



Cities on a Hill

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New York's Education Racial Gap: Facing the Problem, Finding Solutions

One of the most important problems facing American education is the gap in academic performance between African-American and Latino children on the one hand, and white and Asian-American students on the other. In fact, on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP, the nation's most



From left to right: Carol Reich, Henry Olsen, Dennis Walcott, Abigail Thernstrom, and David Brennan.

respected education test), the typical black or Hispanic student at age 17 scores less well than 80 percent of his or her white classmates. On average, non-Asian minority students are four years behind their white and Asian classmates in educational skill level. Statistics show that children who lag behind during K-12 education will most likely remain educationally and economically disadvantaged in later life.

Unfortunately, test scores in New York City mirror national rates. In English Language Arts for elementary and middle school grades, approximately 65% of the city's white and Asian students met standards on state and city tests last year, compared to only about 35% of black and Hispanic students. Nearly

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Study Finds High School Exit Exams Don't Reduce Grad Rates

On April 28, the Manhattan Institute released a new study by Senior Fellow Jay P. Greene and Research Associate Marcus A. Winters, *Pushed Out or Pulled Up? Exit Exams and Dropout Rates in Public High Schools*. Several states have adopted high school exit exams over the past two decades in response to concerns that the value of their high school diplomas has declined precipitously in the labor market. Currently, 24 states—including New York State with its Regents Exam—either already require students to pass an exit exam to graduate from high school or

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Panel Discusses Best Development Model for Brooklyn

Developer Bruce Ratner, with the blessing of Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, has proposed a \$2.5 billion development project for downtown Brooklyn, including a 19,000-seat arena for the Nets with a mixed residential-office project across the street. If approved, the arena will be designed by the prominent architect Frank Gehry. Even without this project, however, Brooklyn is in the midst of a market-driven renaissance that has brought a mix of new housing and light manufacturing back into once blighted neighborhoods. To succeed, the Ratner development has requested government condemnations of private property, public financing, and tax abatements. An alternative approach would be for the city to continue its rezoning of Brooklyn, eliminate the current restrictive manufacturing zoning, and permit market forces to dictate the pace and mix of development projects.

In order to identify which alternative is the best model for reinvigorating downtown Brooklyn, the Manhattan Institute convened a breakfast colloquium of experts on urban development and sports economics on May 13. Joining the panel was the Manhattan Institute's newest Senior Fellow, Julia Vitullo-Martin; Andrew Zimbalist, professor of economics at Smith College; Howard Goldman, a principal at Howard Goldman, PLLC; and Dick Netzer, professor emeritus of economics, planning, and public administration at New York University.

Professor Zimbalist outlined the economic benefits that could be expected from the Ratner stadium development plan, including local employment and tax revenues. Howard Goldman and Dick Netzer discussed how market forces had spurred Brooklyn's dramatic resurgence in recent years, and explained how that trend could be continued by relaxing Brooklyn's antiquated zoning ordinances.

For more information on New York City development issues go to:

<http://www.manhattan-institute.org/crd>

Below: Atlantic Yards site as it stands today. (Photo courtesy of Gehry Partners LLP)



From left to right: Andrew Zimbalist, Howard Goldman, Julia Vitullo-Martin, and Dick Netzer.



Above and below: Two views of the proposed stadium. (Photos courtesy of Gehry Partners LLP)



New York's Education Racial Gap *cont'd from page 1*

20% of black and Latino students scored at level one, the lowest possible achievement level, and did not meet standards at all last year.

On March 9th, the Manhattan Institute brought together a panel of education experts to discuss the racial gap in New York City and how it might be overcome. Panelists included Dennis Walcott, NYC Deputy Mayor for Policy; Abigail Thernstrom, Ph.D., Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute and author of *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*; David Brennan, Chairman, White Hat Management LLC; and Carol F. Reich, Ph.D., Co-Founder, Beginning With Children Foundation and Charter School.

Deputy Mayor Walcott documented the scope of the problem in the city and reiterated the Mayor's commitment to education reform. "Maybe the most critical education reform in New York we've taken so far is mayoral control and accountability for education. Since we achieved that, we've attempted to streamline the school system and have a more accountable system through reforming both the management structure as well as what is [being taught] in the schools."

Dr. Thernstrom added that the racial gap "is the nation's number one educational problem and has become a civil rights issue. Equal skills and knowledge mean equal earnings regardless of race or ethnicity. But we are far from that point here in New York, or anywhere else." Dr. Thernstrom said that all good schools operating in underserved urban communities share common threads: greatly extended instructional time with more hours of the day, longer weeks, and longer school years. These schools also make a commitment to excellence in teaching the core subjects of reading, math, and history. The final critical element in successful inner city

schools was a talented, determined principal with the authority and autonomy to manage the school budget, set salaries, and staff the school with the best teachers he or she could find—as well as the authority to dismiss teachers who didn't embrace the school's core principles.

Mr. Brennan and Dr. Reich spoke of their experiences offering alternative educational programs for students and parents who were frustrated with the traditional educational options available to them. Mr. Brennan noted that many students who drop out of high school, or are at high-risk for dropping out, require an education tailored to their unique educational needs. Mr. Brennan said, "a student who comes to one of our Life Skill Centers, which is what we call the offices where students can work toward their high school diplomas, finds that they can tailor their education to their needs and succeed."

Dr. Reich explained that the success of the Beginning with Children Charter School, whose students score well above city averages on most tests, is the result of a determined focus on reading skills in early grades because, Dr. Reich believes, success in reading will catalyze success in all other academic subjects—just as a lack of reading proficiency will undermine a student's ability to succeed in math or science studies. "At the Beginning with Children Charter School, the city and state math scores correlate with the reading scores on our internal exam. In other words, if a child doesn't read well that child is not going to do well on any of those math tests."

Dr. Thernstrom concluded the conference by urging teachers and administrators to "transform the culture of their students as that culture affects academic achievement," and aim to instill a student peer culture that celebrates academic success.

Study Finds High School Exit Exams Don't Reduce Grad Rates *cont'd from page 1*

have adopted measures to implement exit exams in the near future. States hope that these tests will ensure that students who receive a diploma meet certain basic thresholds of academic proficiency.

Greene and Winters examined the effect of high school exit exams using two highly respected methods of calculating graduation rates. They found that, contrary to the claims of some critics of high-stakes testing, requiring high school students to pass an exit exam to receive a diploma does not reduce graduation rates. The authors also found no relationship between graduation rates and higher levels of per-pupil spending or smaller class sizes, two proposals often touted by the education establishment as panaceas for increasing high school graduation rates.

The authors suggest two primary reasons why exit exams may not be a significant barrier to graduation. First, many students unable to pass the exams are students who would have dropped out anyway; and, second, exit exams may also inspire improvements in school performance by targeting low-performing students for more remedial assistance. This targeting effect may counterbalance the small number of students for whom the exit exam is in fact a significant barrier to graduation.

Access this report at: http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_05.htm

Mayor Manuel Diaz of Miami Joins CCI Board



Mayor Manuel Diaz

On March 15, Miami Mayor Manuel A. Diaz joined the Advisory Board of the Center for Civic Innovation (CCI). All of the members of the Advisory Board are urban mayors who are renowned for achieving dramatic improvements in their cities through pragmatic, innovative public policy programs. As such, their leadership and experience serve as a resource for urban leaders across the country. Currently, CCI's Advisory Board consists of

Mayor Jerry Brown of Oakland; Mayor Martin O'Malley of Baltimore; and Mayor Rick Baker, of St. Petersburg, Florida. CCI's Chairman is Stephen Goldsmith, formerly Mayor of Indianapolis. Henry Olsen, director of the Center for Civic Innovation,

praised Mayor Diaz's accomplishments. "Mayor Diaz has taken a city that was nearly bankrupt and restored an A+ credit rating, while also cutting crime and improving the quality of life. That's urban leadership at its finest."

In accepting his post on the Advisory Board, Mayor Diaz said it was "a pleasure and honor to be included in [CCI's] work with the likes of former Indianapolis

Mayor Stephen Goldsmith and Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley." He added that his inclusion on the CCI Advisory Board reflected a shared commitment to urban revitalization through the empowerment of ordinary citizens. "I am [like the Manhattan Institute] convinced that old, bureaucratic, government-centered policies will not revive our civic health, and that cities seeking to turn around must be willing to devolve power and authority to those people closest to the many problems being confronted daily in our metropolitan areas."



CCI Chairman Stephen Goldsmith

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