

# Dismantling Schools – Disrespecting Communities

The sight of a shuttered school building—its playground gathering litter—is increasingly common. In school districts across the nation, public schools are being shut down.

Some school closings are inevitable due to declining enrollment or population shifts within a district. But over the past decade, school closings have been promoted as an *educational* strategy.

There is no research that links school closings to improved student achievement. In fact, research suggests that student achievement—at least initially—*drops* when a school is targeted for closure. Most students who are uprooted by closing a school, and forced into other, nearby schools, fare no better academically.

So why the rush—even the mandate—to close public, community institutions rather than provide them with the supports they need to better serve their students?

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The trend towards closing schools as a “school improvement” strategy has gathered speed over the past decade, sparked by pro-privatization forces, determined to break up centralized public school systems and dis-empower teachers unions. It is no accident that these efforts have centered on schools that serve low-income students of color.

From New York to Washington, DC to Chicago, Los Angeles, Newark and New Orleans, this model of district implosion has spread. After nearly a decade, there is little academic change to show for it. Instead, the reforms are harming neighborhoods, demoralizing teachers and eroding public will for public education.

Community, student and parent voices are beginning to be heard. In Chicago, hundreds of parents occupied a school slated for closure, and have filed a lawsuit against the district’s so-called “reforms.” In September 2011, organized parent and community groups in New York City hosted a day-long conference that brought together teachers, district officials and others from around the country to share school improvement strategies that produce student gains, in sharp contrast to Mayor Bloomberg’s school closing agenda. In Oakland, parents demanded and won the right to develop a reform strategy for several neighborhood schools that improved student academic performance without closing schools.

In March and again in October, 2010, the Ford Foundation hosted an opportunity for community organizers, parent, student and community leaders, researchers and academics from six cities to come together to share their experiences and reflections on the impact of school closings. The gathering affirmed for these parent and student activists that school closure and destabilization is not only bad for kids, but bad for communities. These are the stories of reform in six cities, through the words of community activists and on-the-ground observers.

Report on the Ford Foundation Secondary Education, Structural Racism and Educational Justice Convening,  
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# Chicago, Illinois

Corporate education reform first blew into Chicago in 1995 when then-Mayor Richard Daley assumed control of the schools and began to dismantle hard-fought victories that had made Chicago Public Schools among the most community controlled and democratic in the nation.

Daley's first CEO, Paul Vallas, was an early proponent of corporate management of schools. Vallas launched a series of high stakes initiatives that sanctioned both students and schools for failing to reach performance goals. He also moved to weaken the powers of Local School Councils (LSC)—school-based committees of parents and teachers with authority over the school's budget and leadership.

Vallas' successor Arne Duncan continued the high stakes movement when he took the reins in 2001. In 2004, Duncan, Mayor Daley and the city's business community came together to announce "Renaissance 2010," a proposal to close 60 Chicago public schools, and replace them with 100 new charter and privately managed schools.

## Organizing Against "Ren-2010"

The announcement ignited community organizations, who challenged not just the idea but the lack of public involvement in the development of Renaissance 2010. Just two months after the launch, activists camped overnight outside the headquarters of CPS to protest before the school board. Chicago city aldermen were challenged to support a moratorium on school closings until communities were given more information and a voice in the matter. The effort failed to move either the board or the Council.

But the organizing exposed some of the unspoken agendas of Renaissance 2010: the links between schools targeted for closure and real estate interests moving to gentrify some of the city's poorest neighborhoods; the involvement of proponents of privatization, and the dismantling of democratic control in Chicago Public Schools. New schools created under Renaissance 2010 were to be exempt from the requirement to have an elected Local School Council.

By 2010 the promised "renaissance" had seen over 45 schools closed, and 103 new, privately managed schools opened. Student academic performance was largely unchanged. In fact, the Consortium for Chicago School Research released a damning report finding that students displaced from closed schools did no better in their new classrooms. Many activists charged that the closings had led to an increase in violence in the school system, the result of consolidations between schools and communities with historic rivalries, and little transition support from the district.



*"Children in our neighborhood went to 3 different schools in a 5 year period, in spite of the fact that research from the University Chicago showed that the disruption is not good for kids."*

*"The school board has earned our distrust. Community, labor, and academia, stand united in that distrust...Schools are community institutions not corporate crap games."*

Jitu Brown, Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization (KOCO)

Under pressure from community groups, Duncan temporarily backed away from school closings. His new strategy took aim at personnel, rather than facilities. Rather than move kids out of a struggling school, Duncan launched “turnarounds,” in which an entire school staff—from the principal to the cafeteria workers—were fired and replaced. The first school to be subject to “turnaround” was Sherman Elementary School. But this, too, ended up being a pathway to privatization. After the school staff was fired, Duncan appointed an outside corporation to help rebuild and manage Sherman. The CEO declared the intervention a victory, but a longitudinal analysis by Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE), of the upheaval at Sherman, found that in the first year after the “turnaround,” the school suffered a 20% drop in enrollment, a 10% drop in the number of low-income children, lower parent involvement, lower science scores, and a 17% increase in student mobility. Five years later, PURE reported that Sherman was beginning to show improved test scores, but still lagged well below the citywide average.

Despite unimpressive academic results in Chicago, Duncan’s market-based school reform models – closure, chartering, “turnaround”—moved with him in 2009 when he became the Secretary of Education under President Barak Obama. Federal education dollars are now dispersed to states only if they agree to utilize one of Duncan’s intervention models to upend struggling schools.

In Chicago, resistance to ongoing school closings and consolidations has continued. Community organizing groups like the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization, Action Now, and Brighton Park Neighborhood Association have worked steadily to expose and oppose the Renaissance 2010 agenda and its sequel in federal law, the School Improvement Grants program. Organized resistance to the school closings is growing. It continues to fight against school closings.

In the face of a School Board vote to close 7 more schools, and remove the staffs of 10, communities have increased the pressure this winter. In February 2012 parents, students and community members occupied a local elementary school that was slated for “turnaround” by the district. The protesters demanded to meet with Mayor Rahm Emanuel to demand that he invest in schools rather than giving up on them. Two days later, hundreds of protesters marched silently past the Mayor’s home, holding candles and wearing tape over their mouths to symbolize the lack of voice they’ve had in local decisions about schools.

Other protests this year included a door-knocking campaign targeting a School Board member, a four-day sit-in outside Emanuel’s fifth-floor City Hall office, and a more than 20-minute take-over of a Chicago School Board meeting, using “mike-check” tactics honed by Occupy Wall Street protestors. Plus, local school council members have filed a suit to block the closings, charging they constitute a civil rights violation.

# Newark, New Jersey

The Newark City Schools have been under state control since 1995—one of the first state takeovers in the nation. Perhaps the most visible result of those 15 years of external control is the complete shattering of trust between low-income communities and the state, city and district administrations.

During the first ten years under state control, there was a genuine effort to equalize funding. But lately, the focus has been on attracting investment from foundations and hedge-fund managers, the rapid expansion of charters, market-based approaches and privatization. Decisions about school closings, co-location, and interventions seem to involve everyone but the students, teachers, parents and communities that are impacted.



Newark Public Schools serves 40,000 students—but that number has been steadily declining, down from 70,000 in the 1970's. The city, along with other urban districts in New Jersey, had long suffered from a lack of adequate funding for its public schools, and lack of economic development and affordable housing. Beginning in 1981, a series of state Supreme Court rulings found that students in New Jersey's low-income districts were receiving an inadequate and unconstitutional education. In 1998, the Court required the state to provide significant new resources to help equalize the quality of education between the state's poorest and wealthiest districts.

In the decade following the Court ruling, Newark and other low-income districts in New Jersey received significant new funding to help equalize opportunity for low-income students. These investments started to pay off with higher achievement. But the reform was short-lived. The economic crisis, in conjunction with the rise of an aggressive charter school sector and support for privatization changed the complexion of Newark's public schools.

In 2010, Mark Zuckerberg—the founder of Facebook—offered \$100 million to Newark to implement school reform. Zuckerberg's gift was announced on the Oprah Winfrey show, and supported co-location of charter schools in traditional public school buildings in Newark, and aggressive school closings.

Parents, community and educators, loosely organized in the Coalition for Effective Newark Public Schools felt colonized – that decisions were being made behind closed doors and plans for the city's schools were being developed as a “secret” agenda by outsiders. Community fears appeared to be confirmed when, in early 2011, a draft proposal calling for school closings and consolidations, was leaked to the press. The proposal had been developed with the help of the California-based Broad Foundation. There had been no community information or input sessions.

In the spring of 2011, the community mobilized in response to the “secret plan” for Newark Public Schools. Hundreds of people turned out for community meetings demanding to know who was making decisions behind closed doors. To parents, community and educators, the continuation of external

control—dubbed “state takeover 2”—was aimed at privatization and driven by private money without any transparency. The rapid growth of charters had produced uneven access, mixed academic results and growing polarization.

By late Spring of 2011, the new Superintendent Cami Anderson busied herself and the community with lots of meetings focused on the minutia of individual school churn: who’s the principal going to be? Which schools are co-locating? Which new programs would open and which would be delayed? The district announced dates and deadlines for packing-up schools for co-location, then change course, leaving school staffs to unpack. In short, the district’s actions and process led to confusion, churn, and more frustration.

*“Newark is a story of dishonesty, stories changing, decisions made behind closed doors, lack of transparency.”*

Lauren Wells, Director, Broader Bolder Approach, Newark.

By the fall of 2011, the community was broadly united on one clear goal—a return to local control over district schools. A unified Advisory Board, with new-found support from local politicians, church groups, nonprofit advocates and community activists, lined up behind a new legal challenge to end the state takeover. While no panacea, the fight to return Newark public schools to local governance provides another opportunity to reframe the issues.



# New York City, New York

After Mayor Michael Bloomberg wrested total control over NY City Schools in 2002, he appointed Joel Klein his first Chancellor. Over the next 8 years the Klein administration became nationally recognized as a leader in corporate-model education reform. The cornerstones of his regime included:

- Offering principals flexibility in many areas of decision-making and budgeting, in exchange for high-stakes “accountability,” meaning that the principals and many of their teachers would be fired if their efforts don’t produce results;
- Restructuring the massive district multiple times, and
- Offering space in “under-utilized” public schools to charter schools, despite parent and community objections to these “co-locations.”

Churn became the operational culture. There have been no fewer than five total system reorganizations in six years: When Bloomberg took over, the massive system was divided into 32 smaller districts. Those were dissolved and replaced by 10 “regions.” Next, “Integrated Service Centers” were created. Then the Chancellor announced a return to small districts. Parent activists are marginalized, whether by design or simply as an unintended consequence.

*“Parents have no idea where to go anymore with all the re-organizations,” said Zakiyah Ansari, an organizer with the Coalition for Education Justice. “We’ve started to see parents check-out. There was a real decline in parent involvement.”*

Giving principals autonomy over their schools sends a “sink or swim” message. When schools have low test scores, they are put on the list for “phase out” to closure, or downsizing and co-location with charter schools. In 2010, 19 high schools were closed. In 2011, 22 elementary and middle schools begin the process of grade-by-grade “phase out” to closure.

At the same time, the number of charter schools has expanded, and co-location of charters in regular school buildings mushroomed – creating buildings that house two differently-managed schools with unequal resources and services. Bloomberg also pushed for and won deregulation of chartering, allowing private investment in public charter schools to become a hot new opportunity for hedge fund managers to amass handsome profits.

All told, since 2000, 91 New York City schools have been closed, 34 high schools and 57 elementary and middle schools. Virtually all of them served predominantly Black and Latino students. In a recent study released by the Urban Youth Collaborative, an organizing collaborative in the City, 33,000 students have been affected by the closures. Nearly half of those students have since dropped out, or been discharged (not graduated) from the schools.

*“We learned from students who went through closings in the past. We identified schools where the community wasn’t fighting back, and organized them. We’re not going to be part of this sham that doesn’t take input from the community... We knew that Bloomberg had a plan and that the closings were just going to continue. We also needed a push on the national level and so helped to form the Alliance for Educational Justice.”*

Jaritza Giege, Urban Youth Collaborative

The parent and community fight-back began in 2000 through the Campaign for Fiscal Equity, a statewide campaign for adequate funding for high-need, low-resourced districts, including NY City. By 2006 the courts had been forced to add \$5.5 billion statewide over four years, the lion's share of it going to NYC, reversing budget cuts and restoring billions of dollars in state funding. But that infusion of additional support has now slowed, and New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has now proposed that significant amounts of basic state aid to school districts be disbursed through a competitive program, rather than to all districts under formula.

A number of NYC groups, organized through the statewide Alliance for Quality Education, pulled together in the Coalition for Better Schools to fight the top-down reforms, school closures and test-based high stakes. The Coalition developed a proposal for a "Transformation Zone" of some of the district's struggling schools. It called for these schools to reorganize, expand the curriculum to offer an enriched program of arts and academics, expanded learning time to give teachers more opportunity to collaborate, and additional professional development. In 2010 the Coalition presented their proposal to the City Council, where it passed unanimously. But when the Coalition then took their proposal to the Department of Education, they were told that it was dead on arrival.

By the start of the 2010-2011 school year, Bloomberg's claims of success were starting to unravel. When New York's Board of Regents re-calibrated the standardized test scores, the student achievement gains the Klein administration had boasted about turned out to be non-existent. The district's achievement gap based on race and class turned out to be as wide as ever. And the gap between what New Yorkers want and what the Mayor is doing is wide as well: Surveyed last spring, voters disapproved of Bloomberg's management of the schools by a whopping 65 to 25 percent. Among parents, only 20 percent approve, while 78 percent disapprove.

In January 2011 two hundred parents and students protested in front of the building that houses the Board of Education. Twenty four protesters were arrested in acts of civil disobedience against school closures and test-driven reforms. In February 2011, 1,400 students, led by the Urban Youth Collaborative, engaged in a citywide walkout. These protests have continued into the current school year, with thousands of New York's parents, students and teachers working together to keep the pressure on the Mayor to stop destroying the New York City schools.

Bloomberg blamed the parents. In an interview on WOR, Bloomberg complained, "Unfortunately, there are some parents who...never had a formal education and they don't understand the value of an education. Many of our kids come from [such] families..." (*New York Times*, May 21)

"How dare he try to blame parents!" said Zakiyah Ansari. "Parents just want to be at the table."

# Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The millennium brought a sea-change in education reform in Philadelphia. When Superintendent David Hornbeck resigned in August 2000, Philly's public schools lost an outspoken advocate for school funding equity and strong parent engagement. Hornbeck's reforms—including higher academic standards and all-day kindergarten, and his seed support for an independent parent organization in the city had begun to show results. But Hornbeck was pushed out by a state legislature and governor set on a different kind of reform agenda.

The state assumed control of the Philadelphia public schools the following year in a highly public and hostile takeover that garnered international attention. Governance since then has been in the hands of the School Reform Commission (SRC) with 5 members appointed by the Governor and Mayor.

This new top-down leadership launched an era of increasing reliance on high stakes testing and a shift towards privatization. The first new superintendent was Paul Vallas, appointed fresh from his high-stakes reforms in Chicago. In 2008 Arlene Ackerman took the reins. Ackerman embraced many of the same dramatic interventions piloted in the Chicago schools under Vallas and Duncan. In 2009, Ackerman announced her own Renaissance Schools Initiative (a clear reference Duncan's Chicago Renaissance 2010 plan), which declared that low-performing schools would be closed down, converted to charters, taken over by outside management or placed under the direct control of the Superintendent as "Promise Academies" with a set of rigid instructional and structural interventions.

Parents and community groups were encouraged when Ackerman recommended the creation of parent-led School Advisory Committees (SAC) that would play a role in the school's transformation. But the promise of a parent/community voice was quickly dampened.

One of the first schools chosen for Renaissance intervention was West Philadelphia High School. In 2003 students at West, led by the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU), began a campaign to break up West into a set of smaller academies. Over the next few years, the students helped to conduct a community planning process and fought for funding to rebuild and transform the school. In 2007, the students were involved in the selection of a new principal, and worked with her to develop a vision for the school that included smaller, themed learning academies and new restorative justice practices to deal with ongoing discipline problems. Together, the students, parents and new school leadership began to change the school's culture. Within the first two years of the reforms, violent incidents fell by 70%. Students and their parents were invested in the reforms they helped create.

But when Ackerman took office in 2009, she announced that West would be targeted for a federal School Improvement Grant, an intervention that requires the firing of the school's principal and up to half the staff. Federally-funded chaos ensued. Three interim principals came and went during the 2010-2011 school year, and 40% of the teachers left on their own, even before they could be kicked out.

In February 2011, PSU staged a walk-out at West to draw attention to the ongoing upheaval at the school. Just weeks later, a federal Department of Education monitoring team visited the city, and their report (ironically) cited the instability at the school as a violation of the federal program rules, and (equally ironically) forcing the Pennsylvania Department of Education to freeze further federal funding to the intervention, basically guaranteeing continued chaos.

In addition to organized students, parents who have worked hard with their School Advisory Committees have also begun to express concerns that their voices aren't being heard. At MLK High School, the Advisory Committee's choice for outside management was rejected after the chairman of the School Reform Commission hand-picked a different company to which he had political ties (a city ethics investigation was launched into the matter and the SRC chair eventually resigned). At South Philadelphia High Schools, significant improvements made by parents and students had shown success in improving school climate and outcomes. South, too, was targeted with a School Improvement Grant and thrown in to chaos.

Even the Mayor and City Council became frustrated with the lack of transparency and public process under Ackerman's regime. In early 2011, the Mayor introduced a proposal calling for an "Educational Accountability Agreement" between the School District and the City Council. The agreement called for full transparency by the school district, and the prompt release of all planning documents and reports, particularly those by outside consultants hired by Ackerman to study the district's facilities needs.

The Superintendent continued the assault on the district's struggling schools, announcing a multi-year "right-sizing" initiative, promising to eliminate 35,000 seats (i.e. close dozens of schools) by 2014. A series of regional public hearings on the plan brought parents out, eager for news of how decisions would be made, only to find that little information was conveyed, and even less interest was shown in their opinions.

In late June of 2011 the Philadelphia School Notebook was given an internal district document naming more than 20 schools as prime targets for closure. Despite the accountability agreement with the city, the report—dated in March—had not been disclosed publicly. The Notebook's release of the so-called "options report" caused a firestorm—with the public clamoring for a voice, and the District administration forced to explain why it continued to conceal information.

Ackerman was ousted in July of 2011. In November, the interim Superintendent announced a plan to close just 9 schools—far short of the number targeted by Ackerman. Still, communities are up in arms and demanding a more transparent process and a focus on substantive and lasting transformation of schools rather than the upheaval and instability that has marked many District efforts.

*"...evidently when the community is already organized that becomes problematic for new district leadership. [Under Ackerman's new initiative] we thought we might have the opportunity to do an innovation plan but it was submitted and rejected. The second plan initiated by parents was also rejected. The problem is when you get new district leadership and they want to put their mark on the world..."*

*—Nijmie Dzurinko, former director, Philadelphia Student Union*

# Boston, Massachusetts

Boston has a conflict-ridden history involving segregated neighborhoods and court ordered school integration from 1974 to 1987. Resistance to de-segregation led more recently to a complicated student assignment plan that has been the focus of the system's reform efforts since 2003. Under the plan parents are given a choice among school options also aimed at balance based on race and class to some degree. But even given that unique history, the reform agenda introduced over the past five years under Superintendent Carol Johnson shows a remarkably similar pattern to what has transpired in other cities.

Mayoral control began in Boston in 1991, but it has never been popular in predominantly African American and Latino neighborhoods. The Boston Public Schools student population is overwhelmingly African American and Latino and seventy-five percent of its students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Like other cities under Mayoral control the decisions to close schools by the Boston School Committee have been unanimous, seen as no-brainers by the powers-that-be, but angry parents and educators defend the schools about to be closed as good ones and improving, unappreciated by the decision makers – two different perspectives, two different realities.

Boston is struggling with an outflow of students, both to charters and to other districts. According to BPS, there are roughly 4,000 empty seats in the system, which is the primary stated rationale for school closings (along with low performance). The district is trying to close a \$63 million dollar budget shortfall. The city has 14 charter schools, and a historically acrimonious relationship between the public schools and independently run charters. In order to be more competitive for Federal "Race to the Top" money, Massachusetts raised its charter school caps.

Superintendent Carol Johnson set about closing schools in Boston shortly after her appointment in 2007. The following year, Johnson closed six schools and merged several others. In December 2010, she proposed closing 9 more schools and merging 8. Johnson and Boston Mayor Menino then recommended co-facilitating new charters in closed and under-enrolled district buildings. The spectacle of school buildings being offered to charter providers just a few weeks after being closed as regular public schools drew criticism.

So the fiscal crisis leading to budget cuts and the Federal Race to the Top policy requirements are feeding a "spiraling down" of school closings, dissatisfaction with the school assignment policy, further flight, further school closings and further disruption.

## **Community Response: Activism and Resistance**

This round of closings in 2010 (under a reform plan called "Redesign and Reinvest") has drawn ire from a range of communities across the city. In December, 2010 district officials hosted a series of community meetings, shortly after the Superintendent announced the plan. Community members pushed back on the accuracy of data being used to justify closures, citing examples of progress and excellence. The carefully-scripted meetings left many parents feeling that they weren't provided a real opportunity to ask questions, voice their concerns or inform the decision-making process.

Among the organizations formed to fight back against Superintendent Johnson's student assignment plan is the Coalition for Equal Quality Education (CEQ). CEQ includes representatives from groups

like the Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON) and the Black Educators Alliance of Massachusetts (BEAM).

BEAM also chose to take a more assertive approach. With the help of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law in Boston (LCCR), BEAM filed a civil rights complaint with the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, alleging that school closures had a disparate impact on students of color (at the time, Boston was already under investigation by the Department of Justice to determine whether it was providing adequate supports for English Language Learners). The complaint is currently under investigation by OCR.<sup>1</sup>

Carol Johnson defended the plan, saying that the schools slated to close were chosen because they have been struggling academically, are in disrepair, or rank among the lowest picked for attendance by families.

Alternatives that would affirmatively address school integration, school assignment, and school quality have been made politically unrealistic both because of the budget crisis and the fact that school de-segregation has become so politically charged. The school district has countered community resistance to closings and co-locations with PR efforts aimed at the appearance of community engagement. Meanwhile, more charters open and co-locate and more parents opt out of a school system that is prevented from offering systemic solutions.

*"Parents felt they weren't being heard. They challenged the fairness and accuracy of the data. In the end the school board removed one school from the list and said that it would become an innovation school. It happened to be predominantly white. Black and Latino parents came out in large numbers. While they were closing schools in the black community they were giving money to charter schools. On December 15th the appointed School Board voted unanimously to close and consolidate the schools. Everyone in the community was talking about this."*

– Gina Chirichigno, National Coalition for School Diversity & the Kirwin Institute

# Dismantling Schools – Disrespecting Communities

“Education Reform” in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark, Boston and cities around the country looks strikingly the same. Corporate reform drives a set of structural changes that are making our schools worse, and taking them out of our hands:

- **Diminished public control:** Mayoral control has meant the elimination of elected school boards, the increasing expansion of privately operated schools and the emergence of autocratic, “no excuses” chancellors like Joel Klein, Arne Duncan and Michelle Rhee. Budgeting and other concerns have become less transparent and decision-makers less accountable.
- **“Accountability” that feels like punishment:** The increasing focus on standardized test scores blames principals, teachers, parents and students as if they are willfully failing. Meanwhile the obvious is ignored: Almost all the schools judged “failing” are in high poverty neighborhoods – mislabeled. The obvious, proven solutions, lower class sizes, universal preschool, after-school and summer programs, and wrap-around services to address student health, emotional and other basic family needs—are dismissed or sacrificed to budget cuts.
- **“Urgency” that justifies churn and destabilization:** Citing the need for “dramatic action,” low performing schools face a fusillade of interventions including firing principals and teachers, privatization and closure. Wave upon wave of “reform” leads to confusion, low morale, and high turnover of both teachers and students.
- **High stakes measures of success narrow educational outcome goals:** A “reform” ideology that demands numbers by which to measure performance forces schools to eliminate the programs that often draw and hold students in schools—like athletics, arts, music, strong mentoring or counseling programs and more. Without these programs, school climates deteriorate, hastening under-enrollment, and eventually justifying closure.

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In March 2010, the Ford Foundation brought activists and academics from these and other school districts together. The conference provided an opportunity for grassroots participants to see the connections between what was happening in their cities, to hear from academics about how research supports their instinctive resistance. It provided a chance for lessons to emerge—lessons about how the corporate education reform movement is impacting our communities, and lessons about how to fight back. The stories of these six cities make several lessons clear:

1. As school districts are dismantled, the notion of a public “school of right” for every child put in jeopardy, and schools handed over to private operators, we are realizing that these “systems of schools” that do not have to accept all students are causing more students to fall through the cracks. *Parents and educators are coming together to fight to defend the concept of an accountable system of public education.*

2. The “dramatic” intervention strategies supported by the federal government and enshrined now in state policy, destabilize schools and communities that actually need consistency, support, and resources. Policies that create revolving doors of school leadership, teachers and students *contribute* to school failure—they do not reverse it. ***Communities are organizing to oppose school closings.***
3. The corporate reform movement is characterized by an arrogance that justifies risky experimentation and top-down strategies with less transparency and less accountability to the public. Accountability shifts to the private financiers writing the big checks. Real estate concerns, private consulting concerns and conflicts of interest easily creep in to district decision making. ***Parents, communities and educators are organizing to demand transparency. It’s time to re-think mayoral control.***
4. The incessant focus on test scores does not capture the depth of educational goals communities require of their schools. The resulting culture can actually harm the educational process and the motivations of everyone in it. Examples of test cheating to make the adults look good are not isolated exceptions, but have become widespread. ***Communities must reject the “failure” label and demand an end to the obsession with standardized tests.***

**There are alternatives. They all require the organized voices of parents, students and teachers. It will take a social movement to ensure that alternative approaches to improve our schools are on the table. Enough is enough.**