

AN OPEN LETTER

*TO THE ADMINISTRATION & FACULTY,
HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION*

– JANUARY 4, 2010 –

THREE CLASSROOM TEACHERS ASK YOU TO SPEAK OUT

The Harvard Graduate School of Education pursues the goal of training leaders in the field, and will soon offer a new degree in educational leadership. The school's web site mission statement reads as follows:

Mission

To prepare leaders in education and to generate knowledge to improve student opportunity, achievement, and success.

Overview

Education touches every aspect of human activity. At the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), we believe studying and improving the enterprise of education are central to the health and future of society.

Since its founding in 1920, the Ed School has been training leaders to transform education in the United States and around the globe. Today, our faculty, students, and alumni are studying and solving the most critical challenges facing education: student assessment, the achievement gap, urban education, and teacher shortages, to name just a few. Our work is shaping how people teach, learn, and lead in schools and colleges as well as in after-school programs, high-tech companies, and international organizations. The HGSE community is pushing the frontiers of education, and the effects of our entrepreneurship are improving the world.

As veteran public school teachers, we are disappointed that the HGSE has not shown the leadership it professes by speaking out against the unprecedented attack on public education. To be sure, there have been courageous voices on your faculty who have defended public schools and the endangered idea of educating the whole child. We know that a thoughtful faculty does not think with one mind, and that there will always be differences about what constitutes the most effective pedagogies or curricula. But we have not heard the HGSE as an institution speak out on issues fundamental to the educational well-being of children and their schools. These issues include:

- The over-testing of students, beginning as early as 3rd grade in Massachusetts and even earlier in other states, and the misuse of single, imperfect high-stakes standardized assessment instruments like MCAS;
- The expansion of charters through funding formulas that divert resources from those urban and rural public schools charged with educating our most challenged children;
- The stripping away of art, music, critical thinking, creativity, experiential learning, trips, and play periods—of joy itself—from schools so that they might become more effective test preparation centers;

- The cynical insistence that all schools be equal in a society whose social and economic policies make it increasingly unequal;
- The use of state curriculum frameworks—and soon, possibly, national standards—to narrow and standardize our schools, an effort that only encourages increasing numbers of affluent middle class parents to seek out for their children the same private schools that so many “reformers” have already chosen for theirs;
- Merit pay proposals that deny and undermine the essentially collaborative nature of teaching;
- And finally, the sustained media vilification of hard-working, dedicated public school teachers.

These depressing developments have intensified over the past fifteen years. They violate the first principles of humane and progressive education, as we understand them. We are proud to have served as teachers in the commonwealth where public education began a century before the country itself was founded and where Horace Mann reinvented it a century and a half ago. We have many wonderful public schools in Massachusetts that can serve as models for all schools. No child in our state deserves any less. Certainly all deserve more than a parched vision of standardization and incessant testing. A global economy demands more than multiple-choice thinking. Most importantly, human beings require more.

HGSE administration and faculty, we need you to speak out in defense of our public system of education and against abuses that have been allowed to pass silently as reforms. We need you to remind our leaders, administrators, parents and students—all of us—what it means to be educated. As young teachers, we were inspired by the words of John Holt, Herbert Kohl, Joseph Featherstone, A.S. Neill, and Paulo Friere. Later, we would read the works of Deborah Meier, Diane Ravitch, Ted Sizer, and Jonathan Kozol. These were powerful voices to encounter. We need to hear your voice.

The time for *Veritas* is now.

Thank you,

Larry Aaronson, Cambridge Rindge & Latin School, 37 years (retired)

Teacher of the Year (Class of 2007)
Recipient, Key to the City of Cambridge for “Outstanding Service” (Mayor)
Recipient, Special Cambridge City Council Citation
Mentor, Student teachers from the HGSE, 1985-2005

Ann O’Halloran, Boston & Newton Public Schools, 30 years (retired)

Massachusetts History Teacher of the Year, 2007 (DOE)
Finalist, National History Teacher of Year, 2007
Honorable Mention, Massachusetts History Teacher of the Year, 2006 (DOE)
Friend of Education, 2009 (Newton Teachers Association)

Bill Schechter, Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School, 35 years (retired)

METCO Recognition Awards, 2001-2005 (L-S METCO Program)
“Outstanding Educator” Award, 2002 (Cornell University)
Faculty Recognition Award (Class of 1992)
Finalist, Lucretia Crocker Award, 1986 (DOE)
Horace Mann Grant, 1984 (DOE)

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