out of touch with its rank and file as well as promoting a professionalism among teachers (“no group knows more”) that does not promote parent/teacher trust. One of the largest NEA local chapters is the Montgomery County Education Association. The union, in accordance with the demands of its national leadership, established site-based decision-making councils called “Quality Management Councils” or QMCs (which makes the connection between systemic reform and economic reform explicit). In 1998, the union successfully negotiated the establishment of QMCs into their contract. MCEA’s president admitted, however, that only 10 out of the 187 schools in the district have come forward to establish QMCs in the first year. Furthermore, the expectations that QMCs would lead to “rich” relationships between schools and parents did not materialize. Neither the local PTA nor the parents of the local NAACP wanted to participate in QMCs (Simon, 1999).

In a 1996 BRT publication, the authors indicate the degree of collaboration they have with the AFT by citing the contributions the AFT has made to ensure that state standards are “high.”

Examples of Ineffectual, Unclear or Poorly Written Standards:

The following selections of standards are cited by the American Federation of Teachers as examples of what to avoid. The AFT criticizes these standards for being confusing, not academic enough and overly focused on skills at the expense of knowledge Many of the standards below met objections from members of the public and business community and were rewritten as a result.

“Students will demonstrate the ability to examine problems and proposed solutions **from multiple perspectives**”² (Missouri’s Standards, Draft, 1995).

“[A high school graduate] understands and describes ways that a **specified culture shapes patterns** of interaction of individuals and groups” (Minnesota’s High School Standards, Draft, 1994).

“While performing individual and group tasks, students organize and intellectually process symbols, pictures, objects and information in a way which **permits the mind to generate the**

reality of what is being represented” (Florida’s Blueprint 2000, 1992).

“. . . A student will demonstrate the ability to think critically, **creatively and reflectively** in making decisions and solving problems” (Oregon’s Certificate of Initial Mastery, 1991).

“All students demonstrate **care-giving skills** and evaluate, in all settings, appropriate child care practices necessary to nurture children based on child development theory” (Pennsylvania’s Student Learning Outcomes, Draft, 1991 (p. 19).

Sandra Feldman, president of the AFT, used BRT rhetoric at the union’s 1998 Convention to define the agenda for the AFT’s members: “we must do everything *within our power* to make turning around low-performing schools – improving all schools – the top agenda of every community in this nation!” [my italics] (Feldman, 1999). She assured her audience that in spite of the lack of support for teachers, “education reform is working! Academic standards and requirements are up, student attendance is up, dropout rates are down, and our students are achieving at much higher levels.” While implicitly acknowledging the small box within which teachers are allowed to move, Feldman apparently believes, like Chase, that by asking for professional responsibilities, perhaps unions might be allowed more power. Feldman’s agenda is not for teachers to claim the right to bargain collectively over textbook selection, standard setting, or school design, but for teachers to demand that they be involved in the hiring process through “peer review and intervention programs.” This would result in the “professionalizing [of] dismissal proceedings” (Feldman, 1999).

By abandoning the fight over the goals of education and allowing themselves to be confined to arguing for increased professionalism (a wedge issue leading to parent alienation), Feldman and Chase may be responding to the pressure that editorialists exert over public debate. One example of this kind of pressure is revealed in a *New York Times* editorial (4/24/00; p. A20). The editors express satisfaction that the AFT

. . . is rushing to cast itself as an agent of change [i.e., promoting the goals of the high stakes testing agenda] instead of an advocate of the status quo. A new report from the teachers’ union embraces stronger teacher training and breaks with a longstanding union tradition by calling for more rigorous tests for prospective teachers. The report is encouraging, but it will take more than rhetoric for the A.F.T. and its sister union, the National Education Association, to be seen as reformers.

The editors identify the major items in the AFT’s report with approval, items that are completely consistent with BRT’s professional development goals as identified in their policy statement, the *Nine Essentials Components*. The editorial ends with a warning to the leadership of both national unions that they need to discipline their membership so every teacher lines up behind the enforcement of “rigorous tests” for teacher credential programs and closing the “loopholes allowing teachers who fail the exams to enter the classroom anyway.”

The proposed changes will take years to phase in. Meanwhile, the two biggest teachers’ unions have an important role to play The unions can take an open-minded approach to special incentives and new assignment strategies, and can crackdown on local unions that resist vitally needed reforms.

That the editors feel a need to call for a “crackdown on local unions” indicates that many teachers are not happy with the official position taken by its leadership on high-stakes testing reform.

The standards movement is one in which the principles of TQM are to be put in place. In site councils or Quality Management Councils, teachers are to become manager/workers while upper management maintains control of the goals of education. When business leaders want students to “think critically” they want students to be able to “analyze,” “synthesize,” and “apply” given bodies of knowledge and theories. They do not want students to *evaluate* what is presented to them in school, to examine the purposes for which various bodies of knowledge are presented, or to question the values on which competitive testing is based. The concept of citizenship is never defined and rarely referred to in BRT documents. “Skills necessary for the workplace” is their mantra. It is the sphere of work, and not political or social life, that is defined as the “real world.” The BRT network has succeeded in disciplining the union leadership. Those teachers who do not succumb to “crackdowns” remain politically powerless unless they can ally with parents and students.

Parental Opposition and Its Cooptation

Business and the professional educational leadership see parent opposition to the standards as one of the reasons for the initial failure of the standards movement. In order to challenge such opposition, various arguments are made by systemic reformers to motivate parents to support high-stakes testing. In October 1999, California Governor Gray Davis, in an op-ed piece, complained about a recent survey result that showed parents to be “generally satisfied with the quality of their children’s education.” Davis argued that “tests scores show otherwise. Parents must throw off their complacency.” Maureen Steinbruner in an op-ed piece (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 1999) acknowledged the existence of parental opposition, yet framed systemic reform (by “politicians and experts”) positively, as an attempt to “challenge children” – one variation on the “high standards for all” theme. Apparently, Steinbruner believes that a little more “support” might go a long way.

[There is] a great ‘disconnect’ today between politicians and experts, on the one hand, and citizens, on the other, over how American schools are doing Business and government leaders want school systems that challenge children. The public, in contrast, sees kids as overly challenged without enough support, either at home or in school. Arguments over what government should do make voters frustrated and annoyed.

Tyack and Cuban (1995) also point to polls that reveal parents having favorable views of their own children’s education. Even more telling, a 1992 poll revealed that 57 percent want school boards to have more control of education than the national or state governments (pp. 32–33). To counter community concerns over the loss of influence over the goals of education, George W. Bush and the Republican Party’s used the BRT rhetoric of “local control” of schools during the 2000 election campaign. Campaign speakers, however, rarely defined what they mean by “local control.”

The closest any parent organization has come to translating their concern over the loss of control over educational policy into active opposition are in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts' statewide, standardized test, called the MCAS, has provoked the creation of a parents' organization call MassParents, which has joined the Coalition for Authentic Reform in Education (CARE), Boycotting MCAS and FairTest. MassParents seems to be the most vocal parent group against the state test but pulls back at condemning all standardized testing as inherently problematic. Using a web page (www.egroups.com/group/care) and a listserv (care@egroups.com), members of CARE are coordinating opposition to the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Opposition includes letters to state legislatures and visits with them in an attempt to repeal the legislation that created MCAS. Many coalition members start petition drives or create brochures and hand them out on street corners before school and school board meetings. Their activity has encouraged numerous school boards in Massachusetts to pass resolutions similar to the one passed in July 2000 by the Berkshire Regional School District:

1. WHEREAS an MCAS program as currently devised will increase high school dropout rates, discourage some middle and high school students who perform at marginal levels, and unnecessarily frustrate some younger children, especially those with special needs, who are unable to succeed in the challenging MCAS test, and
2. Whereas there is evidence that states that have implemented education reform without high-stakes [testing that links passage to graduation] are having better results in providing academic performance than states that have voted high-stakes testing,
3. Now, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Central Berkshire Regional School Committee opposes the use of a passing grade on the 10th grade Language Arts and Mathematics MCAS tests as a requirement for graduation from high school, and
4. In ACCORDANCE WITH THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT, REQUIRING A VARIETY OF ASSESSMENTS OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE, now BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Great and General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, and the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, urge the Board of Education to not link MCAS test results with the granting of high school diplomas and the aforementioned groups lobby for legislation that will prohibit the use of MCAS test results for this purpose (from the CARE listserv July 24, 2000).

CARE is an unusual organization. More common is the pattern of parental involvement established in Texas. Dennis Shirley (1997) has chronicled the development of community organizing by the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) since 1979 and its eventual partnership with the Texas Education Association in 1992 to create 21 "Alliance Schools."³ Although the IAF began its work in Texas as an attempt to help communities take back control over their lives from "huge corporations, the mass media," and "benevolent government," it ended up promoting the educational reform agenda promoted by these very institutions. This is a testament to the effectiveness of the systemic reformers' structural design of its reforms – by removing goal-setting functions from local control, local organizers feel unable to help parents address the content and methods teachers use in the classroom. Beginning in 1986, Morningside Elementary School in Fort

Worth, Texas, was the pilot for the Alliance Schools. The pilot project was funded by the state government, local business leaders, and foundations (p. 100). The money was spent on an organizing staff who identified and trained local leaders through church “education committees”, home visits and training sessions.

The visitations and training sessions gradually changed Morningside from a school with no ties to the community to a fulcrum of parental involvement. Many parents had never understood the actual course of study for their children in the school or how their children were assessed. ACT leaders prepared training sessions to teach the parents about the structure of the school and to advise them about ways they could reinforce activities at home. *At this stage, abstract debates about the legitimacy of the curriculum or the problems of Texas’ standardized tests were avoided; the focus was on helping parents to understand the given realities of the school and how they could assist their children within that framework* (p. 109). (my emphasis)

As long as local organizers stay away from addressing the “legitimacy of the curriculum or the problems of Texas’ standardized tests,” they could expect corporate foundations to continue to support them. In 1990, the Rockefeller Foundation agreed to fund the training of organizers to spread the success of Morningside (p. 115).

Shirley provides example by which parental desires for educational reform was diverted because IAF organizers were not willing to allow the parents to debate the goals of education. In 1994, parental opposition to tracking in El Paso, Texas, was channeled by corporate-funded IAF community organizers into a renewed commitment to the “traditional curriculum.”

The parents of children at Alamo Elementary School knew that for many years, through some slow, opaque, and seemingly inexorable process, their children always ended up tracked to the lowest level when they arrived in middle school and high school. The parents refused to believe that that tracking was a reflection of students’ natural abilities rather than the culture of their schools, but they were reticent to pin responsibility on their children’s teachers and principal. Working with EPISO organizers and leaders, Alamo parents decided to *address the problem of academic standards* by looking neither to the “Essential Elements” mandated by the TEA nor to the curriculum experts of the El Paso Independent School District. They decided that they wanted to play a major role in setting the curriculum standards for the school themselves. In a series of house meetings, parents discussed what they wanted their children to know at the end of each grade level. [School staff and IAF organizers participated in but did not lead the discussions.] The parents would need time and a supportive environment to develop their leadership and to establish those curricular goals which most deeply emanated from their own thoughts and experiences.

What kinds of curricular themes did the parents identify? Parents wanted their children to be literate and skilled in arithmetic, science, and social studies. *As the conversations evolved, there was an almost perfect overlapping between the parents’ curriculum and that which traditionally was taught at Alamo* (p. 211) [my emphasis].

Shirley explains that IAF organizers began discussions with the parents over educational reform by presenting the parents with the “ugly realities” that their children “need to acquire the

education which will enable them to become skilled laborers or professionals” instead of “low wage service sector jobs” (p. 24). As I explained in Chapter 2, this is the argument the BRT makes to support the need for systemic reform and it is a highly debatable one. By setting the goals of education essentially off limits, the IAF organizers, like the BRT has done throughout the nation, severely narrowed the options from which content and instruction can be chosen. Given the goals of education as “ugly realities,” IAF organizers prevented parents from considering education as a process by which they and their children could learn how to change the “ugly realities.” It is somewhat surprising that IAF organizers allowed this to happen given their commitment to helping communities articulate “curricular goals which most deeply emanate from their own thoughts and experiences.” The organizers, presumably, were aware of the teachings of Paulo Freire whose work with poor and working class communities in South America resulted in very different educational goals and practices than what had been “traditionally taught” in the villages.⁴

The Cooptation of Educational Researchers and Teachers

Many educational researchers face a dilemma. Their research depends on funding from the corporate world and the federal government, both of whom are dedicated to promoting comprehensive school reform, high-stakes testing or the New Standards Movement — all three of which are euphemisms for BRT’s agenda. In this section, I provide examples of how researchers associated either with a university or with regional educational laboratories essentially end up as technocrats trying to find ways to implement the nine *Essential Components of a Successful School System*.⁵ The first example explores the effect of the partnership between the Annenberg Institute and the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative.

The BRT agenda has influenced the goals of many research organizations like the Bay Area Schools Reform Collaborative (BASRC). BRT’s “essential components” of high standards, “rigorous” and “measurable” assessment aligned with those standards, the focus on every student, parent involvement, teacher development and technology are fundamental to BASRC’s research and development priorities and to BASRC’s definition of “Core Reform Issues.” This is not surprising given that the Hewlett and Annenberg Foundations (who are among the most generous sources of funds for national systemic reform) are BASRC’s principal funders.

BASRC funds research and development in six areas that are “of critical importance to finding better methods and more effective responses to the new challenges that face our schools.” The areas are “school-to-career approaches,” technology, professional development, teacher practice, “equitable outcomes”⁶ on standardized tests and support for school reform leaders (BASRC, 1999a). BASRC also has established a club to which individual schools can apply “through a rigorous portfolio process.” To qualify as a BASRC member one must already “show concrete evidence of effort in” the areas of “quality teaching,” high standards, “partnerships with key stakeholders” [local business leaders], “systems to manage the change process,” and “developing a sense of professional

community and internalized accountability among teachers” (BASRC, 1999b; Leadership).

The benefits of being accepted as a BASRC member are access to facilitators and the potential for funding. North Campus Continuation High received a Hewlett-Annenberg Leadership school grant when the school established a partnership with the local Chamber of Commerce to develop a performance assessment matrix that reflected the skill requirements of local businesses (BASRC, 1999b; Depth). Washington Science Elementary School, a magnet school in Point Richmond, received \$380,000 over four years for building a community culture committed to increasing test scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (BASRC, 1999b; Breadth). Teachers in membership schools are offered grant money to go to professional development workshops. The money is offered “with no strings attached. Interested teachers have gone together to conferences on subjects like laptop instruction and assessment” (BASRC, 1999b; Leadership).

Fremont High School in Sunnyvale is BASRC’s showcase “Leadership School.” Its economic and ethnic diversity (60 different languages) make it the “picture of what California - and the rest of the country - will look like in the next century.” Its success in implementing high standards has made it a must stop for international educators. It even attracted the attention of Linda Darling-Hammond and a Central Park East teacher. The reason for its success, according to BASRC, is that it “looks at student data to diagnose what is and isn’t working” — a fundamental requirement in BRT’s theory of educational reform. When looking at the “data,” the Fremont staff discovered low test scores in math, science, and English, so it was decided to reformulate the daily schedule to give students more time for instruction in those subjects. But Fremont High doesn’t want to rely on test scores only. It has programs to “increase student input on campus.” Increasing student as well as teacher “input” is done because “research shows that democratically run schools increase student achievement” (BASRC, 1999b; Leadership). One might question how “democratic” the school decision-making can be when the goals of education are decided by an interlocking network consisting of BRT members, state governors, and foundational support for IEL studies and programs.

The experiences of Gabriel Proo⁷, an elementary teacher at Belle Air Elementary School (2000 – 1), suggests that BASRC’s emphasis on “data-driven reform” has made test scores a blunt instrument by which teachers are deskilled and students are humiliated. Although his account is only one teacher’s testimony, it provides a vivid and concrete illustration of the effect of “data driven decision-making” when part of systemic reform. Before deciding to teach, Gabe had been a paralegal for seven years, a purchasing agent for five years. He has a BA in Spanish, a multi cultural credential from San Francisco State University, and a Masters in Spanish Literature. He started teaching in a middle school in Los Angeles (Spring, 1994) then moved to San Francisco to teach in Aptos Middle School (1994-95), then to Oakland’s LaFayette Elementary (1996-97) and Hoover Elementary (1997-2000).⁸

When the principal of Belle Air interviewed Gabe in the spring of 2000, she told him that every teacher at the school was expected to attend a three-day retreat in June and a two-day retreat in

August. The purpose of these retreats was to create a “site plan” to improve test scores at Belle Air. When Gabe arrived at Asilomar State Park near Monterey for the June retreat, he learned that he was one of approximately sixty teachers attending. They were part of a BASRC “cluster” of six schools. Gabe was stunned at the intensity of the “gung-ho” enthusiasm of the BASRC-trained facilitators who ran the three-day retreat. He said it felt like a marketing workshop. He was being sold on using test scores as the basis of the “cycle of inquiry.” This eventually would become the “cyclone of inquiry” since the process of diagnosis and “cure” was to be repeated until the students’ test scores improved. (Interestingly, Gabe could not remember the five or six steps of the “cycle.”)

For three days, the teachers were “taught” how to analyze test data. They were given the scores at Belle Air from the previous year and asked, “What do you see?” The teachers dutifully pointed out “gaps in performance,” for example, a precipitous drop from third grade to fourth grade. There was neither discussion of test score validity, reliability or accuracy nor mention of the Joint Committee on Testing’s *Code of Practice*. There was no discussion as to why scores should be reported as a range and not a single number or why the American Psychological Association has argued that important decisions about students should never be made on basis of test scores alone. What was impressed upon the teachers was that where there was a gap or disparity in test scores, the “cure” should be applied.

The “cure” consisted of teaching only math and English during the first four hours of school. The teachers were handed the curriculum that they were to follow during those four hours – the phonics-based *Open Court* and *Math Steps*. The teachers were told explicitly to not use any other subjects to help teach the reading and computation skills outlined in the given curriculum. Teacher manuals were distributed to help teachers implement the “cyclone of inquiry” and to “customize” the standard curriculum when students failed to learn it (Gabe said that there was no time to give students the individual attention they needed). Gabe asked why he couldn’t use his Spanish in the classroom to help the Spanish speaking students understand what they were supposed to do and learn. The only answer he received was that instruction always had to be in English because the tests were in English. During the school year, when Gabe didn’t understand the teacher manuals, his requests for explanation were ignored, so he started to lie about what he was doing in the classroom.

A fundamental part of the BASRC “site plan” included testing the students three times a year. The teachers were expected to administer five tests per student in the fall, five more in the winter and five again in the spring. These tests were in addition to the SAT9 and other practice tests that the principal told the teachers to go out and buy and administer throughout the year (“April was all tests”). Several of the five-test battery that BASRC provided (only one copy of each so the teacher had to make copies for each of their ~150 students) had to be administered individually. This meant that while Gabe was giving a test to one child, he was unable to monitor the other students in the class (who necessarily were unruly because the test prep materials they were working on did not hold their interest). Students persistently failed to come to school the day they were supposed to be given the test and had to be tracked down later. Gabe argued that the enormous administrative load

that all the testing required of him (teaching had lost its beauty and was now “just grading papers and tests”), made him unable to ensure that all the children were tested. Out of sheer frustration, Gabe began to invent test scores for those students who he failed to track down. One of the many sources of frustration for Gabe was watching students sit in silent humiliation as he administered the tests. Many students didn’t speak English well enough to even understand what was being asked of them by the test. As Gabe followed the curriculum plans of *Open Court* and *Math Steps* and administered practice test after practice test, the students became “bored to tears” and discipline problems escalated.

I asked Gabe if the test scores of his students went up at the end of the year. He said “Yes, but another school got the extra cash from the state. We were demoralized because we worked just as hard as they did.” Gabe’s experiences at Belle Air were far more stressful than those at the previous schools at which he taught (experiences which included dealing with a “race riot” at Aptos Elementary school). It was only during this last year that Gabe felt his health decline dramatically. He is hesitant to cite the intensity of the BASRC “site plan” as his reason for leaving the teaching profession since other factors exacerbated the anxieties created by implementing a test-based curriculum. Other factors identified by Gabe as contributing the stress he felt: no access to bilingual scaffolding materials (which he had in Oakland); no library or playground (a new school was being built on the space around them); the absence of the principal one out of every 2 days (she complained of migraines and said she was attending BASRC meetings she eventually told Gabe that he “was the problem”); an all white faculty who “patronized” their minority students (Gabe was the only Spanish-speaking member of the faculty); no computer specialist; no science manipulatives and the school secretary was fired early on in the year (the principal was never around to provide initial training).

Gabe’s experiences echo the research of Linda McNeil (2000)⁹ and belie BASRC’s abstract claims that “democratic decision-making” is part of their reform efforts. His experiences, perhaps, explain why many veteran teachers are increasingly choosing early retirement rather than accept working within the intensified culture of testing that pervades those schools that submit to the kinds of special programs offered by so-called research-based, professionally staffed educational laboratories. Gabe said he chose to retire rather than continue to experience the contradictions inherent in systemic reform. For example, the principal at Belle Air sent Gabe to a three-day workshop on how to teach learning disabled students. He agreed to go in spite of knowing that he would not be able to use the techniques he learned because they “went against the BASRC program . . . in BASRC, there are no LD students.”

California Tomorrow (CT) promotes workshops similar to the one Gabe went to. CT is a nonprofit organization partnered with IEL and whose publications appear in the bibliographies of the Far West Laboratory newsletters. Far West Laboratory is the parent organization of BASRC. In 1994, California Tomorrow submitted to the California state legislature an “Executive Summary” of its research based upon several “demonstration sites.” The “Summary” consisted of 12

“conclusions” and 61 “recommendations.” Below are two of the recommendations that CT hoped the state legislature would act upon.

Recommendation #4 – Create and fund a major five-year professional development campaign with the goal of supporting mainstream teachers and administrators to develop the expertise needed to teach in a diverse society. These skills include: knowledge of second language acquisition processes and supports for students through the process; familiarity with a wide range of materials about different cultures and historical periods to enable teachers to build inclusive curricula; approaches to creating a climate supportive of diversity; exposure to the major cultures and national backgrounds of the student population of California; and strategies for working in partnership with other children and family agencies (Connor and Melendez, 1994: p. 52).

Recommendation #7 – Invest in the development of a data-driven accountability system that builds upon existing data and management information systems and holds schools accountable for both high-level standards and equitable student achievement and participation. The accountability system must promote self-examination of sub-aggregated data at the school site level, and include three basic components: incentives for schools to improve their performance, technical assistance and professional development for schools engaged in good faith efforts but not sufficiently improving, and reasonable sanctions for those schools which ultimately fail to improve over prolonged periods of time (Connor and Melendez, 1994: p. 53)

There is no indication anywhere in the document of an awareness of the potential conflicts (realized at Belle Air if not other schools) between recommendations #4 and #7. Nor is there any indication of an understanding that the emphasis on “data-driven accountability” can and has successfully reduced issues of diversity and equity (issues typically raised at the community level) to test score results (issues raised at the corporate level).

The corporate funders of research organizations like BASRC and Far West Laboratory have succeeded in persuading the employees of these organizations to incorporate the goals of systemic reform into their research. In some cases, the incorporation turns into re-orientation. For example, one researcher who had a position of leadership in CT (California Tomorrow) had been a proponent of typical community concerns: bilingual education, student empowerment, and the ways in which the public school system force non-Anglo students to abandon their home cultures. But after receiving a five-year Mellon grant, her research turned to promoting the BRT agenda: “finding ways to use data and inquiry for accountability purposes, developing standards and exit criteria for ESL classes and increasing access to academic classes” as well as finding new models of professional development that would support data-driven decision-making. She became involved in finding ways to help immigrant children learn English in order to master academic content so as to qualify for college (UCSB, 1998). This, by itself, is a laudable goal. But if BRT is able to control what “academic content” is taught, then other goals — empowerment, divergent thinking, problem-identifying skills, care-taking skill, even preserving bicultural identities — cannot be pursued in the school system or even supported by it.

Dennis Shirley's (1997) research¹⁰ also seems to have been influenced by his funders — the Mellon and Ford foundations. Shirley states that his research is motivated by the need to

learn about forms of community self-mobilization and political action that not only confront the despair which haunts our urban schools, but also address Kozol's question about the presence of the ghetto itself (p. 4).

Jonathan Kozol believes that teachers should not just teach in the ghetto but to inquire, with their students, as to why the ghetto exists. The rest of Shirley's book never returns to Kozol's question but focuses instead on the ways in which community organizers need to learn how to better "enhance academic achievement," i.e., increase scores on the statewide mandated standardized test. It is rather surprising that Shirley chose to focus on academic achievement and standardized testing. For he apparently shares many educational researchers' reluctance to support the concept of a single test score's determining whether a student has achieved goals set for her by state curricular standards. Nor does Shirley question whether the tests themselves contribute to the "presence of the ghetto." Shirley buries in a footnote his observation that

many convincing studies have been conducted by educators who warn about the reductionist nature of standardized test scores. Regrettably, some of the newer and more promising forms of assessment, which focus on exhibitions, demonstrations, and performances have not been in place for enough time to measure their efficacy in promoting higher order thinking skills (Shirley, 1997; p. 310).¹¹

The focus of Shirley's research is on the means by which the differing cultures of school and home in poor, urban school districts can be fused so students can better develop the "cognitive skills" they need in order to get the better jobs in the New Economy. Shirley notes that after four years of community organizing in support of the Texas state exam, the principal of a Fort Worth elementary school, in 1990,

confessed that a key part of her strategy to improve test scores focused on recitation and memorization – skills that are valuable components of cognitive development but that need to be balanced with higher order thinking skills involving creative expression, synthesis, and evaluation to enhance children's many sided development (Shirley, 1997; p. 114).

Shirley points out that teaching to the test only worsened in 1994, when the new TAAS test was made public and schools began to build their curricula around the test (p. 215). In spite of these and other problems, Shirley feels compelled to use the test scores as the means to evaluate his ethnographic/historical "independent variables."¹²

One cannot know to what degree community-based organizations and the Alliance Schools network operate as independent variables in the data [TAAS scores from 1990 – 96] . . . there are many limitations on the test scores. Nonetheless, they do provide *one resource* for attempting to gauge academic progress. Recognizing the above qualifications, one may

explore the TAAS results to ascertain if they provide clues about the development of the Alliance Schools (pp. 215 – 16) [my emphasis].

In spite of admitting the impossibility of drawing conclusions, Shirley draws them anyway.

What were the factors that promoted the leap in scores at Davis and Roosevelt [High Schools from 1993 – 96]? Davis’s achievement . . . was catalyzed by an unusual matrix of community support, innovative curricular and scheduling¹³ reforms, and an increasingly academic focus in the school (p. 217).

Shirley is conflicted. His research reinforces the legitimacy of tests by using them as his measurement device. Yet, at the same time, he understands not only the limited validity of tests but also their destructive consequences as demonstrated by the confession of the principal of the Ft. Worth elementary school.

The rhetoric of union leaders, the concerns of parents, the implementation workshops of regional laboratories and educational researchers have all lined up behind systemic reform. High-stakes testing, enforced by content standards and written by state committees, is a given. It is a framework within which everyone, it seems, feels they must work. Otherwise, they risk being accused of not wanting every student to be “successful.” Very few are asking “successful at doing what?” At getting a good job? But there are only a small percentage of “good jobs” in the U.S. economy. At competing for a good job? The number of losers will still be the same regardless of how many more skilled people are produced by the schools. Systemic reformers have successfully stifled such questions by painting their critics as people who don’t believe in “high standards for all” and succeed in ending the debate there. Teachers are persuaded to support systemic reform because they are promised new responsibilities that will supposedly increase their status. Parents are persuaded to support systemic reform because they are told that student failure in the past was due to lazy, no-good teachers who didn’t have high expectations of their students. Educational researchers support systemic reform because, otherwise, they cannot get a job. Once again, the very few in this country have managed to give marching orders to the many.

¹ It is phrases like this one “no group knows more . . .” that has the potential to alienate parents by calling upon the legacy of professionalism. Chase, in the face of a concerted assault on *real* teacher autonomy through the imposition of state standards and tests, is attempting to assert teacher expertise as a means to carve out some space in which teachers can retain some respect or prestige. But in seeking status from state officials and editorialists instead of parents (by accepting their definition of the proper role of teachers), Chase threatens to alienate the only constituency that would support real decision-making authority for teachers – parents. Many parents who come to school to speak to teachers about their children want to have a dialogue with the teachers. They don’t want to be talked down to from an attitude that the teacher rather than the parent knows what is best for the child. As long as teachers couch their opposition to systemic reform in a professional paradigm (we know better than parents or state policy makers), they will be vulnerable to divide and conquer tactics by the BRT network.

² I have highlighted in bold the presumably offensive, or “unclear,” words and phrases that makes these standards “unacceptable” to both the BRT and the AFT. The first four examples are probably “unclear” because they can be interpreted as sanctioning divergent thinking. The fifth example is clearly “not academic enough;” “care-giving skills” are not required in the workplace and one wonders whether BRT CEOs believe “care-giving skills” are necessary at all. BRT envisions the role of parents as helping their students succeed academically. Given the plethora of words like “rigorous,” “disciplined,” and

“academic,” one is led to wonder if “care-giving” skills are necessary at all. By citing the AFT as the critics of such “soft” standards, the BRT simultaneously undermines the standards while conferring status upon the AFT. The leadership of the AFT apparently is susceptible to such tactics of co-optation.

³ All page references in this section are from Shirley’s book.

⁴ See Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

⁵ Kirst (2000) unwittingly describes the process by which many researchers become supporters of the BRT educational legislative agenda. He argues that educational researchers can influence state legislative policy if they choose “issues that have a high probability of state legislative action within a one or two-year time frame” (p. 3). In order to get the ear of a legislator or staff person one should become part of a “natural network” whose “common mission . . . reinforces potential relevance”. These networks are formed through personal, face-to-face relationships cultivated through previous employment in state government, that is, having worked already in the state department of education. But even if one gains access to legislators and their staff members by developing personal relationships, it is still important, Kirst cautions, to present information in a way “that users are least threatened and purveyors are seen as trusted colleagues” (Kirst, 2000). Described like this, it is little wonder that the BRT educational agenda was translated into state legislation with little alteration.

⁶ Linda McNeil (2000) studied the impact of the high-stakes testing agenda in Houston, Texas. She found that in the pursuit of “equitable outcomes” (attempts to raise the test scores of poor and minority students to the levels of middle-class whites and Asian Americans), school administrators were forcing teachers to abandon “rich and authentic” curricula for a “dumbed-down, test-prep” course of study (see Chapter 4). In Chapter 5, I attempt to demonstrate that the euphemisms of “equitable access,” “equitable outcomes,” “equity and excellence,” and “high standards for all” mask an insidious development – the reinstatement of the principle “separate but equal”, i.e., the growing resegregation of our nation’s schools.

⁷ I interviewed Gabe on October 15, 2001.

⁸ Gabe moved every year for different reasons some personal, some professional. He left Aptos and LaFayette because of “bad” and “crazy” principals, respectively. He has retired from teaching because his experiences at Belle Air ruined his health.

⁹ See reference to McNeil’s research in Chapter 4, pages 108–109 in this paper in which she argues that “low-performing schools” are targeted with a “test prep” curriculum resulting in the deskilling and dumbing down of at risk students.

¹⁰ Described above (at the end of the “parental co-optation section in this chapter).

¹¹ One of the things that standards advocates like about nationally normed, multiple choice tests is their ability to make fine distinctions, e.g., between an 86 percent and an 87 percent. Alternative assessments do not do this as well nor are portfolio or performance assessment as reliable as commercial, standardized multiple choice tests. For these reasons, I don’t believe that it will matter how long these alternative forms are in place since standards advocates want the better sorting capabilities of the multiple choice tests.

¹² Shirley’s research is a series of case studies. He wishes to test the “social capital theory” of Jane Jacobs, Glen Loury, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam, which “suggests that if reformers seek to improve schools, they need to cultivate generalized reciprocity and social trust in such a manner that virtuous circles replace vicious ones” (p. 27). He describes his books as follows: “I first describe the economic dislocations, decline in political participation, and social disorganization which characterize our current national predicament. Next, I provide background on the origins of the Industrial Areas Foundation in Texas, the nature of the organizations’ philosophy of education, and its strategies of community organizing around issues of school change and neighborhood development. The narrative then moves to case studies in which local organizations of the Texas IAF have sought to mobilize low-income citizens to forge new kinds of social networks among parents, clergy, parishioners, teachers, administrators, and civic leaders” (p. 9).

¹³ The innovations are identified in Chapter 4: “intensive summer courses to prepare [the students] for college preparatory courses in their high school” (p. 122); Tenneco Corporation offered \$1000 per year college scholarships for every Davis high school student who could maintain a 2.5 grade point average and attend two month long summer institutes at the University of Houston for which they were paid \$150 a session; block scheduling (90 minute classes, 15 minute intersessions; an hour for lunch); alignment of feeder schools with high school curriculum; and thirty thousand hours of professional development “in new forms of instruction and curriculum development” – “hands-on mathematics, collaborative approaches to reading, student self-discipline and self-governance” paid for by Tenneco and its corporate allies (pp. 128-29). Tenneco’s scholarship program was cited by the BRT as one of several “Exemplary Corporate Policies and Practices to Improve Education” on page 20 of Agents of Change (Wentworth, 1993)