

James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions



Presents a Public Conference
Cosponsored by
Excellent Education for Everyone (E3)
Citizens for Successful Schools
Students for Education Reform, Princeton University

Crisis and Hope: Transforming America's Urban Schools

Wednesday, May 5, 2010

Frist 302, Princeton University

America's crisis in urban public education, after smoldering for years, has reached a flashpoint in 2010. Schools districts from Rhode Island to Kansas to California are in the news weekly as they adopt radical measures to deal with record high dropout rates and poorly educated graduates from the public schools in urban centers.

The problem—failing schools that deprive the nation's neediest of real educational opportunity—is massive both in size and in the complexity of its dimensions. Failing urban schools leave millions of the nation's poorest young people without the skills needed for economic independence and knowledgeable citizenship in an advanced technological society. In social terms, many of these young people constitute a dependency class overrepresented in prison populations, welfare rolls, broken households and homeless shelters. At the same time, the vast investment of tax dollars in education with seemingly minimal return strains the nation's collective purse strings at a time of severe economic dislocation. The political prominence of the problem is visible nationally in both the No Child Left Behind legislation of the Bush Administration and the Race to the Top initiative of the Obama Administration.

In the last two decades a number of remedies have been developed to address this urban crisis, including innovative curricula, charter schools, magnet schools, opportunity scholarships and school vouchers, early childhood programs and more. Yet, in spite of near uniform agreement on school failure, controversy rages over the character and effectiveness of these remedies. Confusion—between facts and anecdotes, or theory and practice, or cause and effect—combined with the conflicting interests of various economic and political stakeholders plays havoc with the identification and adoption of public policy measures to improve student achievement. The tragic consequence is that the most disadvantaged children in our society continue to suffer irreparable loss of educational opportunity with each passing day.

New Jersey, with its large urban population, stands out for its combination of high spending on schools, poor record of educational achievement in urban areas, and public policy disarray. Three decades of litigation over this problem have increased public school spending massively with little demonstrable impact on school quality. As a result New Jersey truly qualifies as the poster child for urban education dysfunction.

The James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, along with New Jersey's E3 (Excellent Education for Everyone), the Princeton area's Citizens for Successful Schools, and Princeton University's Students for Education Reform, is hosting a one-day conference on America's urban education crisis, addressing the problem of urban education in its full breadth: school failure and its implications; research and practice on the most promising remedies; and the political, social, and economic barriers to implementing effective change.

Bret Schundler, New Jersey's Commissioner of Education, will give the keynote address in the morning. Princeton University's **Professor Cornel West** will join the afternoon discussion.

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Conference Sessions in Frist 302

Princeton University Campus

- 8:50 – 9:00 a.m.** **Welcome**
Bradford P. Wilson, *Executive Director, James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, Princeton University*
- Introduction of Keynote Speaker by Conference Moderator**
Dr. Therman E. Evans, *Former Member, Washington DC Board of Education*
- 9:00 – 10:15 a.m.** **Keynote Address: Challenges to Education Reform in New Jersey**
Bret Schundler, *Commissioner of Education for the State of New Jersey*
- 10:15 – 10:30 a.m.** Break
- 10:30 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.** **Panel I: A Fight for the Future: Failing Schools and Their Effects on Our Society**
Panelists: **Dr. Marcus A. Winters**, *Senior Fellow, The Manhattan Institute*
Martin Perez, Esq., *President, Latino Leadership Alliance of New Jersey*
Dana Rone, *Educational Activist, Former School Board Member, Newark, NJ*
Chair: **Peter Denton**, *Founder and Chairman, Excellent Education for Everyone (E3)*
- 12:15 – 1:15 p.m.** Break
- 1:15 – 3:30 p.m.** **Panel II: The Politics of Urban Schools**
Featuring Remarks by Dr. Cornel West, Class of 1943, University Professor, Center for African American Studies, Princeton University
Panelists: **Joe Williams**, *Executive Director, Democrats for Education Reform*
Rev. Reginald T. Jackson, *Executive Director, Black Ministers' Council of New Jersey*
Patricia Bombelyn, Esq., *Co-Counsel for the Plaintiffs in Crawford v. Davy*
Chair: **Dr. Therman E. Evans**, *Conference Moderator*
- 3:30 – 3:45 p.m.** Break
- 3:45 – 5:00 p.m.** **Panel III: How Can We Improve Our Failing Schools?**
Panelists: **Ryan Hill**, *Founder and Executive Director, TEAM Charter Schools (KIPP in Newark)*
Dr. Marc Porter Magee, *Chief Operating Officer, Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCan)*
Chair: **Derrell Bradford**, *Executive Director, Excellent Education for Everyone (E3)*
- Closing Remarks: Dr. Therman E. Evans, Conference Moderator**