



Report 12

Schools That Work:
Models in Education
That Can be Used in
Onondaga County

**ONONDAGA CITIZENS LEAGUE
REPORT # 12**

**SCHOOLS THAT WORK:
MODELS IN EDUCATION THAT CAN BE USED IN ONONDAGA COUNTY**

Approved and Issued

by

**Board of Directors
Onondaga Citizens League**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education has been the subject of renewed interest in Onondaga County, New York State and the nation. A number of groups have been convened to address problems in public education--problems which seem epitomized by high drop-out rates and low scores on standardized tests, compared to the results in other industrialized nations. The real crisis in education may be that while schools have been making incremental progress in recent years, they have fallen short of the demands placed on them by a rapidly-changing economy and society.

A movement for educational reform has emerged. The Coalition for Essential Schools, a Brown University-based national coalition, and New York State's New Compact for Learning, passed by the Board of Regents this spring, both call for reform.

Common tenets of this reform movement include a call for schools to focus on achieving results and providing remediation, rather than just retaining students who fail. This reform movement emphasizes that schools should aim to have their students achieve mastery and strive for excellence, rather than merely passing minimum competency tests. Critical thinking rather than rote memory should be encouraged. Indeed, a new awareness of how people learn has shaped the more progressive schools to design curricula that engage the students as active learners, rather than passive pupils.

The common tenets further call for districts to provide teachers and building administrators with local authority and hold them accountable for their students' outcomes. The educating of our young people is a community responsibility, and accordingly, parents, students, and others need to be involved along with teachers and school system administrators.

The Onondaga Citizens League urges that our community be guided by these tenets. Joining the League in the effort for educational reform in Onondaga County is the local Coalition for Excellence in Education (or Community ComPac). A City School District strategic planning team and a coalition of parents groups have also been active in calling for improvements.

To facilitate the changes urged by the educational reform movement and the State Compact for Learning, the League calls for all the school boards in Onondaga County to authorize their respective district superintendents to direct the staff in each school building to develop and implement a plan for site-based, shared decision making.

Key to site-based, shared decision making is the fact that people responsible for solving problems have more of a stake in the solution and a greater commitment to seeing it become a success. Site-based management also recognizes that the staff who work directly with students are apt to see the need for change and be able to address the need more rapidly than less directly situated

personnel.

Shared decision making further implies that all components of the school community--who have to live with the consequences of decisions taken--have a voice in making the decisions. By placing the authority and accountability for decision making in the individual school community, the Citizens League believes that the proper mix of empowerment and responsibility will unleash creative energy and enthusiasm among all concerned, and that the needed educational reforms will follow from changes in school governance.

This report also recognizes that some tasks are best done by school districts' central offices and offers recommendations in this area as well. For example, the serious budget problems currently being faced by districts may be ameliorated through central purchasing and sharing programmatic information between districts. Another recommendation that would have to be enacted on a district-wide basis involves increasing the number of days students are in school by having the school year conform to the staff contract year. Equally important is providing enough support, through the use of school-sited social services, to allow teachers to do what they are trained for: teach. This recommendation in particular follows recommendations of the Citizens League in previous reports, including the 1989 report on poverty and its social costs.

Lastly, this report provides "action lists" for students, parents, teachers, administrators and business and community leaders. These lists detail steps that can be immediately taken to improve education of the children of our community. The action lists are provided because of the increasing belief that all components of the community--not just school boards, superintendents, principals and teachers--must participate if we are to realize the improvements called for by the educational reform movement.

PREFACE

In 1978, several members of the Thursday Morning Roundtable at Syracuse University's University College explored the need for, and the feasibility of, establishing a broad-based citizen organization to study and make recommendations on long-range problems facing Onondaga County. The idea for the citizens group was inspired by the successful 35-year history of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Citizens League, which has been responsible for initiating many of the progressive developments in that metropolitan area.

After much discussion, 21 people, who were active in the community and interested in the concept, were convened by University College Dean Lee Smith to serve as an advisory board and to develop plans for an Onondaga Citizens League. They established guidelines for members, prepared and adopted by-laws, and oversaw the operations of the Citizens League in its early months.

The Onondaga Citizens League was incorporated in 1980 and received non-profit, tax-exempt status in 1981. The League's purpose is to encourage citizen education and involvement in public issues and problems. Members study all aspects of selected public issues. They review the facts, make considered judgments on approaches, alternatives and solutions, and develop recommendations to present to the community. The organization's objective is to forestall the development of problems into major crises. The League's mission is to encourage and provide civic education for local residents, not to promote specific legislation or function as a lobbying group.

The Onondaga Citizens League, with a current membership of 200, is open to all residents in Onondaga County. While some choose to join in order to study a specific topic, others join and renew their membership because they support the principle of citizen study of issues of major concern to the community. In its 12-year history, the Citizens League has issued 12 reports.

Reports of the Onondaga Citizens League:

"Equality and Fairness in Property Assessment"	June 1979
"Young People in Trouble: Can Our Services Be Organized and Delivered More Effectively?"	May 1980
"The County Legislature: Its Function, Size and Structure"	August 1981
"Declining School Enrollments: Opportunities for Cooperative Adaptations?"	July 1982

- "Onondaga County Public Works Infrastructure:
Status, Funding and Responsibilities" July 1983
- "Police Services in Onondaga County: A Review
and Recommendations" August 1984
- "The City and County Charters: Time for
Revision?" July 1985
- "Blueprints for the Future: Recommendations for
the Syracuse Area in the Year 2000" July 1987
- "The Role of the Food Industry in the Economy of
Onondaga County" July 1988
- "Poverty and Its Social Costs: Are There Long-Term
Solutions?" October 1989
- "Syracuse Area Workforce of the Future: How Do
We Prepare?" June 1990
- "Schools That Work: Models in Education That Can
Be Used in Onondaga County" September 1991

APPRECIATION

In our community, as in many others, the dedication and active participation of volunteers is an essential ingredient in all civic enterprises. This is especially the case in regard to the work of the Onondaga Citizens League. The League is comprised of volunteers. Officers, board members, committee chairpersons and committee members give freely much of their time and thought to planning and carrying out the work of the League.

The people who contribute the most to an OCL report are the members who volunteer to serve on the study committee. These individuals spend many hours, for more than five or six months, listening to experts on the topic, discussing the issues, reading minutes and other documents and deciding on recommendations. The members serving on this study committee are listed in the Appendix. Those who served as advisors in planning the structure and course of the study are also identified.

The League is especially appreciative of the contributions made by the leaders of this study--Georgette Cowans and Gary Grossman--and for the initiating thought and direction provided by SU Professor Gerald Grant. The responsibility for leading an OCL study project is one of the most intensive and time-consuming volunteer tasks in the community.

The many specialists and experts who addressed the study committee sessions are identified in the Appendix. Their generous contribution of time and thought is much appreciated. Special thanks are due to Jerome Melvin, Superintendent of Schools in Liverpool, for his steadfast and valuable participation throughout the entire study process.

The OCL Board of Directors is grateful to the writer of this report, Laurel Saiz, who also serves as assistant director and general writer for OCL. Her strong interest and special knowledge in the subject of this study have been most helpful in the conduct of the study and the production of this report.

As it has for 13 years, University College of Syracuse University provided staff support, office and meeting facilities, telephone, mailing and other forms of assistance as a community service to implement the work of the Onondaga Citizens League.

I. INTRODUCTION

The educational system was the focus of heightened interest in 1991 on the local, state and national levels. This intensified interest combined scrutiny of proposed plans and reforms and hope that the conditions in our schools would improve. A national dismay at the seeming lack of progress of our schools has changed into an awareness of the part of many that although schools have made some incremental progress, the real "crisis" is that schools have not kept up with the demands placed upon them by a rapidly-changing society.

On the national front, President George Bush presented a plan calling for a "revolution in education." In New York State, the Board of Regents approved a far-reaching program of reform for the educational system called "A New Compact for Learning." On a local level, several new groups sprang up--all with the betterment of the school system as their goal. For example, a new coalition of community leaders came together to try to spark reform of the system and help implement the Compact for Learning. The Syracuse City School District conducted a strategic planning process that involved several hundred people from all walks of life, including district and non-district employees, during the school year. And a city-wide parents organization was founded to help facilitate communication between different school communities.

Thus, this Onondaga Citizens League report was conducted in a rich and active environment. The community, like the state and nation, was clearly recognizing the importance of educational reform. This report was also the logical follow-through of several previous Citizens League studies. Reports Eight through Eleven, which focused on Syracuse in the Year 2000, the role of the food industry in Onondaga County, ways of breaking the cycle of poverty and preparing the workforce of the future, all had a focus on education at their core. Each study recognized that any plans for the future can only be put into reality if upcoming generations are trained and prepared for these changes. And the key, of course, is education.

The vision of this study was molded by a broad-based steering committee of 12 people from a variety of backgrounds. The committee members included Suzanne Brown, a family guide with Exceptional Family Services; Linda Cohen, a member of the Fayetteville-Manlius Board of Education; Carol Cowles, assistant to the president of Onondaga Community College; Bishop Thomas Costello of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse; Virginia Doctor, executive director of the North American Indian Club; Michael Freedman, a professor of anthropology at Syracuse University; Bea Gonzalez, director of University College's Higher Education Opportunity Program and a member of the City School District's Board of Education; Fritz Hess, former superintendent of the East Syracuse-Minoa School District; Darlene Kerr, vice-president of Niagara-Mohawk Power

Corp.; Theodore Levy, rabbi emeritus of Temple Society of Concord; Vivian Moore, executive director of the Human Rights Commission; and Syracuse School Superintendent Henry Williams.

These committee members, led by Chairpeople Georgette Cowans and Gary Grossman and with the early guidance of Syracuse University Professor Gerald Grant, developed a series of six propositions, designed to assess the community's reaction to major issue areas. The actual study sessions commenced in mid-January and continued through the end of May. Close to 50 people--including parents, school board members, teachers, university professors, business people and community leaders--attended the weekly, hour-and-a-half-long sessions. Early sessions focused on the first three propositions, dealing with making schools more personalized, teaching students to become good analysts and problem solvers and providing equal educational opportunity for all children in Onondaga County.

The study did not involve a mass collection of data on schools and school districts in Onondaga County. There was no definitive assessment of the level of educational achievement for children in different parts of the community. Nor did this study constitute a "report card" on teachers, administrators, school board members or superintendents in the various school districts. Rather, there was a realization on the part of the study committee members that the process of a group of citizens coming together with a common goal--to hear about problems and changes being proposed in the field of education--is a valid and useful endeavor. Local citizen involvement--in the form of voting on school budget and electing school boards--impacts education more heavily on education than does any other aspect of today's complex society.

The committee members heard from 40 speakers from a variety of areas. Ten teachers ranging from early childhood educators to a nationally-recognized high school English teacher were among the speakers. Seven administrators spoke about innovative and successful programs, such as the City School District's developmental kindergarten and school-based management underway in the North Syracuse School District. Two professors talked about the historical basis for today's school system--and how the schools have not kept up with the times. A business and community leader told of industry's concerns that today's high school graduates are just not up to the demands of the marketplace. The study committee heard from the principal of one of the premiere alternative schools in New York State and a sub-group of the committee made a site visit to this school. Especially enlightening were two panel sessions where nine high school students and seven of their parents talked honestly of what they liked and did not like about the public schools.

Mid-way through this series of diverse and rewarding sessions, the study committee members decided to narrow their focus and move away from the proposition format. The narrowed topic became "Schools That Work: Successful Models in Education That Can be Used in Onondaga County." This topic reflected the recognition that good programs and ideas exist already. Some are already being implemented in our locality. In fact, much of what is being talked about in education is "not necessarily new--just a lot of old chestnuts," as Ithaca school administrator David Lehman aptly put it.

The latter half of the study was enriched by material developed at this year's Community Leadership Conference, conducted May 20 and 21 at Minnowbrook. More than 60 community leaders heard 14 speakers discuss "Our Local Schools: Inadequacies, New Ideas and Potential for Progress." Some of the expert speakers had been presenters or participants of the OCL study and elaborated on their earlier comments. Others, including a representative of the State Education Department, were not part of the Citizens League effort, but substantively added to the study committee's information base.

What was clear from the steering committee meetings, the study sessions and the Minnowbrook conference is that there is no dearth of activity to improve and change the educational system. Dozens of noted studies on education have been done by public and private entities--most notably the national study, "A Nation at Risk," released during the Reagan Administration. Programs of change have been announced with much fanfare many times before. The New York State Regents Action Plan--now to be drastically changed by the Compact for Learning--is just one example. Yet this Citizens League study demonstrated that people are still dissatisfied, they want change for the better and they want those lauded "new" old ideas to finally be embraced by all components of society. The study committee members wanted 1991 to not just be the year when education was the focus of attention, but the year that was the turning point for education in our community.

II. FINDINGS

A. We Think Our Educational System is Failing

National, state and local figures point to a decline in achievement among American students. Howard Johnson, associate chancellor of Syracuse University and a professor of mathematics education, stated that European students must know three languages, while many U.S. students do not even take a foreign language. Students in the Pacific rim countries need proficiency in math and science comparable to our B.S. degree. He cited studies ranking U.S. students behind students from other developed countries in standardized math and science tests. According to the 1986 Second International Study of Math Achievement, American eighth graders are on a par with other students in computational skills--arithmetic. In geometry, however, they are under the international mean. U.S. students were second from the bottom (only Thailand was lower) in advanced algebra among 12th graders. Perhaps more disappointing, Johnson emphasized that only one in eight U.S. students still elects to take math in the senior year. In reading and writing skills, SAT verbal scores in the United States are at their lowest point since 1980 and equal to the worst levels since the national averages were first compiled in 1970.

Seventy-five percent of U.S. students complete school, fewer than those of other developed countries. This is the average figure for New York State and Onondaga County as a whole. However, the Syracuse City School District--like other urban areas--has a far worse drop-out rate. Syracuse School Superintendent Henry Williams told the study committee that fully 40 percent of Syracuse public school students drop out of school before graduation. Each year, about 8 percent of the approximate 21,600 students in the city drop out. (The numbers vary and do not add up exactly to 40 percent over the four years of high school. For example, 7.15 percent dropped out in 1989-90, 8.9 percent in 1988-89, 9.47 percent in 1986-87 and 7.35 percent in 1985-86.)

Seventy percent of the 11th grade students in the city pass the English Regents and just 49 percent of the ninth graders tested passed the Math I Regents. Of the 700 students who signed up when the Syracuse Challenge program was started with Syracuse University, Williams said that only 85 are likely to meet all of the entrance requirements stipulated by the University. Under the agreement, SU would provide a financial aid package to students maintaining an 85 average or better and meet other requirements.

It is statistics like these that cause citizens in the community, state and nation as a whole to believe schools are falling short of their task in educating young people for the future demands of society. Jim Gray, director of the Manufacturers Association of Central New York (MACNY), cited studies that show workers in other countries are better educated and have better work

habits. For example, IBM has found marked differences between its U.S. plants and those in Japan. The ones in Japan are more efficient, operate at a lower cost, are better managed and have lower employee turnover. It costs just \$1 to orient a new worker for one of the plants in Japan, compared to \$200 to \$2,000 per employee in the U.S. Gray said that the attitude of business and industry is that the public school system just is not doing its job. "Business is tired of paying for it twice--first as school tax and the second time in remediation," Gray said.

Many parents and students perceive parochial and private schools to be better than public schools in terms of parent and teacher involvement, academic performance and student discipline and behavior. A panel of parents and students from local high schools told how the young people experienced problems and seemed to fall behind when transferring from parochial to public schools. Some of these problems stemmed from different attitudes about learning in the public and parochial schools. Hector Segarra-Ocasio, a student at Corcoran High School, said that when he was in parochial school "the attitude was, if you failed a class, you were an outcast." The prevailing attitude among his peers in the public school setting is "it is cool to be dumb," he said. The students and parents did recognize that parochial schools have selective admissions and may not keep problem students, while public schools must take and retain all students. This affects the environment for learning in the two types of schools.

Other students, while saying that overall they have enjoyed and been enriched by their public school education, told anecdotes about clearly incompetent teachers. One student in a suburban district told how her teacher for a required social studies class tells the young people he "hates students" and is just waiting to retire. This teacher shows movies two to three times a week and tells the students that if they want to, they can lay their heads on their hands and sleep during the films. The OCL study committee recognizes that a teacher like this represents a small minority of the teaching profession. However, it is apparent that seemingly incompetent teachers and administrators in school districts lead the public at large to think adversely of the tenure system and today's education.

Parents and others in the community feel frustrated because there is little recourse to removing a poor teacher; tenure laws are strong and students have no process to vent grievances about teacher performance. The latest Syracuse Teachers Association contract in the city provides a two-year process for removing an incompetent teacher, but the paperwork to do so may still be overwhelming. Complicating this matter is that fact that "incompetence" is difficult to define. Other fundamental factors, such as class size, rigid rules, out-of-date curricula, inadequate human service supports for teachers and insufficient responsibility delegated to teachers and building administrators, may seriously

impair the ability of excellent educators.

At the same time, teachers who testified throughout the study told of their increasing frustration in trying to teach young people who don't seem to care and who may come to school with serious home and family problems. One teacher told of her disappointment when an honors student who is considered a high achiever told her, "I just never think about school." Other teachers told of feeling stymied by a culture that places far more emphasis on a student's after-school minimum wage job or achievement in extracurricular sports. This feeling of frustration is compounded by a system that appears inflexible and unresponsive and is becoming increasingly beleaguered by drastic budget problems.

B. The System is Old

Professor Joan Burstyn, an educational historian and former dean of the SU School of Education, described how the educational system is based on a structural design implemented 100 to 150 years ago for a newly-industrialized society. The current school calendar was based on the New England agricultural calendar, holding school only at times when young people would not be needed for harvesting.

Much has changed in the last century, including individuals' life expectancies, the demands placed on high school graduates and the job market these graduates enter. Burstyn noted that in 1900 the average life expectancy in the U.S. was 49.24; in 1986 it was 74.8 years. While the figures for 1900 are skewed somewhat because many people died in infancy or early childhood, the number of years required for public education has remained unchanged. The few people who finished school graduated at roughly age 17 around the turn of the century. Today--almost a century later--young people are still expected to graduate at about the same age with the same number of years of schooling. Traditional education is an extremely small part of a person's life in a rapidly changing world and means "the whole notion of schooling in the lifetime of a person has to be changed," Burstyn noted.

The growth of technology has exploded since the system was put into place. In fact, it is changing so rapidly that we often cannot conceive of all the results and different occupational groups created by this technological change. Burstyn cited a clear example: when the automobile was invented, no one dreamt there would eventually be a mass system of interstate highways, suburbanization, shopping malls and industrial and office parks. No one could have imagined the ultimate effects of this one invention in terms of changing lifestyles and thousands of new kinds of occupations created. Likewise, new technologies being researched and developed right now will have major, perhaps unforeseen, impact in the job market. An up-to-date school system must incorporate teaching about these new occupations and prepare

young people for them. Instead, schools today appear to be hide-bound in the face of these massive technological and occupational changes.

The schedule of the contemporary school continues to be based on an inflexible, "lock-step factory model." The period-by-period schedule of today's secondary schools has not changed in decades. In some buildings, the bell may ring every 45 or 50 minutes. In one high school in Onondaga County, the bell rings every 39 minutes, which one teacher felt reinforces the short attention span fostered by TV viewing, rather than allowing meaningful time for problem solving and critical thinking.

The rigid, subject-based curriculum has not changed. For example, Howard Johnson told how math education remains a "shopkeeper's curriculum," geared toward training people to make and give change. This does little to prepare students for the current demands for critical thinking skills and the technical demands of new occupations. Kindergarten and first graders are presented with all new material--adding and subtracting--then the percent of new arithmetic material presented each year dwindles sharply by eighth grade. In 9th grade there is a huge jump in new material when students are exposed to algebra for the very first time. Studies have been done for years, Johnson said, that show that this approach is difficult for students, yet textbooks and curricula have not changed. "We then blame the students and wonder why they're not doing well," he said.

Part of the reason for this inflexibility in New York State may be the Regents system. The Regents tests "drive" the curriculum and hinder teacher creativity. Teachers teach "to the test," in an effort to have large numbers of passing students to report to the district office, rather than explore innovative methods of learning. Students speaking before the Citizens League study committee felt that the Regents curricula is rigid and inflexible and does not allow them much free time for career exploration or other interests. Tracey Canino, a senior at Henninger High School, said, "The Regents take up every free slot. I have no room for drama or journalism or another interesting course. It is a problem if you have a teacher you don't like and you don't do well in a particular Regents course."

Other students felt the Regents system imposed an artificial--and detrimental--division among the students. Early in their secondary schooling, some students are told they are "college material" and are required to take Regents classes. They have little room in their schedule for occupational classes or elective courses. Other students are labelled as non-college bound and are directed to non-Regents courses. They may have little opportunity to change teacher and administrative judgments about their intellectual capacity. Students continue to be labelled and continue in homogeneously-tracked classrooms, despite research that

shows little educational or social benefit to tracking.

Research cited by Syracuse administrators Linda Cimusz, deputy superintendent for instruction, and Pat Hall, director of elementary education, shows that traditional retention of children who do not achieve is counter-productive. Keeping these students back, behind their peers, merely increases their risk for dropping out later in their school career. At the same time, "social promotion" has problems relating to accountability and standards. The answer, Cimusz, Hall and other educators testified, is remediation throughout a child's educational career.

C. Demographics Are Changing

Dr. Richard D. Jones, acting director of occupational instruction for the State Education Department, said that the composition of our schools has greatly changed since the system was founded a century or more ago. In the early part of this century, most people left school at age 13. Even though drop-out rates remain seriously high, high school completion rates have actually greatly increased in New York State. Twenty-five percent of students completed high school in New York in 1940, while slightly more than 50 percent graduated in 1953, he said. Sixty-six percent graduated in 1980 and 75 percent--the current level--graduated in 1988. This means that our schools are trying to teach more young people than ever before, Jones said, including large numbers with either low skills or low motivation, who would not have been in the system several decades before.

The labor pool is also shrinking, due to a lower birthrate and increased outmigration from our state and community. At the same time, there has been a net increase in the number of jobs in the Syracuse area in non-manufacturing sectors, particularly in service and technical fields. This means that an increasing number of high school graduates are being called upon to fill jobs that require advanced skills. OCL's 1989-90 report, "Syracuse Area Workforce of the Future: How Do We Prepare?," highlighted these demographic changes in the labor pool and job market.

Most significantly, the labor force study showed, our population is becoming much more culturally diverse. According to the 1980 census, 6.4 percent of the population in Onondaga County was black, with most of these residents within the City of Syracuse. While just one percent of the county population is Hispanic, it is proportionately the fastest growing population locally, as well as nationally. White, native-born males will make up only 15 percent of new entrants to the labor force by the year 2000; 85 percent will come from non-traditional sectors of the population. The schools today must prepare young people to enter a world where the "majority" of the past--white, native-born men--are in actuality the minority.

D. Barriers Continue to Exist for Many Students

The community recognizes how poverty and its related problems adversely affect a child's well-being. These problems directly affect a child's ability to learn and, thus, have a direct impact on the school system. In the City School District as a whole, 51 percent of the students qualify for free lunch because their families live at the poverty line or are on public assistance. Another 7 percent qualify for reduced price lunch. In some of the district's elementary schools, as much as 97 percent of the students are on public assistance. Teachers have increasingly been called upon to deal with social ills--counseling students who have been the victim of broken homes, alcoholic or chemically dependent parents or guardians, homelessness, abuse and other problems.

Racial discrimination continues to constitute a barrier to effective education. Recently-obtained data points to how serious the situation has become. The Syracuse City School District last year began tracking grades by a student's race and gender for the first time. Information released by the district this spring indicates that of all socio-economic groups, black males fared the worst academically. Only 5 percent of black male high school students have an average of 85 percent or better. Just 8.5 percent of black females averaged 85 or better. These figures compare to 33.6 percent for white females and 23.2 percent for white males. Among Hispanic students, 12.3 percent of the males and 22 percent of the females had 85 or above averages.

Racial barriers have a number of facets. A major concern of many people in the community is that the school district staffs do not reflect the increasingly more heterogeneous population. For example, the City School District is 37.2 percent black, but has only 9.6 percent black teachers. In one school, Dr. Weeks Elementary, the student population is 44 percent black, but among a small number of minority employees there is only one black male teacher to serve as a role model for young men of color. While the City School District has made strides in recruiting black or Hispanic staff members, such as with the Potential Teacher Program, current budget cuts invariably mean that the "last hired are the first fired."

Residential patterns in Onondaga County also mean that true integration is a mere abstraction. Few school districts outside the City of Syracuse have substantial minority populations. The city district has a black student population of 37.2 percent and has 2.8 percent Hispanic students and 2.1 percent students of other races, such as Asian-Americans. Jamesville-Dewitt, in contrast, has 6.6 percent black, .2 percent Hispanic and 5.7 percent listed as "other." Liverpool Central School District has only 6.1 percent minority enrollment--including blacks, Asian-Americans and Hispanics. Outlying districts have far fewer non-white students. Fabius-Pompey School District, for example, has a minority

population of only .8 percent. Demographics alone mean few non-city students experience interaction and friendships with students from different backgrounds.

A major finding of this education study and last year's OCL study on preparing the workforce of the future is the growing need for an awareness of multicultural diversity. Vivian Moore, executive director of the Syracuse-Onondaga County Human Rights Commission, states that the new emphasis on multi-cultural diversity recognizes the inherent value of all people. Multicultural diversity training is a tool for breaking down these barriers to progress. "Multi-cultural education gives validity to differences, said Martha Tamayo-Vergara, a social worker at Seymour Elementary School. "Different is different--not peculiar, wierd, less than or inferior."

One such tool is Teacher Expectation and Student Achievement (TESA), an in-service program used by the City School District to help teachers recognize unconscious barriers in the classroom. For instance, TESA shows a teacher how he or she might quickly skip past a minority student who falters at answering, but give a white child adequate time to answer. Implementation of this and other programs may be limited due to budget cuts.

Parents and students of color who spoke before the Citizens League perceive the public school curriculum to be out-moded and often biased. The courses stress the heritage of mainstream, Western European cultures, and are lacking in information about the history and culture of other races and non-Western European countries. Students in non-city schools indicated they have some beginning experiences in multi-cultural diversity, although these tend to be extracurricular options only for a handful of interested students.

E. We Do Know How Students Learn

Successful educators do know how children learn. Dr. Lillian Feldman, the founder of the City School District's renowned early childhood education program, stated that students learn by doing, more than they do from merely listening. Students learn via a variety of methods and not just by the traditional textbook-driven, pen and paper testing model. Dan Lowengard, principal of Levy Middle School, eloquently said: "The most important thing is how you teach, next how you evaluate, third is what you teach.

Howard Johnson said the research in math education clearly shows the best ways children learn--not just math, but all skills and subject areas. Students, he said, learn more, retain more and become better critical thinkers when teachers allow the students to engage in active learning and problem solving, using materials that can be related to the real world. Since people absorb information in number of ways, students benefit from instructional

variety. Research is increasingly pointing to the advantage of integrating reading, writing and math skills into all subject areas and an interdisciplinary approach as the best way for students to learn. All subject areas should include oral communication, writing exercises and paragraph answers on tests, rather than fill-in-the-blanks. Students also benefit from continual assessment and feedback from peers, as well as teachers.

Students do not learn most effectively through rote memorization--"kill and drill;" the simple lecture format with no give-and-take; the one method, one answer approach when the teacher has the lock on the right answer; pre-packaged, template exercises; and routine, ditto worksheets.

An exercise conducted with the study committee by Joan Burstyn backed up these findings. In reviewing their own educational careers, committee members found that they retained and valued life-enhancing skills learned in school, such as reading, research skills, being able to work with a group of people or the life-long love of learning. Study committee members discarded highly-specific subject-related skills learned merely by rote, such as diagramming sentences or conjugating Latin verbs.

Moving from the traditional teaching methods that have been taught in college and university schools of education to a more creative, flexible approach often means teachers must rethink their entire method of interacting with students. Karen Notcher, an English teacher at Solvay High School, told of the evolution of her teaching style.

"I began to wonder why my students were so bored, when I was so busy. Why they were so placid, when I was so active. Why they were so powerless, when I felt so much in control in my classroom. Why they were so quiet--even silenced, when I had so much to say," Notcher said. She began to realize that today's educational system encourages students to feel isolated and detached from the product of their work, which in schools too often is the test which the teacher "owns." Notcher has drastically changed her style of teaching over the years. Last summer, she was one of 50 teachers selected nationwide to take part in "The Teachers' Vision of the Future of Education: A Challenge to the Nation." The project was funded by Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and was sponsored by Impact II, a national network of teachers and teacher centers.

Students also learn best when there is intensive teacher and parent interaction and involvement, as evidenced by the City School District's pre-kindergarten program. Teachers in this program visit the parents at home and invite them to the classroom. The program has an open door policy: parents are welcome to visit at any time. There are weekly parent meetings and programs to train parents and teacher's aides. All of this contact helps build both the children's and parents' self-esteem, noted Lillie Fields, a former

pre-K teacher and current principal of Nate Perry Elementary School in Liverpool. Children whose parents are highly involved tend to go on to be successful in high school and higher education, she said.

This Citizens League study also revealed that students valued community and career experiences above school classroom work. These experiences were viewed as more interesting and relevant than their traditional coursework. One student at Cicero-North Syracuse High, Teresa Quinn, told how she assists in a kindergarten class for learning disabled children every morning, providing her with actual experience to back up her courses in early childhood development. Another CNS student, Todd Fielding, talked about how he has covered SU athletics for the school and community newspapers. As part of his career exploration, he was even able to "shadow" SU football coach Dick McPherson. "I cherish the sense of direction I am getting, particularly through the school's career center and job shadowing experiences," he said.

The new teaching techniques implicit in educational reform mean teachers must change traditional methods and give up "control" of the classroom. Some teachers who have taught the same way for years may feel hesitant about drastically altering their methods, opening up their classrooms and having their students reach out to the community through community internships and mentorship programs. Staff development is at the heart of change, but often the first to get cut. Unfortunately, the value of staff development is often not recognized by taxpayers or teachers themselves. Liverpool School Superintendent Jerome Melvin noted that a recent survey of Chamber of Commerce leaders ranked teacher in-service training as a number one priority; a number of teachers surveyed ranked it last. Likewise, Syracuse Education Commissioner Bethaida Gonzalez pointed out that staff surveys on suggested budget cuts ranked in-service training as the first to be eliminated. These surveys suggest that teachers believe the in-serving training given them to date to be of little interest and benefit to them.

F. Pockets of Excellence Exist

As stated earlier in this report, this Citizens League study was not an exhaustive survey of every educational program in Onondaga County. Many of the sessions entailed criticism of aspects of our public schools. Just as many highlighted excellent examples of programs that are making progress in involving students, parents, teachers and the community and incorporating some of the rethinking about educational styles. Some programs are successful and highly commendable, but do not demonstrate the kinds of educational reform being talked about today. The pockets of excellence listed in this section convey the changes implicit in the Compact for Learning and the Coalition of Essential Schools, which are described below. This is by no means meant to be a complete listing: awareness of a particular program often does not

extend beyond the school or school district. OCL cites these examples as programs to be lauded--and used as models--for other appropriate situations in Onondaga County schools.

*** Site-Based Management, Syracuse City School District and North Syracuse and Liverpool School Districts.** In the traditional model of school governance, the principal and central administration make the decisions regarding the school and these decisions get filtered from the top down. In site-based management (sometimes called home-based or teacher-based management), the teachers and staff have much more of a voice in running the building. This model usually includes a district-wide committee in which teachers and administrators are equal partners. In the city this is called the "professional responsibilities committee." Each building has action teams to develop ideas for implementation. The teams may be concerned with scheduling, discipline, budget matters or other areas. The teams develop goals and plan activities by which to meet those goals. There may also be district-wide teams for specific subject areas, such as art, music, science and English. Plans for site-based management are underway in East Syracuse-Minoa, West Genesee and Tully.

*** Outcomes-Driven Education, Syracuse City School District.** The district is beginning to design programs using an outcomes-driven approach. First, the district determines the desired outcomes for student learning and then establishes the necessary curricula. For example, if the district decides that all 12th-graders should be self-directed learners, efforts do not start in the 12th grade or in high school. Instead, the district begins with the five-year-old incoming student and design curricula to build to the desired goal. This approach is the driving force behind the push for excellence and accountability in education.

*** The At-Home Program in House Three, Liverpool High School.** Liverpool High School, a school with 2,800 students, has been organized under a house plan for number of years. (In a house plan, the student body is broken down into smaller units for record-keeping purposes.) During the 1990-91 school, a group of teachers implemented the "At-Home" program in House Three, which incorporates a total team-teaching approach. There are two teams of teachers for approximately 170 10th graders. Each team of students is scheduled together for English, math and biology.

The five teachers for each team work together in an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating aspects of all subjects in each class. An important part of the At-Home Program is a mandatory tutorial period every fourth day, when students can get extra help from teachers. All classes are completely heterogeneous and all teachers teach to the "mastery level." The team of teachers established a standard of what is mastery for a particular subject. If a student does not demonstrate 80 percent mastery on a particular test, then the student must go back for additional work,

studying with the tutor for extra help. The student can then take another version of the test. "We're interested in what the student knows--what the student has mastered--not whether you can fill in 30 blanks in 30 minutes," said Michael Babcock, a biology teacher and coordinator of the program. This mastery approach is a move toward the performance-based outcomes, being called for in the Compact for Learning.

Another key component is cooperative learning, in which students engage in a number of group projects, rather than merely listening to classroom lectures. The incoming group of 10th graders in House Three will be part of the At-Home Program, and the juniors who have moved up will continue it. The following year, it will encompass grades 10 through 12.

*** Developmental Kindergarten Curriculum, Syracuse City School District.** Eight years ago, the Syracuse district determined that 25 percent of all incoming kindergarten students were not ready for school. A curriculum was developed that reaches back to earlier stages of cognitive growth--from two and a half to six years. Four concepts were deemed crucial to doing well in school: language concepts, language skills, visual motor concepts and visual motor skills. This curriculum is based on hands-on work and the awareness that children don't just learn by listening--they learn by doing, manipulating materials and by experiencing things first hand.

*** Continuous Progress Program, Delaware Elementary School, Syracuse City School District.** In this program, used to a lesser extent at Bellevue, Percy Hughes and Seymour elementary schools, traditional grade levels have been altered and students move along with their age groups whether or not they have mastered all skills at a particular level. The six traditional grades have been replaced with three units, each with two age groups. No students are retained. Because the units cover two traditional grade levels, students are generally with the same teachers for two years running. The program is highly individualized, since teachers must provide much more attention to those students who are deficient in some skills, while making sure the other students are also progressing. This approach is viewed as a means of improving a student's self-esteem and overall potential for successfully completing school.

*** The Fowler Project, Fowler High School, Syracuse City School District.** In 1989, the principal and vice-principal at Fowler began to meet with representatives from local social service agencies on a regular basis. Evolving from these meetings is the "Fowler Project," an ongoing collaboration between the school and social service agencies, with the goal of enabling the students' personal and family needs to be met, while allowing the teachers to concentrate on teaching. The project has provided services to students in the school building, so the students do not have to miss any class time. For example, representatives from the

Salvation Army and the Housing Authority each spend a day at Fowler to meet with students and provide them with appropriate services. Fowler also has a drop-out recruitment program, which has been in operation for two years. In this program, a school attendance officer goes out in the community and recruits students who have already dropped out of Fowler and re-enrolls them in the school.

* **Alternative Community School, Ithaca School District.** ACS is one of four public secondary schools in the Ithaca district. It has 230 students from grades six through 12 and each year has a waiting list of up to 100 students. The school has a student body that is representative of the racial mix of the Ithaca community and the students include typical students, "high-achievers" and those who have been determined to have handicaps or learning disabilities. ACS is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, a national network of schools that subscribe to nine common principles. Briefly, the principles state:

- * Students should learn to use their minds well.
- * Students should master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge.
- * The school's goals should apply to all students.
- * Teaching and learning should be personalized.
- * The governing model should be student-as-worker, rather than "teacher as deliverer of instructional services.
- * Students of appropriate high school age, but at lower skill levels, should be provided intense remedial work. High school diplomas should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery.
- * The tone of the school should be non-threatening, but one of high expectations.
- * The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first.
- * Plans should strive for student loads of 80 or fewer per teacher and substantial time for collective planning by teachers. To accomplish this, plans may have to phase out or eliminate some services now provided students in many traditional comprehensive schools.

The school operates by democratic self-governance and is characterized by schedule flexibility, student-teacher interaction, extensive community involvement and demonstration methods for showing mastery. There is a weekly all-school town meeting, run by students who have been trained in participatory decision making. Courses are offered in nine-week cycles and include days where classes are offered in morning or afternoon-long blocks for extended projects. Each student has a daily "family group" period with the same teacher and a small group of students. A strong component of the curriculum is being able to do internships or mentorships in the community or taking courses at local colleges.

Demonstrating mastery of a course can take many forms: A recent class in the Middle East ended the cycle with a four-day peace conference with students taking the roles as representatives of different countries. Students in a class in "Forces and Fields" were required to build a structure on a certain size piece of paper that could withstand a certain amount of pressure. The structures were taken to an engineering lab for testing. A class in nutrition plans the menu for and cooks the daily lunch for everyone in the building--more than 200 people.

ACS has been in operation since 1974. Sixty percent of the graduates elect to go to college immediately following graduation, while another 15 to 20 percent attend within several years. While the school "doesn't place much stock in standardized tests," according to Principal David Lehman, students score well on SAT and other achievement tests. Most students do not opt for the traditional Regents Diploma curriculum. Instead, most courses are designated as "Regents-endorsed courses."

G. Changes Are Occurring

This Citizens League study was conducted in a proactive atmosphere of state and community organizations all making education their number one concern. These entities all seemed to have reform of the educational system as their guiding concern.

* **A New Compact for Learning** was passed by the New York State Board of Regents this spring and calls for major reform of the system. Subtitled "A Partnership to Improve Educational Results," it is based on six fundamental principles:

1. All children can learn
2. Focus on achieving the desired outcomes; the essence of accountability is found in results.
3. Aim for mastery, rather than minimum competency.
4. Provide the means for sound, basic education for all children.
5. Provide authority with accountability. Each participant--including students, parents, teachers, counselors, librarians, administrators, school board members and others--should have the authority needed to do his or her job and should be held accountable for achieving the desired results.
6. Reward success and remedy failure.

The Compact calls for the Board of Regents and the State Education Department to fill five major roles during the decade of the 1990s. First, the state will establish statewide goals and specify the desired learning outcomes. According to the Compact, "the required skills and knowledge should be arranged on a continuum for each subject, from the most rudimentary attainment to mastery" and the goals and learning outcomes should apply to

all pupils. Second, the state should promote local initiative. Under the Compact, local communities are encouraged to take responsibility for making changes in and improving the performance of their school systems. The state will aid this by relaxing and removing inhibiting rules and regulations, promoting the participation of teachers and parents and permitting the consolidated use of monies from separate funding streams.

Third, the state will provide resources, incentives and assistance. According to the Compact, the Board of Regents will promote equity for all pupils, support programs that assist parents in raising and educating their children, and "help school districts respond to the diverse needs of the families they serve." Fourth, the state will assess results. Pupils will be assessed for progress toward mastery, as well as for minimum competency. An important part of assessment will be a "portfolio" of a student's best work, including writing samples, projects and oral presentations, instead of merely a grade on a final pen-and-paper test. Fifth, the Regents will reward success and provide remedies for failure. Rewards can include public recognition, relaxed regulation, financial incentives or other support. Remedies include a state-imposed education improvement plan or partially or totally superseding local authority, among others.

In addition the Compact for Learning clearly delineates what is expected of local school districts in terms of parental involvement, partnerships with business and the community, and linkages with higher education and cultural and educational institutions.

* **The Syracuse City School District's Strategic Plan** was an extensive, broad-based process conducted by the district this year. Early in January, 28 community leaders were convened for an intensive four-day meeting to develop a mission statement and a core set of objectives, parameters and strategies for the district. The committee was composed of representatives from all segments of the community: school officials, teachers, business people, city and county officials, parents and representatives of social service agencies. The mission statement developed by this committee reads:

"The mission of the Syracuse City School District is to ensure that all students demonstrate mastery of defined skills and knowledge, appreciation of diversity, and development of character, which will enable them to become productive, responsible citizens who can succeed in a rapidly changing world; this is accomplished, in partnership with our community, by transforming our educational system to respond to the unique needs of each student through excellence in teaching and learning."

Throughout the spring, more than 300 people met as part of eight action teams, each devoted to a different strategy area. Teams dealt with defining learner outcomes; instruction and staff development; multicultural diversity; business and community partnerships; finances and resources; communication; links with human service providers; and strategic plan implementation. Each team's reports were finalized in May and presented to the Board of Education in June and July for review. Recommendations from the individual teams include establishing a Syracuse City School District Foundation, to solicit private contributions; to develop partnerships between school children and retired men and women; to improve and expand the Adopt-A-School Program; to promote recognition of the school district through a logo; and many others. The strategic plan approved by the board will constitute a five-year plan for school district operation, which will be updated annually.

The strategic plan will serve as a tool to determine if a program should be continued or eliminated. "Anything that is not related to the strategic plan is a candidate to be excised from the budget," said School Superintendent Williams. "We will consolidate or eliminate programs that are not working for kids." Reforms taking place will be directly tied to the strategic plan. For example, the district will look at the social services programs offered by the district and determine if they should be continued, or returned to another agency or entity.

*** The Central New York Coalition for Excellence in Education, known as the Community ComPac,** is made up of educational and community leaders and is designed to help the community work together and respond to the state Compact for Learning. Members include representatives of the Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce, Onondaga Community College, the Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES, the Central New York Regional Education Center for Economic Development, the Syracuse-Onondaga County Private Industry Council, the Syracuse City School District, SUNY Health Science Center, the New York State Department of Economic Development and several bodies.

The local ComPac was organized to "engage the full resources of business, industry, education and the community." The ComPac's ultimate objective is "total redesign of the school system," according to Jim Gray, president of the Manufacturer's Association and a ComPac member. The group has developed 10 guiding principles:

- 1) Educational delivery systems must be efficient, economical and collaborative.
- 2) Expectations must be higher.
- 3) Education must be the top priority of the community.
- 4) All people can learn and learning is a life-long process.
- 5) Parents have a fundamental responsibility for the

- education of their children.
- 6) The business-education partnership must be informed, trusting and active. Participation requires interaction and continuity.
 - 7) Education must be accessible to everyone.
 - 8) Change is continuous and must be recognized and celebrated.
 - 9) Everyone has a stake in the system.
 - 10) Diversity should be recognized and valued.

* **The Council of School Community Organizations or CoSco** was formed earlier this year and is designed to unify the city schools and allow people from various school communities to discuss ideas and opinions. CoSco offers support to officers and members of parent teacher organizations and serves as a communications link between the 30 PTOs in the City School District. Among the activities of CoSco have been an all-day workshop on parent involvement and committees on parent outreach, parent involvement and student scholarships.

III. CONCLUSIONS:

A. Change often best takes place at a point of crisis; we may be at that point in Onondaga County.

Lionel "Skip" Meno, former state deputy commissioner of education and currently the education commissioner for Texas, noted that the much publicized "crisis" in education was not that all local schools have failed miserably in their jobs. Meno pointed out that schools have been making "incremental improvements" in recent years. Presentations during this study clearly showed that there are many fine programs and educators in our community. The true crisis, Meno said, is that schools have not kept up with the demands placed upon them by a rapidly-changing society.

"The requirements of the real world have increased geometrically and the gap is getting larger every year," Meno told University College's Thursday Morning Roundtable this spring. "This increasing gap is the real crisis." Speakers from this year's education study and from OCL's studies on the workforce for the future and poverty were in agreement that our schools have not kept pace with the demands placed upon graduates of the system. Because of this, the business community and parents are becoming more disenchanted with the current educational system and are ready for a change.

At the same time, school districts are grappling with a fiscal crisis involving massive cutbacks in state aid. The 17 suburban and rural districts in Onondaga County lost a combined total of \$8,155,000 for the 1991-92 school year, compared to aid received for the 1990-91 school year. The Syracuse City School District's basic aid was cut by \$290,000, although it will receive slightly more supplemental state aid. The district is experiencing a budget gap of \$11.4 and has laid off 388 people, including 151 teachers. It is unclear how many, if any, of these staff people will be recalled. Other school districts in the county are likewise laying off teachers and staff members and eliminating programs.

It is a time of fiscal crisis--but it is also a time of intense scrutiny of educational programs and their effectiveness. The Citizens League is concerned with the possible deterioration of educational programs caused by the state aid cuts. However, the review of the cost-effectiveness of programs, coupled with the implementation of the Compact for Learning, may spark fundamental long-term changes and increased collaboration and cooperation between school districts and between schools and the community.

B. Change often is best implemented if it is not mandated from above.

In the 1970s and 1980s, demands for educational reform almost always came in the form of mandates and heavy bureaucratic control from the higher levels of government. As Governing magazine has noted, demanding better schools from the top-down doesn't necessarily create them:

"As the reform efforts swallowed up money, and were swallowed up in bureaucracy, it began to occur to educators in many places that [this process] was fatally flawed. Mandating excellence from on high didn't encourage innovation or offer incentives for improvement. If anything, it helped to create a dependent underclass of schools uninterested in change, simply following the stream of mandates from central departments."

The state's new Compact for Learning recognizes that "regulation and monitoring alone will not bring about the desired improvements in the system. ...We have learned that we cannot achieve the results we desire through top-down regulations alone. We know that we cannot wait for the necessary changes to well up from the bottom. What we need is 'top-down support for bottom-up reform'." The North Syracuse school district, in its response to the Compact for Learning, has added:

"In the past, the highly-prescriptive approach of initiatives such as the Regents Action Plan have been easy to criticize, because they were not 'our' idea, and did not necessarily meet 'our' needs. In fact, such plans often resulted in decreased initiative and innovation on the part of schools."

A bold national example of successful bottom-up reform is that of the Chicago City School District. In Chicago, most of the impetus for reform has come from a broad-based citizens group called "Designs for Change." This group was composed of parents, community leaders and business people from all races and walks of life. It called for the total revamping of the school system and, according to Governing magazine, "mounted a strong and sustained lobbying effort in the state legislature in Springfield to win the authority to undertake the overhaul." In this bottom-up reform, parent-controlled local school councils govern schools. Close community ties mean schools can quickly respond to the needs of the students. In this model, the central office has been pared down, saving large sums of money in administrative overhead, and has become more of a resource for local schools, rather than an arbiter of central policy mandates.

In Onondaga County, bottom-up reform was spurred by a group of teachers at Liverpool High School. Two years ago, the teachers in one of the "houses" of students at Liverpool High got together to discuss ways of better serving their student body. "There was a unanimous groundswell that what we were doing was not working. We realized we had to change the way we were educating students," said Michael Babcock, coordinator of the new In-House Program. The teachers--on their own initiative--researched the educational literature on teaching and learning styles and came up with a new model. The model incorporates many of the ideas from the educational reform movement, such as heterogeneous classes, team teaching and cooperative learning. The teachers, with the full support of the school's administrators, approached the school board for approval of the At-Home Program. The board allocated money for in-service and planning time for the teachers during the summer of 1990, which led the way for the implementation of the program during the 1990-91 school year. The success of this program underscores an important part of the bottom-up process: teachers must be an integral part of the planning for change.

C. Change best occurs when there is full communication and trust between all parties.

There is little incentive for a system or organization to make massive changes unless all components "buy into" the change and feel they have ownership of those changes. The Compact for Learning recognizes that the state's decentralized public school system means that many people share a responsibility for achieving the desired results. On a state level it includes the Legislature, the Board of Regents, the Commissioner of Education and the State Education Department. Perhaps even more important are the local actors--the school boards, district staff, parents, community and business leaders and students--since these are the people who will be enacting those changes. "No one part of the system can achieve satisfactory results without the cooperation of other parts of the whole," the Compact reads.

Because of this, the Onondaga Citizens League applauds the collaborative efforts that are beginning to be taken in the educational reform movement. Some signs of communication and trust are taking place on a statewide level. For example, the Business Council of New York State and the New York State AFL-CIO have issued a joint call for the educational reforms outlined in the New Compact for Learning. Both entities call for a school-based management system that involves principals, teachers and their unions to produce greater autonomy and responsibility for individual schools.

On a county-wide basis in Central New York, the Coalition for Excellence in Education, or the Community ComPac, is bringing together leaders in the community who can help move the process forward. This effort was described earlier in this report.

The success of collaboration can also be seen on an individual school level. The Alternative Community School in Ithaca was started at the urging of a broad-based citizens committee, made up of people who reflected all walks of life in the Ithaca community. The school has flourished for 17 years because all components of the community--parents, students, teachers, district officials and administrators, business people, community leaders and not-for-profit agency representatives--continue to be involved. They not only serve on a school advisory committee, but are highly active with the student body with mentorships, student internships and work experiences. Improvements wrought by the other models listed in this report are also due to the collaborative work of the teachers, administrators, parents and community. Each program is different, because it reflects the individual needs and characteristics of a school community. But each one is succeeding because of the involvement of all parts of the system.

D. Change is imminent in New York State--A call upon the community to capitalize on this.

Skip Meno, also a former Syracuse City School superintendent, noted that change is at the heart of the Compact for Learning and similar efforts at educational reform throughout the country. "If we're going to change the schools, we've got to be able to change the people in the schools and we have to give the people in the school time to change the schools," Meno said. "We have to take charge of the issue of educating America's youth."

The state's New Compact for Learning provides a mechanism to facilitate change. The Regents are shortly expected to approve regulations that will call for each school and each school district to develop five-year plans incorporating the changes inherent in the Compact. This requirement for five-year building and district plans was part of the state "Excellence in Accountability Program" or EAP, which is now included in the Compact for Learning. It means that each actor in the system--including classroom teachers, parents and members of the community, must be fully involved and prepared to make changes, based on the Compact's new direction.

The Syracuse City School District, in responding to the earlier EAP requirement, has already been through the strategic planning process. Other school districts are about to begin strategic planning in order to develop the necessary five-year plans. The Onondaga Citizens League encourages all groups in each school district to become involved in their district's planning process and the changes imminent under the Compact. A significant part of the Compact is that districts will be able to select members of review teams. These review teams will later make sure these plans are geared toward the needs of the individual districts and that the plans are being successfully followed. This contrasts with the approach under the Regents Action Plan, when the state sent in teams from Albany to review local school districts. The new

review method relies on collaboration with the state, rather than top-down intervention. However, key to successful implementation of any of these five-year plans is the participants' willingness to change.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The 50 members of the OCL education study committee culminated five months of weekly presentations with an intensive session focusing on recommendations. The committee members drew upon information from individual presenters, outside research and reading and ideas developed during periodic "think-tank" review sessions conducted during the study. At the end of the study process, 100 specific recommendations on a variety of different aspects of educational reform were presented for evaluation. The following sections constitute the study committee's final recommendations to the community for specific action.

A. Philosophical Principles that Should Guide Our Schools

There are a number of statements of philosophy that have been released in recent months by national, state and local education entities. Some of these statements, such as the mission, goals and objectives of the City of Syracuse Strategic Planning Committee, the state Compact for Learning, the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools and the principles of the Community ComPac, have been cited elsewhere in this report. The Citizens League is encouraged, both by the content of those guiding principles and the fact that they demonstrate a revitalization of interest in education. The Citizens League does not intend, however, to add to this proliferation by issuing a new and separate list of philosophical principles. The statements eloquently express the philosophies of these various groups. Instead, this report can serve a purpose in highlighting those common principles that are at the heart of all of the stated goals and objectives of these various organizations.

The guiding principles, which seem to be common to all groups active in the educational reform process, can be narrowed down to the following concise statements:

* **Focus on Results:** The state, community and individuals should, at all times, be concerned with the ultimate outcome of the educational process. The focus should not be on dictating inputs--whether a student spent "x" number of hours on a certain requirement or whether a district has filed a report of "x" number of pages. Instead, the focus should be the outcome of the educational process: how well the students have been prepared for life.

* **Aim for Mastery:** Students who are only expected to achieve a minimum competency in the basics will attain only that. Aiming for mastery will refocus education on excellence, rather than minimums.

* **Provide Authority with Accountability:** Providing districts with an option for relaxed regulation of the means, will

increase the local responsibility for achieving the ends. Likewise, those with direct contact with students--teachers, administrators and support staff--should be provided with the flexibility and authority to carry out the goals and objectives, but held accountable for the results.

* Make Education a Community Endeavor: Make the results of the public school system an important stake for all parts of the community by empowering all components of the system.

B. Recommendation: Implement Site-Based, Shared Decision Making in All Schools

The Onondaga Citizens League calls for all the school boards in Onondaga County to authorize their respective district superintendents to direct the staff in each school building to develop and implement a plan for site-based, shared decision making. Site-based, shared decision making in every school building will go hand in hand with the coming Regent's requirement for each school (and each district) to develop five-year plans incorporating the changes inherent in the Compact.

OCL recognizes that the form shared decision making will take will be site-specific. Since each school building is it's own community, a uniform model cannot be imposed across the board. The model could be a council, advisory board, committee or some other form. OCL does recommend that shared decision making in each building involve:

- * Faculty and Staff
- * Administration
- * Parents
- * Local business people
- * Students (to the extent and degree feasible)

The model might also incorporate local residents, representatives of a school-business partnership program and any other people the local school community feels should be involved in making that school a better place for learning. It might also incorporate a direct line of communication to the Board of Education.

1. The Roles of the Site-Based, Shared Decision Makers

The Citizens League urges that these site-based, shared decision makers consider recommendations developed by this study in the areas of school governance and planning, community outreach and involvement, incorporating newly-recognized methods of learning and teaching, recognizing and responding to changing demographics, dealing aggressively with barriers to achievement and educating

students for a wide range of future choices. These factors should be considered in day-to-day activities of the school and in developing the five-year building plans required by the Compact. The plans for each building should be made available to the community by the site-based, shared decision making group.

a. School Governance and Planning

- * Develop specified outcomes for students and measurable objectives for administrators, teachers and students.
- * Integrate and coordinate activities within the school and between the school and other relevant agencies.
- * Collect relevant information in a timely fashion to monitor the progress of the outcomes and objectives sought.
- * Establish personal accountability for the objectives and make this known to all parties concerned.
- * Define a clearly-developed and understood relationship between accountability and responsibility. Everyone involved should know the answers to such questions as: Who is responsible when the objectives are not achieved? How are rewards and sanctions built into the system of responsibility?
- * Implement a teacher review process composed of peers, students, parents and administrators.

b. Community Outreach and Involvement

- * Inform parents on a continuing basis about the teaching and learning taking place in their children's classrooms.
- * Develop a systemized and meaningful program of community volunteers to tutor, teach enrichment courses and serve as role models and mentors.
- * Provide educational opportunities to parents.
- * Provide parenting education, since parental involvement is one of the most crucial single factors determining a child's ultimate success or failure in school.
- * Establish, continue and expand programs that promote contact of students and teachers with managers and workers in business and industry.
- * Expand school-business cooperation to identify the knowledge, skills and capabilities needed.
- * Continue and expand Adopt-a-School programs.
- * Involve cultural organizations in integrating a variety of arts activities in the classroom.

c. Incorporating Newly-Recognized Methods of Learning and Teaching

- * Emphasize excellence and adaptability in teacher in-service training.

- * Intensify observation, evaluation and help during the first three years in a teacher's career, before tenure is granted.
- * Improve cooperation and communication between teachers and social services representatives to help teachers understand the students' home environment and any exacerbating problems.
- * Encourage teachers to be open about changing their style of teaching.
- * Modify lesson plans to genuinely involve the students in the learning process.
- * Focus the school day on achievement and creativity, not on time. Allow for flexible scheduling.
- * Tap into the peer structure of young people; make it "cool" to learn.
- * Move to the comprehensive assessment methods.
- * Emphasize the use of the mind, not rote learning.
- * Establish goals for graduation for all students, but allow for different methods of getting there.

d. Recognizing and Responding to Changing Demographics

- * Incorporate multiculturalism and awareness of different socio-economic levels.
- * Initiate, continue and enlarge programs, activities and special events in multiculturalism.
- * Have all staff--from administrators and teachers to support staff, such as secretaries and cafeteria aides --attend multiculturalism training.
- * Have staffing at all levels reflect the heterogeneity of the student population. The Citizens League recognizes how difficult this task will be, given recent staff layoffs due to cutbacks in state aid.
- * Support local and state efforts to revamp textbooks and school materials.

e. Dealing Aggressively with Barriers to Achievement

- * Work with central offices to provide quality programs for preschoolers so they will be prepared to enter kindergarten.
- * Provide peer counseling and tutoring at lower grades.
- * Work with the community to expand and support programs in pregnancy prevention for teenage boys and girls.

f. Educating Students for a Wide Range of Future Choices

- * Inform students of the broad array of occupations available.
- * Have schools and businesses work together to develop technical programs that focus on up-to-date and marketable technical and service-related skills.

- * Focus attention on trade school education and apprenticeship programs as alternatives to college.
- * Work to remove the stigma associated with technical and occupational training, which hinders the self-esteem of students in those programs.
- * Work with business and industry to sponsor an annual conference for a wide range of school personnel to keep them abreast of job options and new skills.

C. Recommendation: Make District-Wide Changes

The Citizens League recognizes that some changes will not fall in the purview of the site-based shared decision making group. Some changes will require cooperation across district lines or lobbying the state for changes in statute. The Citizens League urges the Central New York School Boards Association, the Conference of Large City Boards of Education and the Community ComPac to follow through on the following nine recommendations, in full cooperation with the teacher unions affiliated with New York State United Teachers and the teacher unions affiliated with the National Education Association of New York.

1. Expand the school year to the contract year for both teachers and students.

Begin classes the first week in September and continue through June 30th. This will increase the number of days children are in school, without increasing personnel costs, since teachers are currently paid under their contracts from the beginning of September to the end of June. This slightly-expanded school year will continue to allow teachers to have in-service days during the school year, enabling them to immediately incorporate what they have learned into the classroom, without cutting into contact time with students. Eliminate the contractual allowance for days off to be given for unused snow days. These extra days come near the end of the school year, at a time when student attention and achievement must be maintained. These recommendations do not reflect a feeling that "teachers are not doing their job." However, teachers must recognize that there is increasing community concern about serious local fiscal problems and the perceived deterioration in student achievement.

2. Eliminate tenure.

Critically evaluate options to the tenure system for both administrators and teachers to determine a better way to protect competent teachers, enhance and improve the educational system and remove incompetent teachers. Again, OCl recognizes the structural barriers to realizing this end, but believes it should be investigated and pursued.

3. Designate at least one local school as a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools.

On the secondary level, Fowler High School in the Syracuse City School District would be a logical choice because of its small size and the initiatives currently underway in the school.

4. Eliminate party-line designations and city-wide races for City of Syracuse educational commissioners.

The Citizens League believes that decisions regarding our city's educational system must be made in an atmosphere removed from partisan politics. Likewise, holding city-wide races inhibits neighborhood representation on the school board. Parents and residents may feel hesitant to communicate their concerns because they do not have one designated representative on the Board of Education. Instead, the City should be divided up into districts with an education commissioner elected from each one. The OCL study committee recognizes that state statute must be changed to allow for this, but believes adequate representation for everyone is an issue that must be pursued.

5. Lobby the State Legislature and State Education Department to terminate or relax state mandates that are outdated or unnecessary, and may cause excessive red tape, reporting requirements and bureaucratic layers.

6. Cooperate on a county or regional basis to examine methods of eliminating duplication and overlapping of effort.

This better utilization of resources could take the form of pooled purchasing of school supplies; food for school lunch and breakfast, and other items; and the cooperative delivery of services. An important area for investigation would be potential savings from allowing city school districts to join BOCES programs, currently prohibited by law.

7. Reduce administrative overhead.

There is little "fat" in a system that is faced with ever-dwindling resources. Budget cutting should be targeted at administrative overhead, rather than those "on the front line" closest to students.

8. Have school-sited services for human development.

The time teachers spend in non-instructional activities should be minimized. Draw upon the resources of community-based organizations to provide counseling and support services in school buildings at times convenient for students and their families, such

as is current practice at Fowler High School, and as described in OCL's tenth report, "Poverty and Its Social Costs: Are There Long-Term Solutions."

9. Improve county-wide information sharing.

Model programs in school governance, alternative programs, magnet schools and other specialized programs continue to be developed with little publicized data concerning the programs and their results.

C. What You Can Do: Action Lists for Students, Parents, Teachers, Administrators and Business and Community Leaders

Students, teachers, parents, administrators and business and community leaders all have vital roles to play in any action to restructure and improve public education in Onondaga County. The following action lists suggest specific ways to become involved.

I. An Action List for Students

1. **Recognize that you are the most important part of the educational system.** You are the reason all of the teachers and staff gather in the school building each day. Your graduation from high school will be the "end product" of a complex, expensive and time-intensive process. The role of a student is an important one in your life and in society as a whole.
2. **Learn what is expected of you.** Learn what the requirements are for graduation and for life after high school. Find out about different career options and what skills you will need to meet them. If your guidance counselors are not providing you with information you need, ask to become involved with mentors or internships to find out about the long-range picture.
3. **Make school your priority.** Studies show that your educational level determines your lifetime salary expectations. People with advanced technical skills or college degrees earn more than people with a high school diploma. They all earn more than a high school drop out. If necessary, forego your part-time job now, if it interferes with your real job--learning.
4. **Go to school ready to learn.** You can only learn if you are well-rested and have good nutrition and work habits. Get involved with learning in your classroom by asking for help when needed or taking part in discussions.
5. **Recognize teachers as a valued and essential part of the community.** Your teachers today will have a life-long effect on you. Skills you learn today will likely influence what kind of job you obtain or if you will be eligible for later training in a field that interests you.
6. **Be part of your school.** Get involved with extracurricular activities, such as plays and clubs, as well as intermural athletics and scholastic sports. Get involved--not only with class government, but school governance. See if your school will let you take part in reviewing the educational program and help make decisions about curriculum and scheduling.
7. **Be part of the educational system.** Students know better than anyone who the good teachers are and which are the good programs. Communicate your opinions to school administrators and your local

school board. See if your district will appoint a student representative to the board.

8. **Serve as a role model for learning.** Strive to make it cool to excel in school. Praise, rather than ridicule, students who are academically successful. Encourage all your fellow students to do better in school. See if you can serve as a tutor or mentor for a classmate or student in a younger grade. The younger child will look up to you and enhance your self-esteem.

9. **Take advantage of free events in the community.** These will expand your educational experiences.

II. An Action List for Parents*

1. **Clearly communicate your expectations for learning to your child, school and district.** Expect a mastery of subject areas and life-long learning skills, not minimum competency of several basic skills areas.

2. **Send your child to school ready to learn.** Children learn best when they are well-rested, clean, fed and on time. Make sure your child is immunized before registering for kindergarten.

3. **Provide a home atmosphere that supports your child's learning in school.** Talk about school--ask questions and wait for answers. Set aside a place and time for homework; see that homework is done, check it and make sure it is returned to the teacher. Look at your child's textbooks and materials. Limit television and read with your child.

4. **Support your child's teacher.** Visit your child's classroom and attend open houses and parent-teacher conferences. Write notes to the teacher about any concerns and ask him or her to call you. Give the teacher information about factors that might affect your child's learning, such as a death in the family, divorce or a new sibling. Don't blame the teacher or other students for problems your child may be having; work with the teacher for a solution. Thank the teacher and show appreciation.

5. **Be a part of your child's school.** Visit your child's school and introduce yourself to the principal. Join the school's parent organization. Read school newsletters. Attend school events and student performances. Be part of the education process as well--volunteer in your child's class or elsewhere in the school building.

6. **Be part of the educational system.** Register to vote and vote in all school-related elections or budget votes. Attend school board meetings and let board members know of your concerns and expectations. Make sure your district involves parents in district planning and school governance. Ask what is being taught in your district's schools. Write to legislators and the governor about educational concerns.

7. **Serve as a role model for learning.** Continue your learning. If you are not a high school graduate, get your GED. Welcome change--be open to new ideas. Get rid of hatred, bigotry and fear of other people who are different from you. Expect greater things from yourself, as well as from your child.

8. **Ask for help if you need it; give help if you can.** Contact the school if there is a problem and ask for services or counseling if they are needed. Listen to your own and other children; help them find answers to their problems. Ask your child's teacher or

principal how you can help needy children in the school.

***Note:** Prepared by Bethany Record, a member of the Liverpool School Board.

III. An Action List for Teachers

1. **Be open to change.** The community's call for change in education is not a reflection of your abilities, but rather that the demands of society on high school graduates is greatly changing. Educational reform cannot take place without your involvement and expertise.
2. **Urge that your school become involved with site-based, shared decision making.** Work with your administrators, fellow teachers and others in your district to institute site-based decision making. Convince them that rather than taking away their "control," this will improve the educational process in the long run.
3. **Inform parents on a continuing basis about the teaching and learning taking place in their children's classrooms.** Communicate with parents by phone and in writing about what is going on in your classroom. Urge that parents volunteer as mentors and tutors to help augment your teaching. Inform them of free events in the community which tie in with your curricula.
4. **Explore aspects of educational reform to see which would be beneficial to your class or building.** These aspects could include heterogeneously-mixed classes, team teaching, alternative schedules, peer tutoring, an interdisciplinary approach and other methods. Some are included in the state Compact for Learning, while some are being used by other alternative models.
5. **Help establish a more responsive and effective teacher review process.** Call for your teacher's union to work with administrators in developing a teacher review process that includes the input of parents and students. Help beginning teachers develop good teaching practices in their first three years, before tenure is granted.
6. **Expand your school's involvement with the business community.** Utilize programs that promote contact of students and teachers with managers and workers in business and industry. Utilize mentorships and internships to expand students' learning opportunities in the community. Work with the business community to identify knowledge, skills and capabilities needed in today's workplace.
7. **Make in-service training a priority for your school.** In-service training can be a strong tool in facilitating the changes called for by the State Compact for Learning. Develop in-service programs in cooperation with your district that are responsive to your needs as teachers.
8. **Make education a priority for your students.** Work with students, parents, administrators and staff members to develop a school-wide attitude that promotes learning and achievement.

IV. An Action List for Administrators

- 1. Be open to change.** The community's call for change in education is not a reflection of your abilities, but rather that the demands of society on high school graduates is greatly changing. Educational reform cannot take place without your involvement and expertise.
- 2. Make your school open and effectively involve all staff members, students, parents and members of the community.** Investigate and use different administrative structures and styles conducive to open lines of communication and cooperation. If your district has not already done so, involve staff and parents in site-based, shared decision making. Explore ways of involving students in school governance.
- 3. Inform parents on a continuing basis about the teaching and learning taking place in their children's classrooms.** Encourage parents to visit the classroom and become involved with the educational program. Encourage your teachers to utilize parents as a resource for tutoring, mentoring, curriculum development and portfolio assessment, not just as chaperons for school activities.
- 4. Establish a more responsive and effective teacher review process.** Work with the teacher's union in your school district to include a role for parents and students in teacher reviews. Emphasize the first three years of a teacher's career, before tenure is granted.
- 5. Expand your school's involvement with the business community.** Utilize programs such as the Tech Prep Program at Onondaga Community College that promote contact of students and teachers with managers and workers in business and industry. Encourage your teachers to utilize mentorships and internships with the community to expand students' learning opportunities. Work with the business community to identify knowledge, skills and capabilities needed in today's workplace.
- 6. Make in-service training a priority for your school.** In-service training can be a strong tool enabling your teachers to respond to the State Compact for Learning. In order to change their teaching styles, your school's teachers will benefit from supportive programs throughout the school year.
- 7. Make education a priority for your students.** Work with students, parents, teachers and staff members to develop a school-wide attitude that promotes learning and achievement.

V. An Action List for Business and Community Leaders*

1. **Be a mentor.** Get involved with a student's life and let him or her get involved with yours. Let the student observe the etiquette, the routine and the rewards of the world of work. This may make a more significant contribution than your talent for math, English, history or another subject area.
2. **Learn more about the dimensions of problems in education.** Ask your company's human resources department to quantify the skill level of job applicants. Find out how much your company is spending on remedial training.
3. **Encourage your employees to become active in the public school system.** Allow them to take time off to visit their children's classroom, tutor or teach in a classroom or serve as a mentor or internship coordinator. Give sabbaticals for those who want to teach or help schools in a variety of ways. Offer management training for employees who want to serve on a local school board.
4. **Lobby for real educational reform.** Put pressure on the state government to reduce the burden of regulations and paperwork. Encourage and support school districts to implement real reforms in school organization and governance and learning and teaching styles.
5. **Raise young peoples' expectations about life.** Support programs that widen students' horizons and improve their self-esteem. For example, support programs that provide visits at local colleges or universities for a day, or let them shadow a successful young person in your community who can serve as a role model.
6. **Help young people go to college or advanced training.** Support Syracuse Challenge or help support or endow a program to permit disadvantaged students to go to college. Provide assistance to young people in helping them apply to college and advise them on the sources of financial aid.
7. **Give financial assistance when appropriate.** Time and effort are your most significant contribution, but sometimes a financial contribution can be important, too. A contribution, such as for computer or laboratory equipment, academic awards, library books and supplies or mini-grants for students and teachers, can greatly boost the morale of a school and provide the "extras" that districts cannot afford.
8. **Tell the schools exactly what you expect in a high school graduate.** Let students, parents and educators clearly know you expect students to achieve a mastery of subject areas and life-long learning tools, not a minimum competence in a few basic areas.

9. **Show respect for teachers.** Teachers are on the front-line in the entire educational effort. Do not say, "Oh, she's only a school teacher." In other countries, teachers are revered members of society and receive the highest respect from the community. Work to make that true in our community.

10. **Don't be discouraged by the slowness of the system.** Turning around America's 150-year-old, highly-bureaucratic educational system requires steadfast and long-term commitment.

* **Note:** These points were adapted from "Ten Things You Can Do" from Fortune magazine's Education 1990 special issue.

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