After years of social gains and with bright futures within reach, why are things still so difficult for middle school girls?
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“You can’t generalize on nationality. I’m not a threat.”
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Behind the Cover
Lory Hough, Editor in Chief

My son started middle school two years ago, so I know a lot of middle school families. Since then, I’ve been swapping stories with parents: Which sixth-grade teachers are tough. How complicated the school schedules seem to be with rotating days and off-teams classes. We’ve talked about super-heavy backpacks and what level of independence makes sense at this age. Much of the talk has been ordinary, the regular conversations many parents and caretakers of adolescents have. But I also noticed that some friends — gutsy women with great jobs who are leaders in our city — had stories about daughters struggling to fit in or feel good about themselves. Some of the stories involved social media — group chats that left a daughter crying or a fun Instagram photo that made a girl wonder what she had done wrong to not be included. In person, I noticed once-spunky girls who suddenly seemed extra self-conscious. Hadn’t we gotten past this, I thought? With everything we know about adolescent development and gender, why were girls still struggling?

Past Tense
In the magazine’s fall 1991 issue, Carol Gilligan, a former professor at the Ed School and co-director of the Harvard Project on Women’s Psychology, Boys’ Development, and the Culture of Manhood, wrote “Joining the Resistance: Psychology, Politics, Girls, and Women.” Here’s a brief excerpt:

“Like a film running backwards, women teaching girls arrive at all the moments of our own resistance and come up against our own solutions to the problems of relationships which girls face. Then as women, we may encounter our own reluctance to know what we know and come to the realization that such knowledge is contained in our own bodies; and may discover that we have succumbed to the temptation of modal perfection by trying to be perfect role models for girls and thus have taken ourselves out of relationship with girls — in part to hide our own imperfection but also, perhaps, to keep girls from knowing what we know and not be left all alone.”

CONNECT WITH ED.

Winter 2019
NAJWA ELYAZGI, ED.M.'19, arrived in Boston on August 22, after spending the summer, reluctantly, 450 miles away in Virginia. It had been three months since she had graduated from George Mason University. Her original plan had been to go home after graduation — to her parents’ home in Tripoli, the capital of Libya. She was beyond excited to attend a cousin’s elaborate six-day wedding and be there for her sister when she had her baby. She was going to go on hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca.

“I was expecting a cheerful summer,” she says.

But none of that happened. In June, with her bags packed and awaiting one form from the Department of Homeland Security, Elyazgi learned that the United States Supreme Court upheld President Donald Trump’s right to ban people from certain countries from entering the United States. One of those countries was Libya. Elyazgi knew that if she flew home after graduation, she might not be allowed to come back to the United States to start her year at the Ed School as part of the Human Development and Psychology Program.

It wasn’t the first time her ability to pursue an education in the United States had been in jeopardy. In January 2017, while on a layover in Turkey on her way back to George Mason after the holiday break, Elyazgi was stranded at the airport.

“The same day, the travel ban was approved,” she says, referring to the first travel ban Trump imposed for citizens of Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Libya. She was not allowed to board the plane to Dulles International.
Making Caring Common Project, on a powerful emotion that par-
etent receives the same greetings as I, and sees the true
I am home and not alone. I wish that every Libyan stu-
all my professors welcomed me and made me feel like
arrival, everyone from the Office of Student Affairs to
full of support and help from all the faculty members at
arrival to Cambridge,” she says. “I have received emails
mediate application.”

“I will be working on designing a better education system
fashioned, based on memorizing information. Class-
system,” she says. “Right now the system is very old-
Ministry of Education, which offered her scholarships to
— head home. She already has a job lined up with the
FaceTime with family and friends in Tripoli.

ceremony, while in her cap and gown, she’ll have to
leave,” she says. She also can’t have relatives or friends
flight back to Virginia to finish her last few months as
Now at the Ed School, she is again in limbo.

When a federal judge temporarily blocked Trump’s
tan a few days later, Elyazgi hastily booked another
flight back to Virginia to finish her last few months as
undergraduate.

“Torry, if you’re a young immigrant who received
Deferred Action for Child-
hood Arrivals (DACA) status, you may be working an internship. You may be applying to medical school
and being worried about how to plan a trip to see a cousin get married this weekend. But next month,
or next year? You’re not alone.
President Donald Trump or-
dands like him are not running
away from the immigration
issue, but they are not running
to it either. After all, he de-
clared on his campaign plat-
form that he would end DACA
and deport the 780,000
people who have been protec-
ted by the program. Since his
inauguration, however, the
administration has not
made any steps toward
repealing the program or
debuting any replacement
network.

“Since Trump took office, 
DACA has become a symbol of 
what is possible when the 
voices of immigrants are
heard and valued.”

TODAY, the Keep Our Dream Act
(KODA) is gaining momentum as a
Washington, D.C., bill that would
provide a permanent solution for
DACA recipients. 

“The Grecians wrote about it.
Shakespeare wrote about it. It’s in the Bible.”

Senior Lecturer RICHARD WEISSBOURD, Ed.D./’87, director of the Making Caring Common Project, on a popular idea that par-
ents can help kids deal with: jealousy. (The Washington Post)

The interviews discussed how, once they were document-
ed and given access to new jobs and spaces, they were more se-
ure in their identities. DACA al-
lowed previously undocumented youth to obtain drivers licenses, open bank accounts, and get jobs
that gave them financial indepen-
dence, rather than the low-wage,
dead-end jobs that undocumented-
ed immigrants are often forced to
have. Having DACA status came
with other benefits, too, like a
greater sense of belonging.

Among recipients who were
older than 21 when they became
to DACA holders, the program al-
lowed them to pursue dreams deferred. Younger students were
able to gain wider access through the program, the night-
mare was largely over.

To understand more about
the program’s impact, Gonzales
and his colleagues analyzed in-
terviews, conducted in 2015, of
408 beneficiaries of DACA, ages
18-32, about their experience with their new immigration sta-
tus and how it affected their tran-
tion to adulthood — things like being able to work.

But for all its speed in help-
ing students integrate into soci-
ety and achieve independence, DACA has limitations.

For one, its benefits have not
been felt to the same degree across the United States. Local context
shapes both the legal limitations and the daily experiences that im-
migrants and undocumented peo-
ple have. In another paper, Gon-
zales and his co-authors note that
DACA recipients who live in places
like New York, where DACA recipi-
ents can get a tuition break to state
schools, have entirely different ex-
teriences than recipients who live in places like Georgia, where they
are legally prohibited from re-
cieving in-state tuition, and are in
fact banned from attending some
postsecondary institutions.

What’s more, the federal gov-
ernment still blocks DACA re-
cipients from receiving federal
financial aid. It offers no relief to
students’ family members and offers the students themselves no path to citizenship. This means that the opportunities DACA has
carried can be a mixed bless-
ing, especially in places where

local and state governments are
focused on restricting immi-
gration. In California, undocu-
mented immigrants can obtain
professional licenses and driv-
ers’ licenses, even without DACA. But in states like South Carolina or Georgia, a DACA beneficiary might be the only person in their family authorized to work or even drive.

This double-edged sword,” Gonzales says. “In one way, you can see that DACA has benefited not only the little over 800,000
DACA beneficiaries, but also their family members. In other
ways, it’s really threated DACA beneficiaries to their families. It’s
added another layer of burden.”

An Uncertain Future
Right now, the status of DACA
itself is precarious. Gonzales is
beginning another round of in-
terviews to see how the current
climate around immigration is
affecting DACA recipients. They
started seeing a shift as anti-
immigrant rhetoric from the 2016
presidential election began re-
fected in federal policy.

“The climate is also really im-
portant,” Gonzales says. “You’ve
got an opportunity for schools
and community institutions to
play a really important role in
creating places of belonging,
providing opportunities, provid-
ing resources, for immigrant stu-
dents and their families.”

“Some of our respondents
didn’t reapply for DACA in cer-
tain areas and they’re strained
in ways they weren’t before, espe-
cially thinking about that double-
edged sword and their responsi-
bilities to their families and their worries about their family mem-
bers,” Gonzales says.

While the courts decide the
fate of DACA, and Congress de-
cides whether or not to create
federal legislation that would re-
form immigration, a lot is left up
to state and local policymakers, who can pass laws that make it
easier for immigrants to thrive.

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READ REPORT: GSE.HARVARD.EDU/ED

Why DACA Works
Immigrant students with DACA status have an easier transition to adulthood, study shows

STORY BY GRACE TATTER

Illustration by Kristina Spano
Right on the Nail

A TEACHER DISRUPTS THE GENDER BINARY
STARTING WITH A FABULOUS MANI

STORY BY JOSHUA JENKINS, ED.M.’15

As a child, I liked pink; playing dress-up in my mother’s skirts, dressed as the wicked witch from The Wizard of Oz or on Halloween (twice), held my pinky out for chocolate milk — the list goes on. I also liked biking, camping, fishing, and playing in the dirt. Still, the cost of my affinity for pink and playing dress-up, despite my affinity for things we typically associate with “boys,” reductively cast me as the “sissy boy,” which resulted in social punishments like exclusion and bullying. That’s how the hegemony of the gender binary works: You’re not “normal” if you’re a boy and you like some “girl” stuff. As an adult, I learned how much we needed to disrupt the binary of gender that pervades some of our practices and thus I stand out as a queer educator for students who may be queer or questioning. On the other hand, my outness is a win for others to learn more. It is one action I can take, one nail in the coffin (okay, 10 nails), to help disrupt the binary of gender that pervades some of our practices in schools. But just as important, I’m a happier teacher when I look about me and see my nail art. It feels like me. In teaching, we talk a lot about modeling. I finally feel like I’m modeling “be yourself.”

So far this school year, the headlines have already shown a fourth-grader who committed suicide after coming out. Queer visibility is important. So, this school year, my nails are fabulously painted, and for the first time in my life, a photo of my partner and our two dogs sits on my desk. I am disrupting what is “typical” gender performance, and thus I stand out as a queer educator for students who may be queer or questioning. On the other hand, my outness is a window and a conversation starter for others to learn more. It is one action I can take, one nail in the coffin (okay, so nails), to help disrupt the binary of gender that pervades some of our practices in schools. But just as important, I’m a happier teacher when I look down and see my nail art. It feels like me. In teaching, we talk a lot about modeling. I finally feel like I’m modeling “be yourself.”

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A group of fourth-graders had loudly commented on my bright pink sneakers, pointing to one another. “Look at him wearing girls’ stuff!” Hearing how en-grained the gendering of colors and clothes was made me realize how much we needed to disrupt the gender binary if we ever hoped it might indeed get better. Starting with me.

As I reflected on my teaching practice and my position as a queer educator, I realized that I was hiding authentic parts of myself at school. For example, I enjoy a nice manicure and play-ful paint job but had never dared to do it since I assumed it would create unnecessary attention. This was a lost opportunity to be a model for queer youth who are looking to see adults living happily or to be someone at school who will support them.

So last June I had my nails painted rainbow polka dots for Pride month. The mani was quite the conversation piece. Many gave compliments, and an equal number had questions. Some second-graders said, “Boys can’t have painted nails!” When I told them that people can style their hair or wear whatever clothes they feel comfortable in and flashed my nails, most agreed. The next day, one student who was insistent boys could not paint their nails came to me and said, “I guess you’re right. I saw a boy on the train with green nails!” My nails suddenly played two roles: personal enjoyment and teaching tool.

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STORY BY JOSHUA JENKINS, ED.M.’15

This was a lost opportunity to be a model for queer youth who are looking to see adults living happily or to be someone at school who will support them.
Millie Heber, Ed.M.’18, knew she was working with talented students when they picked apart her resume during a job interview.

Heber was in her last semester at the Ed School, finishing classes in the Education Policy and Management Program. She was trying to land a job as the project lead for High School Insider, a journalism project started by the Los Angeles Times that gives students an online platform to publish their work.

“I was interviewed by two rounds of students before I ever met a permanent staff person at the Times,” she says. “It was the only job I interviewed for where they put young people in front of the interview process. They took it very seriously.” That included giving her advice on her resume.

Now eight months into the job, Heber has fully become part of what’s called “the fam.” She says it’s an exciting time to be giving young people a platform to be heard gets to the heart of why the project was started, Heber says, and high school students are responding. Since the project began in 2014, more than 7,000 students have contributed.

“It’s an era where young people are finally feeling heard, or trying to be heard,” Heber says. “The point of the program is to do just that — let students feel they have a voice and can share their perspective. I don’t think we do that enough in classrooms or in the general world. If you read the pieces students have written, most have really powerful perspectives about what’s going on in the country and the world.”

For example, a student wrote a piece while her school was in the middle of a lockdown.

“This student didn’t know why they were on lockdown,” Heber says. “The teacher wasn’t in the room to tell them. They didn’t know if there was an actual shooter. This student took notes as she was in the situation then wrote the piece later. It was so terrifying for her. With High School Insider, there’s an opportunity for young people to share what’s going on in their lives.”

Students can get involved in two ways: individually or as part of a journalism or English class. Heber sets them up with a WordPress account, and they contribute pieces to the site, including news stories, fiction, cartoons, and videos. Two college interns, both alumni of the program who are now pursuing journalism careers, lightly edit the pieces for typos and to fit Associated Press style, which the Times follows.

“The interns might reach out to a writer and say, ‘here are three ways you could improve this,’” Heber says, but student journalists really drive the work. The exception is when a teacher takes this on as a class project. “The teacher will work more closely with students, helping them fine-tune their pieces before they get published.” Even then, stories are “unfiltered and unadulterated.”

The project also hosts a youth journalism conference, a student advisory board, and a paid summer internship for eight students at its California offices. Eventually, Heber wants to help teachers find ways to teach media literacy. Until then, she says a highlight of her job is going into classrooms to introduce students to the project.

“I love seeing the one or two kids who hang on to every word I say or hang out after to ask a question,” she says. “I’m looking forward to seeing those kids slowly start to post their stories and then grow into leaders of the program itself. That means they’re moving from finding their own voice to learning to share it with others and then to becoming advocates for youth voices more broadly.”
### Helping Early Childhood Educators De-stress

Wondering how early childhood educators can de-stress and not burn out? With the help of the MindfulEC project, which she started with two Harvard Kennedy School students while at the Ed School, former preschool teacher EMILY WIKLUND, Ed.M., offers five tips:

#### 1. Recognize the struggle.
"Many career fields are stressful, but the teaching profession stands out because it sits right at the intersection of high demand and low professional support. Part of that professional support relates to pay. The average wage for early care providers is just above $10 per hour. The age wage for early care providers is just above $10 per hour. The average wage for early care providers is just above $10 per hour.

#### 2. Recognize when other teachers are at their break point.
"Many of the symptoms of burnout or unhealthy stress may not be obvious to others, but signs of fatigue, difficulty concentrating, or attending to tasks, edginess and irritability, sadness, or detachment and isolation could indicate that a teacher is having trouble. Frequent unexplained or illness-related absences can be a definite sign that something is wrong. Disengagement from the teaching community or in the classroom can also be a sign that it’s time to check in.”

#### 3. Find community. Now.
"At MindfulEC, we strongly believe that social networks and relationships provide an essential role in preventing or addressing stress. Teachers who have access to a community of support have a go-to system for affirmation, reflection, and solidarity. They have someone or a group of people they can talk to after a stressful day, and in talking they might get ideas about how to respond next time or simply some positive acknowledgment that things will be okay.”

#### 4. Reconnect to intention.
"Ask yourself why you wanted to become a teacher in the first place. What have you always loved about working with young children and their families, and what are the short- and long-term goals for your work? Find meaning in your work.”

#### 5. Take time for yourself.
"It’s important to develop a daily self-care practice or habits that bring calm between (inevitably) stressful moments. This can include yoga, mindful walking, or even mindful eating, which includes noticing and savoring textures and flavors. During the school day, which can feel hectic, teachers can find quiet spots during breaks, engaging socially with colleagues over lunch or at the end of the day. Self-care and strong community bonds aren’t luxuries; they’re essential components in providing quality experiences for children.”
The Story of the Unlikely Children’s Book Author

STORY BY ANDREW BAULD, ED.M.’16

One upon a time there was a professor. His name was Fernando Reimers. Professor Reimers lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He taught at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He spent his days working with students and writing many books for adults.

But at home, Professor Reimers had an idea. He wanted to write a book for children. He decided the book would be about a very special friend of his named Filomena.

Filomena, the parakeet.

REIMERS, ED.M.’84, ED.D.’88, has spent a career focused on innovative global education policies and programs as a professor at the Ed School and director of the International Education Policy Program. He’s also a prolific writer and editor, producing more than 20 books, plus scores of journal articles, on the importance of developing 21st-century skills in students.

So it came as a surprise when Reimers’ latest writing wasn’t on global education, or for adults, but a personal story about his 12-year-old parakeet.

“I can’t explain why I did it,” Reimers says on what drove him to write a picture book. “I remember sitting at my kitchen table with 60 papers to grade early in January and wondering how the bird saw the world. I began to write this story from the bird’s point of view. This simple act made me very happy.

From that initial question emerged The Story of Filomena. It’s the first in a trilogy featuring an observant blue parakeet that joined the Reimers household as a pet for his two young sons.

In the book, as in real life, the boys have grown up and left the figurative nest, leaving Filomena behind with Reimers and his wife, Eleonora Villegas-Reimers, Ed.M.’84, Ed.D.’88.

“The simple story includes several surprisingly high concepts for a children’s book. Reimers speaks to Filomena in both English and Spanish, something he says he did to show readers a bilingual home.

The main themes of the first book are observation, empathy, and perspective. As Reimers writes through Filomena’s voice, “You can learn a lot about the world if you observe and listen. Observing is not just looking or seeing, and listening is not just hearing. To observe you have to think about what you see and hear. You have to ask questions.”

Reimers says some of what he’s learned in his career has found its way into the story, including the focus on early literacy and intergenerational observation that came from a book he published last year.

“Language development and literacy are so important to participate in society in inclusive ways,” he says. While those topics might be appropriate for graduate students, it could be a bit heady for young readers. But Reimers has had the best test market, sharing Filomena with faculty colleagues who in turn have shared the book with their children and grandchildren.

“One of the wonderful things when you have a community of colleagues is people step up and give you ideas,” Reimers says. One of the fans of Filomena is Professor Catherine Snow’s 7-year-old granddaughter, Juliet Baum-Snow, “a very critical reader,” he says. “She gives me wonderful feedback.”

Former students have also responded positively. One visited recently from Mexico, bringing Filomena drawings from their children. “You’ve made it when your former students’ children make art like that,” Reimers says.

Other fans have shared the book, which has been translated into 10 languages, in classrooms and other educational settings. There are also 10 schools in six countries in which older students read the book to younger students. The second book in the series, Filomena’s Friends, came out last summer; the third in December. Reimers laughs that his family members are his biggest fans but are also quick to remind him that he lacks children’s lit credentials. That’s exactly what makes writing Filomena such a joy, he says.

“Like any creative process, we’re only partially aware of the forces that get us to do what we do. I want to do something I’ve never done and learn everything about it,” he says. “It makes me feel like a child.”

Andrew Bauld, Ed.M.’16, is a frequent contributor to Ed.

READERS: THEHEADVENTURESFOPHILOMENA.SQUARESPACE.COM

When Assistant Professor Tony Jack’s partner got tired of being asked to knit things for him, she made a smart decision: She taught him about pull stitches and casting on so he could make things himself. Reflecting on his first attempt, he says, “I was so nervous that I would mess up. She had to get me a vodka spritzer.” That was Christmas 2017. Since then, Jack has started listening to Crocheterumor podcasts. He frequently Googles how to knit various patterns. In fact, he’s gotten so into knitting that he’s no longer afraid to pull out the needles and yarn in front of others, especially when he’s traveling, which he does often as he crosses the country sharing his research on low-income college students. “Flight attendants recognize me now,” he says. “One of the flight attendants told another, ‘Our friend in 1B is a knitter,’ when she recognized me but could not place my face immediately. I also have people come up to me in the airport to ask me what I am making.”

So far Jack has knitted scarves. Yes, latest in pastels, but plans on tackling a blanket and washcloths. Eventually he’ll try his dream project: a quilt. “We bought a sewing machine for the house and have a crafting corner in the loft,” he says. “That will take some time through.” But he wants to get knitting now before switching to winter 2018.
Where were you born?  
I was born in Shanghai, China. It was during the tumultuous final years of the Cultural Revolution. My parents, like millions of young college students, were in government-mandated exile in distant farmlands. I grew up in different places and different households largely separated from one or both of my parents. I came to the United States when I was 16.

What’s a childhood memory that had a lasting impact on you later in life?  
As my living situation fluctuated as a young child, the one continuity was the radio. Radio stations (like the early days of radio broadcasting in America). This was how I got to know David Copperfield and Les Misérables. I slowly learned the experience of the displaced orphan who relied on the kindness of neighbors, teachers, and distant kin. So it was natural that my wife and I decided to adopt two children, and I spent a lot of my professional life working and learning in orphanages.

What’s a childhood memory that had a lasting impact on you as a researcher and educator?  
I have the vivid memory of sitting in class in fourth grade as a teacher stood on the raised teaching platform haranguing the entire class for misbehavior or incompetence. I remember thinking at that exact moment that someday I hope to teach, and when I do, I would be the opposite of whatever I was experiencing. Later, I realized that I don’t quite have the stamina to be a full-time K-12 teacher. However, I love teaching and working with grown-ups.

What did you want to be “when you grow up”?  
It was either a physicist (both my parents are, so all the dinner stories they told me were about Maxime Curie, Albert Einstein, Richard Feynman) or a teacher (both my parents also taught during their exile and after their return).

What’s an important idea in computer science that you feel is still relevant today?  
As a stereotypical Asian immigrant child, I was expected to major in something like computer science. But I loved the humanities. My parents thought that humanities were not for immigrants like me with a radio broadcast as a limp grasp of language and culture. Their proof was that I got a B freshman year in psychology 101, which tarnished my otherwise all-A transcript. But the real reason is probably related to my childhood desire to teach. One thing I learned from computer science is how to debug a complex system that is not working. That’s part of what I do now with child-serving social systems.

You first discovered Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood as an adult?  
When one grows up in a country of more than one billion people, and one is taught by family and society that the only way to distinguish yourself from the other billion is to be exceptional, there isn’t much room to accept “being themselves.” That, of course, was Mr. Rogers’ message. He would say that no one can truly learn and grow without being accepted and welcomed for exactly who they are. It was a shock to my system to hear that message, but it certainly has made a huge difference in the kind of parent I strive to be.

He became your role model.  
Fred Rogers was one of the greatest communicators on behalf of children and families. He could talk about any thorny issue with almost any audience and help people to see and feel what children and families need. He was my role model to find and communicate what is “deep and simple” in work and life in a world that noisily seems “shallow and complex.”

The “deep and simple” idea led to the Simplicity interations program you started.  
Fred Rogers’ motto for his own work was “deep and simple is far more essential than shallow and complex.” I wonder: What is deep and simple about each of us who are passionate to make gentle the life of this world for children, families, and communities? We can always remind ourselves, and those around us, to look for the deep and simple amid all the shallow and complex that surrounds us.

You kept the name of the program.  
Simplicity, Simple interactions, simple. Yes. We don’t want people to think they have to be experts in order to interact with children well. Also, while we aim for relationships, the only thing we really have control over is how we interact in every moment. And the plural form of “interaction” means that we all develop based not on one Hollywood-style moment, but the patient incremental accumulation of positive, humanizing interactions.

Finish this sentence: I love what I do because…  
... my hope for the world is renewed each time I get to see, feel, think, show, and talk about how helpers do for children and families through simple, everyday human interactions.

EdCast, Round Two

In our winter issue three years ago, we listed some of the most interesting leaders in education (and beyond) who were interviewed on the Ed School’s podcast series, the Harvard EdCast. With at least 250 interviews now under its belts, we thought we’d highlight some of the popular podcast’s more recent and memorable guests.

- Nicole Hockley, founder, Sandy Hook Promise 2/27/2017
- Jessica Jackson, civil rights activist 2/23/2017
- Tommy Chang, then-superintendent, Boston Public Schools 4/26/2017
- John King, former U.S. secretary of education 11/15/2017
- Cornell West, professor, philosopher, activist 1/20/2018
- Timucia,ívico  Gente Special 12/31/2017
- Dr. Ruth Westheimer, therapist, sex educator 2/14/2018
- Carol Dewick, professor, mindset guru 3/15/2018
- Mireille Brown-Tickey, one of The Little Rock Nine 6/20/2018

Missing Something?  
It’s not easy to stay on top of all the news stories out there, despite our best efforts. We get it. So we decided to give you a list of recent pieces on the Ed School’s web page (gse.harvard.edu) that you may have missed but should circle back and read. Trust us.

- The Power of Conversation
- Building a Strong School Culture
- Preventing Sexual Harassment at School
- A Four-Day School Week?

A look at what’s gained and what’s lost when school districts give students and employees every Friday off.

- 8 x 8: Bold ideas from Faculty (videos)

For the next eight weeks, faculty have 8 minutes to present their research and their work to brand new students at orientation. (video)
ON MY BOOK SHELF

Tina Grotzer, Ed.M.’85, Ed.D.’93, Principal Research Scientist

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY READING? The Book Thief by Markus Zusak. It is the story of a young girl, Liesel, growing up in a foster family in Nazi Germany. She steals books, each of which are significant to her learning. It chronicles the story of a young girl, Liesel, growing up in a foster family in Nazi Germany. She steals books, each of which are significant to her learning. It is hauntingly written and compelling in how it juxtaposes Liesel’s innocence, hope, and resilience to the horrific events of the time.

WHAT DID YOU RECENTLY PUBLISH A BOOK, LET US KNOW: Harvard Ed.GSE.HARVARD.ED.U If you’re part of the ED SCHOOL COMMUNITY and you’ve recently published a book, let us know at Harvard Ed.GSE.HARVARD.ED.U. If you’re part of the ED SCHOOL COMMUNITY and you’ve recently published a book, let us know at Harvard Ed.GSE.HARVARD.ED.U.

WHAT DREW YOU TO IT? This is hard to answer. I read a lot of nonfiction because it fuels my work. I find it hard to stay put because I have conversations in my head with the author and often end up wanting to write. I love fiction because it is powerful and engaging like fiction. I read a lot of nonfiction because it fuels my work. I find it hard to stay put because I have conversations in my head with the author and often end up wanting to write. I love fiction because it is powerful and engaging like fiction.

FAVORITE PLACE TO CURL UP WITH A GOOD BOOK? In her new book, Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration, Edward M. Gussin, a professor at City College of New York, looks at the ways that educators can use art to better understand how our different identities shape our learning and how they show up in the classroom. The ability to understand our students, her families, and their communities is imperative if we aim to facilitate empowering learning experiences.

FAVORITE BOOK TO ASSIGN TO YOUR STUDENTS? This is hard to answer. I read a lot of nonfiction because it fuels my work. I find it hard to stay put because I have conversations in my head with the author and often end up wanting to write. I love reading All About Women because the ideas are compelling, but the narratives are powerful and engaging like fiction.

FOR A FULL LIST OF BOOKS FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE, GO TO HED09-INTRO.INDD. FOR A FULL LIST OF BOOKS FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE, GO TO HED09-INTRO.INDD.

USING GRAMMAR TO IMPROVE WRITING: RECIPES FOR ACTION

Sarah Tantillo

In her third book since graduating from the Ed School, Sarah Tantillo, Ed.M.’91, offers what she says is “just a grammar instructional manual for life.” Essentially, it focuses on helping readers to write clearly. And that matters more than ever at a time when there is a problem for many students, she asks. Tantillo doesn’t want to write with the easy-to-follow book, starting with a critical chapter for instructors called “What should we STOP doing?” and including sections on helping factors that affect how we write and what we usually teach from kindergarten through high school.

NEXT UP: Great Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration by Keith Stanovich. I can’t wait to read this book and I hope it shows the same mushrooming of interest that Gussin’s book did. It’s about group flow and the dynamics that enable it. So much of what we focus on and reward in the world relates to individual accomplishment, but we have yet to develop structures that fully explore or recognize the power of collaboration and collaborative flow.

TRANSFORMATIVE SCHOOLING

Vaia Watson

Vajra Watson, Ed.M. ’98, Ed.D. ’08, director of research and policy for equity at University of California Davis, action to be the work that activists have become more facile in carrying out. In a study she read for one of her classes at Harvard, Watson found that school leaders often focus on data, are not teaching students to think, and often engage in other ways that are not effective for ensuring equity. Watson focuses on the ways that educators can use art to better understand how our different identities shape our learning and how they show up in the classroom. The ability to understand our students, her families, and their communities is imperative if we aim to facilitate empowering learning experiences.
After years of social gains and with bright futures within reach, why are things still so difficult for middle school girls?

STORY BY LORY HOUGH
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONATHAN KODOWYK
September, The New York Times came out with a story with a promising opening paragraph that made me happy: “Girls have been told they can be anything they want to be, and it shows. They are seizing opportunities closed to previous generations — in science, sports, and leadership.”

And then I read the second paragraph: “But they’re also getting another message: What they thought was true is no longer true.”

The piece came on the heels of a slew of recent research that showed a rise in depression and anxiety and a dip in confidence for girls, especially as they enter middle school. Friends were telling me stories about their struggling daughters, particularly around social media and feeling left out. Around the same time, a group of us saw the movie Eighth Grade, about an apprehensive 13-year-old girl entering the last week of middle school. As we left the theater, several of the women immediately started talking about their own middle school experiences — how uncomfortable they felt, how horrible it was. They talked about scenes that resonated with them. I remember thinking: Wait. Have things really not gotten better for girls? My friends were in middle school 25, 30 years ago. As The New York Times article pointed out, girls today are seizing opportunities previously unavailable to them. They are more likely to sign online petitions and volunteer. They are doing better academically, outperforming boys in English and language arts, and often in math. Women outnumber men in college, especially women from low-income and minority families. Kayla, the protagonist in Eighth Grade, was smart, creative, and kind.

So why was she also painfully awkward and seemingly friendless? Why haven’t things gotten better for middle school girls? And why, I wondered, are we still having these conversations?

“I feel like our culture asks boys ‘What do you like to do?’ and asks girls ‘Who are you?’ I think there’s an immense interior mental pressure put on girls, so ‘deep’ is kind of their starting point. You can’t not be deep when you’ve been buried. It’s also a very specific time in life, and girls are emotionally maturing a bit quicker at 13 maybe.”

“Almost no one I talked to, including Bo Burnham, was surprised that despite the progress made — the better grades, the better opportunities — middle school girls were still suffering. Some even felt it was getting harder.”

“I’m not surprised, no,” Burnham says. “There’s been a lot of progress made, but the cultural pressures are still insane. And culture is what leads you at that age, I think.”

Eighth Grade, was surprised when he was prepping for his movie, as he watched hundreds of adolescents’ vlogs online. Girls tended to talk about their souls, boys about things like video games.

“I think our culture forces girls to ask deeper questions of themselves earlier than boys,” he says. “I feel like our culture asks boys ‘What do you like to do?’ and asks girls ‘Who are you?’ I think there’s an immense interior mental pressure put on girls, so ‘deep’ is kind of their starting point. You can’t not be deep when you’ve been buried. It’s also a very specific time in life, and girls are emotionally maturing a bit quicker at 13 maybe.’”

Simone de Beauvoir wrote about this in The Second Sex back in 1949: “Girls who were the subjects of their own lives become the objects of others’ lives. Girls stop being and start seeming.”

The pressure that comes from this understanding, this transition from subject to object, disorients — and changes — many girls as they move out of elementary school and into middle school. In 1991, when the groundbreaking study Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America was released by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), 60 percent of elementary-age girls said they were happy the way they were; 67 percent of boys said the same thing. By middle school, those numbers had dropped for both genders, but significantly for girls overall: 37 percent, with 16 percent for boys. (The report found that black and Latinx girls fared much better: 79 percent of black middle school girls said they were happy the way they were; 67 percent of Latinx middle school girls said they were happy the way they were.)
54 percent for Latinx girls. Unfortunately it hasn’t gotten better. In 2018, pollsters from Ypulse and the Confidence Code for Girls found that between the ages of 8 and 14, girls’ confidence levels fall by 30 percent. At the lowest point, at age 14, boys’ confidence is still 27 percent higher than girls’.

Professor Martin West found similar confidence drops for girls when he surveyed 400,000 Californian students to see how social-emotional learning develops from fourth grade to senior year. While girls have a higher level of self-management and self-awareness compared to boys, he found that their self-confidence begins lagging in sixth grade and only starts to increase in high school — almost the opposite of boys that age.

“Boys’ confidence in their ability to succeed academically peaks in sixth grade and then declines steadily through 10th grade,” West says, citing the report, “but the total drop in confidence between fourth grade and eighth grade for boys is less than one sixth as large as the drop for girls. And girls’ confidence continues to fall at a faster rate than that of boys through 11th grade.”

It’s why we start hearing about self-possessed girls saying “I don’t know,” in contrast to boys, who start to say, “I don’t care.” (In fact, Way writes in her new book, The Crisis of Connection, boys do care, especially about friendships, which more resemble the plot of Love Story than Lord of the Flies.)

Brown made the “I don’t know” connection while she was studying gender issues at Harvard in the late 1980s and early 1990s with former Ed School Professor Carol Gilligan. She was also working on a seminal book, Meeting at the Crossroads: Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development.

“Girls were wondering, Is it safe to say what I think and feel, has been referred to as ‘I don’t know.’” Brown says. “We heard a big increase in ‘I don’t know’ responses at early adolescence: children to see how social-emotional learning develops from fourth grade to senior year. While girls have a higher level of self-management and self-awareness compared to boys, he found that their self-confidence begins lagging in sixth grade and only starts to increase in high school — almost the opposite of boys that age.

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Even way this shows up: anxiety and depression. A 2017 study in the journal *Pediatrics* found that between the years 2005 and 2014, adolescent depression rose steadily, but particularly for girls. For boys, the prevalence of a major depressive episode increased from 4.5 percent in 2005 to 5.7 percent in 2014. For girls, it increased from 11.3 percent to 17.3 percent.

CHESSIE SHAW, ED.M.’98, a counselor in Massachusetts, sees the anxiety at her middle school, especially once girls reach seventh grade.

“Seventh grade is when I have seen some girls start to question their academic abilities and intelligence. This is especially true in math and science. It’s also when a lot of anxiety and self-harm behaviors come to light,” she says. For example, “I definitely see the most cutting in seventh grade. It’s often around feeling that they aren’t doing well enough in school or that they aren’t ‘good enough’ in some way.” By the end of eighth, some girls regain their confidence, however, for another smaller group, it’s when real mental health difficulties start to entrench — suicidal ideation and attempts experimenting with alcohol and drugs and sex.

She sees a lot less of this self-destructive behavior with girls of color — a pattern that is consistent with the 1991 AAWU research. “There is definitely relational aggression between girls of color, but it doesn’t appear to result in as much anxiety and self-doubt as in white girls,” she says. “Students of color who participate in the Metro program — a Massachusetts program that sends kids from underperforming to higher-performing school districts — seem to have a stronger support group in each other. I wonder if this outside-of-school support group is what, in part, shields them from some of the depression. So is it actually harder to be a middle school girl today? Rachel Simmons, author of *Odd Girl Out*, thinks that in some ways it is, in part, paradoxically, because of the gains women and girls have made.

“We hope for girls to be smart and brave and interested in STEM fields, but we still expect them to be sexually attractive and have a witty and appealing online presence,” she told ParentMap in 2018. “No matter how many achievements they accrue, they feel that they are not enough as they are… We haven’t really upgraded our expectations; we’ve just added on to the old ones.”

These expectations pile on the pressure. “Add this ‘role overload’ to the fact that girls continue to need to please others first and be likable,” Simmons says. “Girls are still raised with a psychology that is trained to think about other people before themselves. This all is a real recipe for unhappiness.”

The 2018 Ypulse Confidence Code poll found that more than half of teen girls feel pressure to be perfect, while three in four worry about failing. Between ages 12 and 13, the percentage of girls who say they’re “not allowed” to fail increases by a stag-

“Girls in middle school are hitting the culture in very ferocious ways.”

NIOBE WAY ED.D.’94
growing up is hard. In 2018, it’s not surprising that reports have surfaced of girls 14–19 said they felt judged as a sexual object. And, just as their own bodies are changing physically, boys making sexual comments or jokes about girls after looking at photos on Instagram. Feeling excluded certainly isn’t new, but back when I was that age, if you weren’t invited to the mall, you rarely

For instance, in a survey by Common Sense Media in 2015, it’s not surprising that parents have surfaced of the negative impact social media could be having on teenagers, especially girls. Beyond the reports, it’s likely there’s still a fear of hearing from their kids regarding how they’re using their phones, and to assess the types of apps they’re using.

“Teens in my interview studies describe how the real-time nature of social media apps can disrupt social connections because it makes you feel disconnected from the people who left you out and it can interfere with your experience of connecting with the people you’re actually with,”

Today’s apps are also more demanding than the music industry, even just a few years ago. As Burnham told me when talking about his early career making YouTube videos, “When I was on social media, getting people to like your content was sort of like having a Facebook photo of yourself and list some of your interests and list your friends. And now it’s Instagram, Twitter. ‘What do you look like? What are you thinking?’”

“They’re so readily baser, deeper, stranger questions. And the way kids interact with it, I think, changes the way they feel about the world and themselves.”

Shaw says this has been true especially because of learning how to express that identity,” she says. “I believe that Instagram is evil for middle school, about exclusion in real time on Instagram can double the number of reported incidents. ‘There are also a lot of veiled insults and inside jokes that get shared, she says. “Because the post- er event and can quickly go from involving five or six people to 150 people. Numerous reports of group texts with up to 500 kids on them. Kids will delete and block each other and say mean things to each other and say mean things to each other and say mean things to each other...’

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A public boarding school provides a stable home away from home for some of D.C.’s most at-risk students.

STORY BY MIKE UNGER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY WALTER SMITH
Harvard Ed.

Just four of their eight girls are home on this Thursday night in October, so things are relatively calm. Relatively. Home is a third-story suite at Monument Academy, the charter boarding school in Washington, D.C., where Paul and Joy Langmaid work as house parents. Their “kids” are seven middle school girls with varying levels of social and emotional challenges from some of the poorest sections of the city, and their own 3-year-old daughter, Micaela. When I walk into the home — the term that’s purposefully used at Monument — I’m greeted by Paul and the family dogs, Midas and Lucy. In the kitchen, where there’s debate raging over whether to prepare ravioli or something, as one of the girls puts it, less “gross,” I say hi to a seventh-grader, who ignores me and retreats into the bedroom that she shares with a roommate. Langmaid excuses him and follows her. A few seconds later they emerge, and K. (her first initial) walks up to me with her right hand extended.

“Nice to meet you,” she says, a shy smile creeping onto her face.

Such is life at Monument, an innovative school that is attempting to educate — in all senses of the word — some of Washington’s most traumatized children. More than 80 percent of the school’s 130 students have been involved in the child welfare system — including foster care or temporary removal from their homes — at some point in their lives, and data show that they are half as likely to graduate from high school on time as their peers. On average they have attended at least three schools prior to Monument, but none of them has attended a school like Monument, where the overwhelming majority of students live during the week. (All students go home on the weekend, to their foster families, parents, or caretakers.)

“The lesson right now is one of socialization and manners. K. listens to Langmaid and alters her behavior both because he and his wife have established a culture of respect in the household, and because she wants to rack up core values points.

“We earn them by being kind to one another, being respectful to their daughter, the dogs, the house, and doing what we’re supposed to do,” another girl tells me.

When I ask about their favorite snack food, three girls answer in chorus: “Ice cream!”

“Allowing kids to scarf down a bowl of cookies and cream after school is a brave move for any parent, let alone one with a basketball team-worth of middle schoolers.”

“They know if they can’t handle their sugar, then they can’t buy ice cream anymore,” Paul Langmaid says. “We’ve had a couple of girls that tried and failed, and that’s okay.”

Monument Academy is the brainchild of Emily Bloomfield, an economist who served as an elected member of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District Board of Education, and later on the D.C. Public Charter School Board. It stemmed from a personal situation she encountered in which her aunt and uncle-in-law took custody of their two young grandchildren. She wondered what their futures would hold if they entered the foster care system or were adopted, so she began examining statistics. What she found horrified her. Students in the foster care system move homes one and a half to two times a year, destroying relationships with friends and teachers; they’re twice as likely to drop out of high school; and only 2 percent earn four-year college degrees.

“I thought that was not acceptable,” Bloomfield says. “Considering that roughly 25,000 kids age out of foster care every year [in the United States], and it will cost the government $8 billion for the next six years of their lives, it’s a staggering waste of money but an even more staggering waste of lives. I began to think, Is this an inevitability?”

She started researching what does work for children in foster care, and discovered that personal-
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ized education and a relationship with a caring adult are key. Life skills that they often miss, like cooking and financial literacy, are also important.

Bloomfield put together a white paper and shared it with educators, policy experts, and legal advocates around Washington. Her idea was based loosely on the Milton Hershey School, but unlike the renowned Pennsylvania institution, she designed Monument to be a weekday-only boarding school, in part to avoid the appearance of institutionalization, and in part to get buy-in from parents and caretakers.

She and cofounder Madlene Magrino submitted the school’s charter application in February 2014, and it was approved that May. After a year of planning the school opened for fifth-graders in August 2015. It’s added a grade each year since, and now has fifth through eighth. As a charter school, it receives extra financial support from the city, and is around 90 percent publicly funded.

According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, about 3.2 million students attend 7,000 charter schools in 44 states plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam. Despite that, says KAY MERSHIT, M.A.T.’69, ED.D.’82, a senior lecturer at Harvard and former director of the Ed School’s Teacher Education Program, the popularity of charter schools has been waning in recent years.

“There was tremendous growth, and they’re run into a little bit of a buzz saw with people suggesting that they’re re-segregating the schools,” she says. “I get pretty frustrated with the criticism because the good ones are trying to provide an alternative for kids who have lousy choices.”

That was exactly Bloomfield’s aim. Creating Monument outside of the charter school framework would have been an impossibility, she believes.

“Charter schools are meant to be places where you can incubate an idea and try a really new thing,” she says. “We never could have done this in a traditional public school setting because of the whole idea of boarding and using our budget in such discretionary ways. Our first year we did so much revising of schedules, job descriptions, programming, all these things that are really hard to do when you’re working in a more rigid structure. We could be really nimble.”

Bloomfield envisioned a school that enrolled a high number of students in foster care, but there’s been a movement in Washington away from placing kids into that system. In June 2016, D.C.’s Child and Family Services reported 1,400 kids in out-of-home placement, compared to 1,676 four years earlier.

“Some of the outcome data around foster care is shocking because you think, Oh, if we get the kids out then they’re going to do better,” says SIMON MULHERN, ED.M.’95, Monument’s president. “But unless they’re in physical or sexual jeopardy in terms of abuse, it’s better to keep them with the parents. They do far better. The reality is family is family.

There’s an important skill to be gained by having to navigate the family dynamic.”

Housed in a former elementary school less than two miles from the U.S. Capitol, Monument has already threatened to outgrow its physical space. Narrow halls mean students (70 percent of whom are male) are sometimes too close for comfort, which can lead to confrontations. Despite the fact that words like “kindness” and “mindfulness” are painted on the otherwise sparse-colored white hallway walls, violence is a reality here. Mulhern was punched by a student last year. Another tried to stab Miles with scissors.

“Adolescents in general know exactly where your buttons are and will poke them on purpose to elicit a response,” Miles says. “But our kids are especially skilled at that and often are looking for the conflict because that’s what they’ve used to.”

Still, both stress that aggressive behavior is a manifestation of trauma, not the core of who a child is. Dealing with disruptive situations, even in classes that average only 12 students, is difficult. Staffing is among Monument’s biggest challenges.

“Finding people who can do this kind of work is tough. It is not how teachers have traditionally been trained,” says Mulhern, who previously worked at the U.S. Department of Education as director of the Investing in Innovation Fund. “Part of my job is developing partnerships and residency programs where we can have individuals come in and build their capacity to create a pipeline for ourselves, but also a pipeline where folks can go do this in other schools. But I don’t have a simple answer in terms of the people and the training. We are living in it and figuring it out.”

As Mulhern gives me a tour of the academic space, after-school activities like sports, dance, cooking, and chess are taking place. During the week, Monument students almost never stop learning. Among the staff of more than 100 are 11 on the wellness team, which provides behavioral, emotional, and therapeutic support. In addition to their academic curriculum, every student at Monument receives two hours of weekly instruction on mindfulness, emotional regulation, and distress-tolerance.

In the third-floor student wellness lounge, complete with beanbag chairs, an exercise bike, and colorfully painted walls, Mulhern stresses the importance of the school’s psychologists, counselors, and social workers.
“There’s so much we don’t know in terms of supporting students who have had adverse life experiences,” he says. “Running a 8.5 billion initiative at the Department of Education is a cakewalk compared to this. It is humbling every day. But I have never worked with a more talented, committed group of adults. This team and what they do on a day-to-day basis and what they’re willing to do for children, they’re the heroes of this work.”

Because the school is relatively new, lots of outcome data is not available. But in 83 percent retention rate is impressive considering its enrollment is more than 50 percent special needs, as compared to about 15 percent in most other charter schools, Mulhern says. Homelessness is also a growing problem. Perhaps as a result of gentrification in Washington, about 9 percent of Monument’s students this year are homeless (which includes living in a hotel, shelter, or with relatives).

“These kids have experienced a lot of trauma in their lives, so the challenge is creating a structured academic environment that caters to their specific challenges because trauma presents differently in each individual student,” says Zenon Mills, who teaches fifth- and sixth-grade special education. “I had a student who, the first time he saw me, said I was his favorite teacher ever. I have another student who, no matter what I do, it's incredibly difficult for me to connect to him on a one-to-one level. He needs a lot more social reinforcement. And that’s pretty standard — seeing that makes it worthwhile?

"One of the students who was in my home is one of our brightest students,” Miles says. “He told me when he was in fifth grade, ‘My second-grade teacher told me I was the angriest person she’d ever met.’ He would upend furniture, run out of the classroom, and he was in fights constantly. He’s an eighth-grader now and hasn’t been in a single fight. He’s a different world. Paintings of palm trees line the walls; the smell of Italian food wafts through the air. At the Langmaids, K. has transformed in the most part” — attributed, she thinks, to the small, close-knit atmosphere at Monument and to meaningful collaboration with his mother and grandmother. “He’s looking at selective high schools now, doing ACT prep, and preparing for the evening. Perhaps not surprisingly, students who board more consistently tend to do better at Monument academically than their peers who don’t. (Boarding isn’t required, but it is strongly encouraged and widely done.) Students must read for 30 minutes each night.

J. is a seventh-grader in her third year at Monument. During the week she lives with the Langmaids, an arrangement she enjoys. “I do miss my mom sometimes, but sometimes we argue and I think it’s better for both of us to have our own space,” she says.

That students shuttle between two worlds — Monument and their often less-stable home — creates a challenge for parents like the Langmaids. Their rules and strict structure often don’t exist for the kids outside their home, making for a sometimes rocky readjustment period after the weekend. When the students arrive back on Sunday afternoon, they can be upset because they fought with a family member — or because they enjoyed their time at home and didn’t want to leave.

At Monument, the challenges for staff are huge; the jobs are so much more than nine-to-five. What makes it worthwhile?

“Thanks for having me,” I reply. “It was a pleasure meeting you.” Then homework continues.

MIKE UNGER

A Typical Day at Monument

7–7:30 a.m. wake up, chores, and showers

7:30–8 a.m. breakfast together as a home

8–8:25 a.m. complete chores, goal setting, and head to advisory

8:30–9:10 a.m. whole school is in advisory with members from different groups are centered around DBT steps (dialectical behavioral therapy), such as distress tolerance

9:10 a.m.– 3:30 p.m. typical school day that includes lunch, recess, two electives, and core content classes

3:30–4:15 p.m. dismissal, return to the homes, relax, have a snack, and prepare for the evening

4:15–7 p.m. family meetings in the home for students, chores, and meal prep, while others attend extended-day activities outside of the home, including Girls on the Run, Lego League Robotics, Cooking Matters, and African drum music

7–7:30 p.m. dinner together

7:30–8:30 p.m. homework, showers, chores, family meetings, or house activity together such as games, crafts, or time in the gym

8:30 p.m. begin prep for bed and 30 minutes of nightly behavioral therapy

9:30 p.m. lights out

Denise Miles

HEAD OF SCHOOL

Emily Bloomfield

COFOUNDER AND CEO

A Typical Day at Monument

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8:30–9:10 a.m. whole school is in advisory with members from well-being and safety, operations, academics, and student life. Student groups are centered around DBT steps (dialectical behavioral therapy), such as distress tolerance

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How Boston’s bold attempt to increase equity and reduce student travel time by giving families smarter options didn’t quite work — but could.

STORY BY PROFESSOR NANCY E. HILL
ILLUSTRATIONS BY LAURENT CILUFFO
HOPE MABRY PHOTOGRAPHY

less experience, and higher teacher turnover, characteristics that make it difficult for children to receive an education that sparks creativity and critical thinking and prepares them for their future.

Like many districts, Boston Public Schools — after failed attempts to solve such segregation and inequities through busing policies — turned to “controlled” school choice policies to give parents the option to send their children to schools outside of their neighborhoods. Depending on how you look at it, this either put the onus on parents or it empowered them to select schools.

School choice policies are not new. They have been used as a means to provide families with school options that are not directly tied to their neighborhood of residence. At the individual family level, school choice policies enable all families to choose schools that match their interests and needs, especially providing lower-income families with options beyond the neighborhood school. At the district level, school choice policies can trigger market processes that help districts determine which schools are more or less attractive to families and to guide districts in replicating schools that work for families and that families want. With all school choice policies, parents make choices at the time of registration, often ranking several schools. When more parents choose a school for their child than there are seats available, a lottery system is employed to determine who gets desired seats.

In practice, in a given school district, it is rare that market pressures are triggered through school choice policies that result in opening new schools at the rate or of the type that the market pressures demand. In the end, all students are assigned to a school. However, it may not be the school the parents wanted either in quality or in curricular emphasis.

There are at least two trade-offs that must be maximized for school choice policies to efficiently ensure access to high-quality schools. The first is transportation costs. The more options families have outside of their neighborhood, the further children will travel to school, with significant costs to the district for buses and significant burden to children and families in commuting time. Second, districts must balance the number of choices they give families. Giving families more options, when not all of the options are considered high quality, actually increases the likelihood that families will pick lower-quality schools and that their children will be assigned to

AREN'T WANT ACCESS to high-quality schools close to home. School districts and society at large want children to have access to high-quality education that prepares them to be good thinkers and to contribute to and succeed in society.

If we know what parents want and what society needs, why is it so hard to achieve for so many districts across the country?

One major barrier is the persistent racial and socioeconomic inequities many families face in trying to access high-quality schools. And one of the primary drivers of inequities is the legacy of historic racial and economic segregation — and continued residential segregation today.

The landmark case Brown v. Board of Education deemed such separate and unequal schools as unlawful. In fits and starts and with significant resistance and challenge, school districts began to inch toward desegregation, in part as a means to ensure equitable access to high-quality schools.

Today, however, cities across America remain largely segregated, residentially, along race and socioeconomic status lines. This has often resulted in continued de facto segregation across schools and significant inequities across race and socioeconomic status lines. This has often resulted in continued de facto segregation across schools and significant inequities across race and socioeconomic status lines. This has often resulted in continued de facto segregation across schools and significant inequities across race and socioeconomic status lines. This has often resulted in continued de facto segregation across schools and significant inequities across race and socioeconomic status lines. This has often resulted in continued de facto segregation across schools and significant inequities across race and socioeconomic status lines. This has often resulted in continued de facto segregation across schools and significant inequities across race and socioeconomic status lines. This has often resulted in continued de facto segregation across schools and significant inequities across race and socioeconomic status lines. This has often resulted in continued de facto segregation across schools and significant inequities across race and socioeconomic status lines. This has often resulted in continued de facto segregation across schools and significant inequities across race and socioeconomic status lines. This has often resulted in continued de facto segregation across schools and significant inequities across race and socioeconomic status lines. This has often resulted in continued de facto segregation across schools and significant inequities across race and socioeconomic status lines. This has often resulted in continued de facto segregation across schools and significant inequities across race and socioeconomic status lines. This has often resulted in continued de facto segregation across schools and significant inequities across race and socioeconomic status lines.

And one of the primary drivers of inequities is the legacy of historic racial and economic segregation — and continued residential segregation today.
them, especially if these lower-quality schools are closer to home. In Boston, the district’s original controlled choice policy, created in 1988, attempted to maximize choices for families. It divided the city into three large zones, with parents selecting schools within their zone, plus any school that was within a mile of their home. While providing many parents with very little choice, it has largely been achieved by shortening the list of acceptable schools, which, combined with a policy that provides families with options based on their residential address and distances around their residential address (their “zone”), resulted in the former policy regulators’ combination of choice (100% to 85%) of seats in schools for families in the same neighborhood. The result? Because of residential segregation along racial and ethnic lines, blacks and Latinxs had a quarter or a third the number of high-quality seats as their white and Asian American counterparts. The new assignment policy, which went into effect in 2013 and was both a bold and clever attempt to increase equity and reduce travel times, created in 1988, attempted to maximize options across Boston neighborhoods — that is, across the city. The new assignment policy, which went into effect in 2013 and was both a bold and clever attempt to increase equity and reduce travel times, created a universal minimum access to high-quality schools based on quality ratings of schools on a four-tier system and proximity to families’ homes. Simply, parents may choose from a list of schools that, in addition to their children’s address, includes from the Boston Teachers Union, and it never came to fruition. As a result, our policy evaluation examined issues resides in historically marginalized neighborhoods. A View from Inside

MEG CAMPBELL, C.A.S./’97, WAS A MEMBER OF THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE AND AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER WHEN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT’S SCHOOL ASSIGNMENT POLICY WAS PUT IN PLACE IN 2013. SHE SHARES SOME OF THE COMMITTEE’S THINKING AND HER HOPES AT THE TIME.

As a long-time Boston educator, school leader, former Boston Public Schools (BPS) parent, and member of the Boston School Committee facing a vote to change how children are assigned to district schools for more than 20 years, I couldn’t help but consider the opportunity before us.

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the best school they can for their children. Black and Latina children, many of whom are already disadvantaged in other ways, face greater competition for seats as an indicator for equity, rather than number of schools. We are already pursuing options to help Boston Public Schools adjust the algorithm to account for competition.

The underlying problem, though, is that a school choice and assignment policy alone cannot make much progress in solving inequities in access to high-quality schools when there are too few high-quality schools in the neighborhoods that need them. Rearranging school assignments without increasing the number of high-quality schools merely rearranges who has access to high-quality schools and who is left out. The harder and more important solution is to focus intensely and purposefully on increasing the number of — and widening the distribution of — high-quality schools across the district. While this is a harder problem to solve, it is ultimately a problem we know how to solve. We know what high-quality schools look like. We know the kinds of schools we want children across our nation to attend.

High-quality schools are schools that show improvement in learning and engagement with learning. High-quality schools help students who have fallen behind, and they challenge students who have mastered material. High-quality schools have rich and engaging curricula and extracurricular activities that support students’ interests and identity development. They are encouraging youth to think creatively, critically, and synergistically, and to analyze and solve problems. High-quality schools have the ability to connect students and families to resources outside of school to help them come to school ready to learn.

High-quality schools have guidance counselors that help high-school students not only plan for college, but also plan for meaningful careers that might not include college. They create spaces where students can make mistakes and learn from them — to fail a class and be able to take it again without closing doors to college opportunities based on GPA. High-quality schools are places where students are empowered to take leadership responsibility, become civically aware and engaged, and practice de-empowerment so they are prepared to make tough decisions outside of school and into adulthood.

It has been difficult for districts to quickly replicate their highest-quality schools. Private schools and charter schools often are more agile in their ability to experiment and replicate high-quality schools in urban neighborhoods. But, for charter schools especially, quality varies tremendously across schools, and it is difficult for parents to know how to navigate them, especially while they are also navigating the school choice process in a district like Boston.

And many charter schools serving lower-income black and Latina youth engage in highly structured, often zero-tolerance behavioral policies that are not consistent with the kind of environment that promotes creative thinking and a restorative, redemptive orientation to behavior that we expect of high-quality schools. Although many of these highly structured schools may be able to produce higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates than their lower-quality public school counterparts, they are not providing independent, critical, and creative thinking skills and a sense of autonomy, as well as purpose-driven, goal-oriented thinking that will guide students through college and into a meaningful life. The Boston Public School district implicitly and explicitly knows that high-quality schools are ones that have strong ties to their neighborhoods. This is why a key goal of the renew policy was to bring children closer to their homes and recreate neighborhood schools. Increasing the distribution of high-quality schools means that those schools can become embedded in the neighborhoods in which they are located, creating partnerships to support students and give them access to community service, internships, and valuable job training.

As the district is engaged in the Build Boston’s Initiative, where it is allocating significant resources to rebuild dilapidated schools and open newer schools with the goal of increasing the number of high-quality schools in the district, I hope the district will pay attention to the evaluation of and strong school Assignment Policy and target those resources to the communities where there is greatest need, to create the kinds of schools where all of our children can thrive. I also hope districts across the country facing similar inequities in access to high-quality schools will take a careful look at their policies to ensure equitable competition for seats. However, even more, I hope districts across the nation will redouble their efforts to increase the number of high-quality schools in the communities that need them. Doing so not only better serves the students in those communities, it better serves our nation, which needs our next generations of youth to be well educated and able to think globally, critically, creatively, and analytically — to solve the challenges that face us and to envision a better world.

NANCY WILLIS is a professor at the Harvard School of Education. She is a developmental psychologist focused on adolescent development and the role of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in shaping parenting beliefs and practices in shaping youths’ plans for their futures.
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Winter 2019

In memory

1966


1973

Bill Littlefield, Ed.M., retired last summer after nearly 35 years in public radio, including 25 years hosting Only A Game on WBUR, the NPR affiliate in Boston. He is the author of several books, including Taking Me Out and Only A Game. For 39 years, Littlefield taught English at Curry College, where he also served as assistant-residence.

1976

Martha Minow, Ed.M., former dean of the Harvard Law School from 2009 to 2017, was named last summer as a university professor, considered to be Harvard’s highest faculty honor. Established in 1895, university professorships allow faculty to teach and pursue research at any of Harvard’s schools.

1978

Ruth Schwartz, Ed.D., is an associate professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and directs the Master’s Program in Instructional Design. The focus of the program is on the design and development of effective digital resources for learning. She writes that she still lives in the city, in fact married to Jack Lew, a former United States Treasurer and development of outstanding leadership in Higher Education. Schwartz was also a keynote speaker at the organization’s annual leadership conference.

1981

Helaine Daniels, Ed.D., relocated to Lagos, Nigeria, to serve as dean of the new Africa Institute for Leadership and Public Administration.

1991

Larry Stybel, Ed.L., is a licensed psychologist. A year after he graduated, Stybel founded Stybel Peabody Associates, Inc., a Boston-based retained search, leadership development, and executive placement firm. He is a regular contributor to Psychology Today.

1997

Sean Bean, Ed.M., gave the Harvard Medical School Class Day Commencement address, “What Matters?” this past May 2018. He is the executive producer and show runner of the Netflix television series, Designated Survivor, which will premiere in the spring of 2019.

2004

Ned(models, Ed.D., president emeritus of Wagner College and Elm College, was the recipient of the 2018 American Association of University Administrators’ Trachtenberg Award for Outstanding Leadership in Higher Education. Smith was also a keynote speaker at the organization’s annual leadership conference.

2010


2011

Monty Neill, Ed.D., was awarded the 2018 Deborah E. Meier Hero in Education Award in November. Neill retired this past fall as executive director of Fairfield: The National Center for Fair & Open Testing.

2014

Elizabeth Filer, Ed.D., published Margot Perowne Wecht (1953–1984): Proper Bostonian, Activist, Pacifist, Reformer, and Education Program, which will host a panel of experts to discuss the new Africa Institute for Leadership and Public Administration.

2018

Jay Gabler, Ed.M., works at the national nonprofit Teach Plus, a Washington, D.C.-based retained search, leadership development, and executive placement firm. He is a regular contributor to Psychology Today.

2019

Renee Wiener, Ed.D., published Using Grammar to Improve Writing: Recipes for Action. She has written two other books, the Literacy Cookbook and the Common Core. (See page 18.)

2019

Matthew Gravel, Ed.M., was named dean of academic initiatives at Springfield Technical Community College in Springfield, Massachusetts.

2019

Education needs more people like you.

Help us find others who share your passion for education.

http://me/ref/er/ed

ONE ON ONE WITH PETER SMITH

tion” — this idea that knowledge is valued based on where you’re learning something, not on how you were learning or if you can apply it. This past fall, Smith, a former Vermont congressman and founding presi-
dent of California State University Monterey Bay and the community College of Vermont, opened Ed about life-learning and the status ladder.

Why do we undervalue personal learning but re-
ward “only educational attainment”? There are a few exceptions to that rule. The simple
answer, however, is that from the Reforma-
tion forward, the academic world’s status prevailed into the
education further differentiated the quality signal. And,
the “status ladder” within higher
education this past summer for the
state of New York.

Jeffrey Chan, Ed.D., is an as-

professor at the University of Illinois
at Chicago in industrial design was
senior admissions officer since
Heather Miller, Ed.M., is the asso-
cient professor at the University
of Colorado School of Education. Prior, she was
director of financial aid at Harvard
College. She had been associate
director of policy and
the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
as director of policy and
the Arthur D. Healey K–8 School, all
Woodrow Wilson Elementary School
Was appointed secretary of higher
Education and in the White House
Zakiya Smith Ellis, Ed.M., is a
former senior adviser in the Depart-
ment of Education and in the White House
under the Obama Administration,
was appointed deputy secretary of
higher education this past summer for the
state of New York.

Calitain Lowans, Ed.M., was
named artistic director of THEATREWORKS
Circus in New Hampshire. She is
executive director of the Flying Gravity
Circus Lab for Kids, published
Jackie Davis, Ed.M.
book on how to build a circus in
Circus Lab for Kids, published
in Massachusetts.
and the National Endowment
for the Arts.

Louie Rodriguez, Ed.D., is an asso-
ciate dean of undergraduate edu-
cation and as an
at UC-Riverside’s Graduate School
of Education. Last year, he was
also named chair of the school’s
educational leadership, policy, and
practice program.

2005

Jana Kauffman, Ed.D., was
appointed this past summer as
director of financial aid at Harvard
College. He had been associate
director of financial aid and a
senior admissions officer since
2005

Wayne Hostetler, Ed.M., national
dean for Relay Graduate School
of Education, has been named its
most president.

2007

Vana Bliki, Ed.M., took a new
position as executive director of
the Los Feliz Charter School for
Arts in Los Angeles. Prior, she was
executive director of the Ameri-
can Youth Symphony, also in Los
Angeles.

Ashlyn Clemmons, Ed.M.,
was elected to the North Carolina state
legislature this past November.

Jackie Davis, Ed.M., published DIY
Circus Loft for Kids, a do-it-yourself
book to build a circus in
your backyard. Davis is a movement
education teacher and serves as
executive director of the Flying Gravity
Circus in New Hampshire. She
is also a mime who worked at Disney
and created a circus arts curriculum
for Pine Hill Waldorf School.

Marti Dwhurst, Ed.M.’03, Ed.D., has a new book. Teachers
Bringing Differences. Explo-
ing Identity With Art, with Harvard
Education Press. (See page 18.)

2010

Kristen Skare, Ed.M., founded
the Boston Laburn Campus in 2015. She
is also the director of the Neighbor-
hood Rocks Choir in Boston.

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2015
Barbara Elffman, Ed.M., graduated with a certificate from the Institute of Nonprofit Practice Core Leadership Program affiliated with the Jonathan Tisch School of Civic Life at Tuft University. She is an administrator with the Black Hole Initiative at Harvard University.


2012
Moira Pirech, Ed.M., earned a Ph.D. in 2018 from NYU Steinhardt's School of Education, principal in her hometown, East San Jose, California.

Rhoda Mhiripiri-Reed, Ed.L.D., recently began teaching at Jesuit High School, Portland. (See news story online, i-lab while a student at the Ed School.)

Rachel Hanebutt, Ed.M., earned a Ph.D. from Portland State University. She is a professional learning platform for Teach For America's Social Innovation Award. They also won a 

2014
Darienne Driver, Ed.M.'06, Ed.D., founded Mindful Education, a professional learning platform that matches teachers to mentors online. Sayed developed the idea at the Harvard i-lab while a student at the Ed School. (See news story online, give.harvard.edu.)

2015
Eduardo Contreras, Ed.M.'08, Ed.D., was promoted this past summer to assistant provost at the University of Portland. There he will lead a new unit, the Office of International Education, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Dilara Sayed, Ed.L.D., left her job to work full-time on wveR.com, a professional learning platform that matches teachers to mentors online. Sayed developed the idea at the Harvard i-lab while a student at the Ed School.

2016
Florey Azu, Ed.M., moved to Ghana and is working as director of alumni relations at SOS-Heinemann Greiner International College.

Rachel Hamblott, Ed.M., started Conf, an online website that offers expert-approved advice on sensitive health issues.

Ryan Halling, Ed.M., recently joined Google as a university programs specialist. Prior, he worked in development at the Ed School.

2017
Andrew Nalani, Ed.M., spoke in September at the Gates Foundation Global Readiness event. The event coincided with the 2016 U.N. General Assembly. Nalani's personal narrative focused on the role of transformative education in activating youth's potential, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

2018
Christopher Calderin, Ed.M., recently began teaching at Jesuit High School in Portland, Oregon.

Sarah Engle, Ed.M., and Bene Webster, Ed.M., were finalists for Teach For America's Social Innovation Award. They also won a fellowship from 4.0 Schools (Tiny Fellowships) to support the pilot of their organization, UpTwo.