

How Can Unions and Small School Reform Leaders Fight for Full Funding and True Equity?

A Discussion at the Coalition for Essential Schools Fall Forum '04

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Panelists:

Steve Jubb, Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES)

Craig Gordon, teacher, Mandela High, Oakland Education Association (OEA)

Deborah Meier, Mission Hill School; founder, Central Park East

Dan French, Center for Collaborative Education, Boston

Facilitator: Greg Hodge, Oakland Unified School District Board member

Craig Gordon: We have a facilitator who may not have gotten the directions to the room soon enough, but she should get them as soon as she goes to the registration desk. That's Alice Spearman, who is a new school board member in Oakland and we're hoping that she'll get up here soon so that she can be the facilitator. But, I'm Craig Gordon, Steve Jubb, Dan French and Deborah Meier. And thanks for coming. And I guess what we'll do is that we'll just sort of facilitate ourselves for now, and we're going to make an opening statement of about five minutes each, after which we're going to open it up to all of you for questions or comments for about two minutes each. Try to stay within that. We're not going to be like, banging the gavel. And then we'll respond. We're going to try to stay within about one minute each in our responses. We have until 3:15, so we should have plenty of time for a good discussion. So it's a question of who wants to go first?

Deborah Meier: Oddly enough, I want to start off in a totally different place in a way. I'm for equity and democracy, and have been since I was a child. And there are a lot of ways you can fight for equity and democracy. One of them happens to be schools. I only got involved in schools as a place for equity and democracy sort of by chance. My kids were young and I had long summer vacations, and it was more interesting than I expected it to be. So I stuck with that.

But the issue of equity and democracy, I think, is far larger than schools. And I want to say to start off with that, in fact, I believe unions are enormously vital to the future of democracy and equity. And the absence of working people's organizations that represent their interests, sometimes in even less than wholly wonderful ways, are very important for the future and possibilities of democracy.

I once wouldn't have had to make a speech like that. People from right to left in America when I was growing up – that's because the enemy was Communism – used to make that speech. You know, that the difference between us and the communists and the fascists was that we had democratic unions and that we had a balance of power between labor and management. We had negotiations and so forth. That was another age. And there aren't anywhere near as many

unions left and those that are nowhere near as powerful as they once were. I think a lot of the trouble we have in this country on the democracy/equity issue is due to that.

So I want to make sure that schools don't undermine the potential power of unions. So I want to make sure we organize reforms in unions in ways compatible with good schools and in schools in ways compatible to good unions. I put them there in the forefront, both, of the long term and never-ending [struggle], and we haven't gotten anywhere near where I would have hoped in my youth toward an equitable and democratic society. But I can't see doing it without those making changes and fighting for those two principles.

I'm a frequent critic of my union. But I always have thought of the teachers' unions of America as my union, and as a person working within a school as a practitioner, that the work I do needs to be done side by side with strong unions. And I have been lucky, perhaps, to a very large part of my life been in situations where the unions were not great allies, but the best allies I had around, not the worst. I had more fights with management in New York to create small schools than I had with the union. And that's true, as Dan will tell you more about, in Boston. Not to say that if I had been the head of the American Federation of Teachers in New York I would have had better policies than Al Shanker would have had, but he was a better ally in many struggles than many superintendents who have passed through New York City. And the same may be true, I think, in many places in the country. And where I have least hopes of seeing democracy and equity in our schools I think are in the places where we have essentially abolished democracy in the workplace, which is another word for saying teachers' unions.

So I think, like in many issues, we're so far from getting the balance right, that I'm less worried about unions that are too powerful at the moment. I don't think in America today that's a serious -- I think it's a sham, rhetorical argument, that unions today are a serious threat to the balance of power, and if they were, when that time comes, I might find myself on different sides at different times.

So that's where I start. And I think this is just the beginning of a discussion about what would good unionism look like in our schools.

Dan French: Hi, I'm Dan French. I direct a nonprofit called the Center for Collaborative Education in Boston. And we are the convening organization for a group of schools in Boston called the pilot schools which are members of the district. And I'm going to talk about teacher unions in small school reform from that vantage point. I'll tell you a little bit about what pilot schools are and what some of the lessons are and some of the challenges that we face.

The pilot schools were created by virtue of teacher union contract in 1994, somewhat in response to first-time charter legislation in the state, with the intent of trying to keep the kids that they may lose within the district. And what pilot schools do is they essentially, through the teacher union contract, create a set of schools that are members of the school district, all the teachers are members of the union, but have full charter-like autonomy over budgets, staffing, curriculum, assessment, governance, school policies and time, both faculty and student time. So essentially, it's taking all the work conditions from the district-level union contract and placing them at the

school level, with each school negotiating their own work conditions with the faculty who choose to work there. So all faculty who work at the schools, they sign what's called an "election to work agreement" at that school, because in order to work there, they're choosing to give up the district work conditions and electing to buy into another set of conditions that are defined at the school level. In most schools, they're negotiated between the administration and faculty together.

And from our experience, these are schools with the same per pupil budget, same demographics, but on the whole, with a couple of exceptions, do far better than district schools. They have higher wait lists, higher attendance, lower transfers, lower grade retentions, higher graduation and college-going rates, higher achievement. And one way they do that is through having that autonomy over their resources. It's putting the CES principle essentially that those closest to kids should be making the decisions. And that's essentially what's behind that principle. So what they're able to do with it is with the same amount of resources they have lower class sizes, student-teacher loads of 60 instead of 120 and above, and longer instructional periods, greater amounts of faculty collaborative planning time.

And essentially one of our lessons, working both with pilot schools and with schools trying to be small in the regular arena, one of our lessons is: We worry that we're all engaged in incrementalist work in the small schools movement unless we bring teacher unions and the district together to create the conditions at the school level where professionals have maximum control over their resources.

So I'll quickly go into some of the challenges we face. So that's the big picture and some of the good stuff. The challenges we face is as we've gone along – by the way, we've increased from an original five schools to nineteen schools now in Boston, and from one percent of the student enrollment to ten percent of the student enrollment. So we're now a force that has to be reckoned with with the district, and brings it's own set of challenges. One is having a change in union leadership. The union president who crafted this concept retired. We have a new union president who doesn't — though supportive, has reservations about some of the construct. One, pushing for hour-for-hour pay above and beyond the contract hours that teachers work, because in most pilot schools teachers elect to work for additional hours, usually toward faculty planning time.

So that's one of the things. And as a result of that right now, the union isn't agreeing to endorse more pilot schools until we work out some of the union president's fundamental concerns about the contract language. That comes about because there's also worry at both the district and union level about reaching a certain tipping point. That five schools is okay. Nineteen [schools] and ten percent enrollment, with a whole hopper of schools waiting to come on board, because any school in which two-thirds of the faculty vote to go can turn pilot. So that puts pressure on the district, because basically the schools are saying we don't want to buy into the centralized reform, we want to decide on the reform ourselves. And teachers are saying, we're willing to forego work conditions in order to work in a different kind of school. That creates tensions and new kinds of discussion that need to be worked out.

Then the other one is, in some schools, just guaranteeing teacher voice and empowerment. In the language it didn't say how those conditions get worked out, so essentially you have to have benevolent administration that's committed to democratically working out those work conditions. And so what we're working with with the union right now is how to build in language that ensures a democratic and equitable process of figuring out those work conditions together. Not having it so it can be solely in the purview of the administration.

So a quick couple things about how we have tried to continue to massage and nurture the conversation. It's been extremely important to build a strong alliance with the teachers' union. So one of the things we did when the union was starting to get worried about the numbers of pilots: We made sure every pilot school had a teacher union rep elected and that they committed to being active in the union, getting on the contract committee, so that there could be a voice of pilot teachers and why they choose to work there as union members. Second, our board hosts the union twice a year for a luncheon just to share strategies, build strategies together. We've worked with them on how to move away solely from the centralized curriculum in the district and extending it to all schools. And then finally, trying to negotiate with them around these current concerns how to revisit the contract and build in that teacher voice in decision-making and to the work conditions. So we're doing behind-the-scenes negotiations with a group of pilot directors, pilot union reps, us and the union leader to figure that out, so that it's not played out in the public, and find a win-win situation for both the district and the union. So some of the challenges and victories.

Craig Gordon: I'm Craig Gordon and I'm a teacher at a small high school in Oakland called Mandela that is part of what used be Fremont High School, and I'll talk a little bit about how that happened in a moment. And I am also a site representative of the Oakland Education Association. It's kind of ironic that, representing the union, I may talk a little less directly for a lot of my opening remarks about the union, but also about the overall sustainability of these schools and the union's role.

I ran into somebody recently at an airport and we talked about what we did. When I said that I taught at a small school, she, as a lot of people often do, says, "That's great. Students need small classes." And I say, "No, small schools don't necessarily have small classes. I have 32 students in each class. And in small secondary schools teachers often must teach three or four different subjects, cutting into prep time for each class, because of the limited flexibility in program.

"So what's the point?" they often ask. I explain the potential advantages of small learning communities, the incredible teamwork and the small dedicated staff, like the one I work with. And small schools are supposed to reduce the total number of students one teaches daily to no more than 80 to 1, so teachers really get to know all of their students well.

"Well, that sounds great," they reply. But, unfortunately, Oakland's small high schools – the ones I know about – have 160 students per teacher, and if you count the advisory [class], then it could be up to 192.

I point out that small schools often are created by grassroots initiative that can unleash creative energy to improve education. "That makes sense," they say. But at my traditional high school,

when it was a large high school a few years ago, the District came in and said we had to break into small schools and anyone who objected could leave. Their rhetoric was and still is, you're either for this reform or for continued failure and inequity. Then the District implemented the same regime change in two other high schools and is now starting on the middle schools.

Now, long ago, a number of years ago, the Coalition for Essential Schools spelled out basic conditions of small school success. When the Oakland Public Schools steamrolled these principles, as I just described, some of us looked to CES's local affiliate – I don't know if that's the correct term, affiliate – which is the District's partner in small school creation, for help.

Instead of help, we met silence. It's not our place to take sides, said the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools. I wondered then and I still wonder how can one fight for equity in this fundamentally inequitable society and not take sides?

Many school reforms of the past forty years have produced progress in some areas for a limited amount of time. Then each reform has been elevated as a silver bullet and co-opted by an establishment not interested in real reform. To ignore this history dooms us to a new round of phony reform and cooptation.

We see the same regressive trend all over the country now: in Chicago the city's biggest corporate interests and the mayor are pushing the creation of 100 new small schools by 2010. In Milwaukee, Bill Gates hand-picked voucher-king Howard Fuller to lead small schools reform there. In Oakland, the state administrator Randolph Ward, got BayCES' support (according to the San Francisco *Chronicle*) as he shut down schools in poor neighborhoods over the protest of more than a thousand parents who came to token hearings where he claimed the schools had to be closed because they were too small and costly. Ward, an associate of the pro-charter Broad Foundation, then opened new small schools in their place.

Now the District is demanding, in our current contract negotiations, that all the new schools be exempted from broad areas of our contract, including class size limits and every other aspect governing teaching and learning conditions. Again BayCES claims that it can't take sides in this dispute, but justifies the District's position in the name of autonomy in small schools; never mind that nearly every other kind of small school autonomy is currently out the window.

And Oakland's small schools helped pioneer something called Results Based Budgeting or RBB. Instead of funding schools according to program needs and enrollment, RBB treats each school as a small business and ties funding to average daily attendance. Even this negative incentive will not erase the historic imbalance in attendance patterns between schools in richer and poorer neighborhoods, so RBB will exacerbate the inequity in our district. Our union may have to sue the District for violating *Brown v. Board of Education* in its creation of even more separate and unequal conditions. Eight years ago Oakland teachers struck and paved the way for class size reduction statewide. But if the District is successful in making small schools essentially union-free zones and converts the majority of Oakland's schools in the next few years, as it says it intends to, the most effective advocate for real equity and reform in Oakland will be crippled or destroyed.

The difference between this latest round of small schools creation and past co-optations of reform is that this time powerful interests are poised to inflict unprecedented damage in the grab for monumental profits. Small schools can promote improvements in student achievement, but they can also promote isolation from the larger community of schools. This is especially dangerous as the tidal wave of NCLB and privatization rolls closer.

One thing that reforms over the decades have had in common is a failure to increase funding for schools. As if all we need to do is rearrange the crumbs we've been given and we'll produce qualitative change, we just didn't realize it before. BayCES argues that after we prove that public education can be successful, then we'll get the resources our students deserve.

This is an illusion. Those demanding full educational funding to achieve equity are called unrealistic, but, in fact, claiming we can achieve equitable education – or even get close to it – without changing the distribution of resources and wealth is completely irrational.

Is it misguided to fight for full funding of education? Only if we believe that democracy is no longer possible. The Iraq war has cost (according to a website I've gone to called "Cost of War" and extrapolated from the cost to Sacramento), the cost of the war in Iraq to Oakland alone more is than \$170 million, enough to pay for another 3000 teachers for a year, and resistance to this criminality is sure to grow. But we also have tremendous wealth right here in Oakland, too. It's the 20th largest urban economy in the nation with a Gross Metropolitan Product of more than \$100 billion. The CEO of Oakland's own Clorox Corporation made \$31 million in 2002, enough to pay for 857 new teachers or a large chunk of the debt Oakland must repay at the expense of its students and staff for years to come. How long can this continue, this kind of outrageousness? To quote Frederick Douglass, "Find out what any people will quickly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them...The limits of tyrants are set by the endurance of those whom they oppress."

So in closing I just want to say that quiet collaboration and accommodation behind the scenes to spread small schools under conditions of austerity will meet the same dead end of past reforms. The promise of small schools should not divert us from the larger fight necessary to win fully-funded, equitable schools.

Steve Jubb: So when I asked Craig what kind of conversation we were planning on having, this is kind of what I guessed, and that's good, it's good. I told him I was perfectly happy and willing to engage, because I think we face a potential train wreck in the near future. A huge train wreck. And I have been, if not agreeable to Craig's position, I have been consistent in my vision for what I think the starting place has to be.

Which for us and for me, and I should say as background for some of you who don't know me, others do, I did start out my career as a teacher. And I also had a four year crash course in what it means to do real democracy focused on real outcomes for people, and the devil's in the details. I spent four years living and working in Cuba, 1982 to 1986, and found that the complexities of actually delivering on the promises of the revolution are an ongoing process. It was fascinating to see what equitable education looks like in Cuba with one of the highest literacy rates in Latin

America. And I felt it taught me a lot about where I wanted to spend my time. I wanted to spend my time on the devil-in-the-details part, because I feel that ideology will take you so far, protest will take you so far, and then there's some hard work to do. And my experience over the years as a person who is likewise, with Debby, who believes in strong unions and in union leadership of reform, my experience has taught me that it takes really, really, really hard work by the people working across the boundaries of our organizations and our neighborhoods to do what kids need us to do.

So when we started working in Oakland, we did, in many ways, model the work we've done off of the work that Debby had done and Dan had done, and we continue to believe in the power of relationships to unlock the labor resources that come when people are actually working in partnership as opposed to not.

So we have, in the history of the effort it's important to note, as many of you know, that instead of starting with a partnership with the teachers union as Dan had done, we actually started off our partnership with a community-based organization, Oakland Community Organizations. Many of you I see here are familiar with and probably know that story. For those of you who aren't, we were approached in 1998 by OCO and asked to help them create a small school. Twice that small school met with – and we were a small organization at the time, but had some history of helping to start small schools in other neighborhoods, other cities – and we worked with them, actually Mark Gordon, who's running around right over there (points to Mark Gordon) worked with a team of folks that wanted to start that school and twice it came down to a crucial meeting and, in both cases, between the lack of space, really, and lack of any sort of district support or lack of understanding with the teachers' union, as well, both times it was rebuffed.

And OCO then, some of you may remember this history, actually went out and tried, got a number of charters passed, implemented three of them, very quickly discovered, again, the devil is in the details. Just starting a charter school is no guarantee. In fact, the data on charter schools is very inconclusive about whether they actually elevate student achievement or not. However, they are often defended by the people who start them and then work in them, because they're their schools.

After that we started talking about a more systemic effort. And we started talking about pulling together teachers, organizing teachers, organizing parents, which was done over a period of time through the efforts of Liz Sullivan, an organizer for OCO, who isn't here with us today, but people who were around during that period are. And Liz found that many, many teachers were frustrated with the conditions that they were teaching in. And they were, to be honest, frustrated with the inability of anybody, their own bargaining unit or the district, to really take leadership, and found that the opportunities provided by the dialogue sessions, by the small schools working group sessions, gave them a chance to think about how they might do what many had read was done in New York and Boston. And that led to, as many of you know, the passage of a small schools policy in 2000 and the first wave of small schools.

Now I'd be understating it if I said that – and Greg was there and he knows (gestures toward school board member, Greg Hodge) – the district had the capacity to actually implement any sort of broad based, ambitious program. We had lots of support at the bottom and support from the top, but at that time in history, very little support in the middle in the actual district

infrastructure. And between the work with OCO and the work with BayCES we pretty much had to erect everything external to the district, and at that time we did engage with OEA. They appointed, they had official representatives on all of our committees that screened proposals, that reviewed proposals, that advanced those proposals to Dennis [Chaconas, then Oakland Unified School District Superintendent] for approval. And for a while it felt like we had done what we thought we had hoped we'd done, which was to be able to create a three-way partnership, not from everybody, but certainly a powerful organizing group in the community, a large number of teachers who really wanted to do this reform, and we had support within the central office.

And that process continued until a convergence of a number of other issues, which are, of course, the emergence of – first the possibility and then the reality – that there would be a deficit in Oakland. Secondly, the fact that most people, I think, when No Child Left Behind came out, imagined that it might get swept away in this election or that those things were so drastic and dramatic, that they wouldn't be real. And, in fact, as our schools went from, I don't know... How many of you are here from different states? (Several people raise their hands.) OK, I don't know how it's working in your state, but the federal guidelines really specify a set of ever-increasingly directive and radical sanctions for schools that fail to make what's called adequate yearly progress. And Oakland currently is facing 39 schools who, in the next few years, three years, will be into what they call year four, year five of program improvement, and are required by law to do one of a set of things that are in the law, including closing the school altogether, turning the schools charter, handing them over to private operators, uh, let's see what's the other one...

Deborah Meier: Handing them over to the state.

Steve Jubb: Handing them over to the state, but see, the state is already there. So it will be interesting to see how that actually works.

Deborah Meier: I think that's what the schools should choose. (Laughter.)

Steve Jubb: Yeah, right. So, I think, between the deficit and certainly there was a specter of massive layoffs, and right before Dr. Ward came on there was, that was the first time we (gestures toward Craig) had this conversation that "BayCES needs to stand with us." Many of those layoffs, many people were, as I was when I was a teacher, felt very insulted and disrespected by layoff notices. Who wouldn't? Fortunately not that many or any that I can recall actually got laid off, through retirements and a whole bunch of other things.

So during that time period our relationship with the union, even though our relationship certainly with Sheila [Quintana, OEA President until July 2004] and the members participating at our schools has always been, I would say, good, OEA did pull their representatives out of those committees then, at that point in time. And since then, it's been very challenging to try to create the same set of conditions whereby we could have an ongoing and positive dialogue about how to carry the work forward.

The other point I want to mention here is we start from the place of what children deserve and need, what we know about those conditions, and then we go out from there and say, well ok, where are those resources in the community, in the system. What are the ways in which those

conditions can be mustered in spite of all that we face? Because while many of the causes that individual organizations, groups of people, roles, sectors of the community have are just, what we have seen historically in Oakland and in other cities in California is that the hostility and the adversarial relationships become so endemic in the system that we begin to expect failure, and we begin to act on distrust, whether there is data or reality supporting that distrust or not. Then this pretty much drops the door on our ability to not sacrifice another generation of young people while we work diligently on these issues.

So we did create BayCES very purposefully, not in the same way that Dan created his organization; we didn't have those same set of conditions and opportunities. We actually positioned ourselves to be a partner as long as people were headed somehow in the right direction. We feel there needs to be in every community some organization, some ability, to transcend the changes in leadership, the changes in policy, the changes in relationship, and keep supporting people to move forward.

And so that's the nature of our disagreements around BayCES's role. So we have played that role. And you have to ask yourself, how does an effort get sustained over five superintendents? And I think that, while it may not always be popular, I think it is important that there be sustained technical assistance and support for people as they try to move through this situation. And we still maintain the same thing we've maintained since the beginning, which is that unless we find a way to work – I heard the privatization thing and the working against privatization. Let me assure you that privatization is both schools and the district. There's a common interest you share there. Because No Child Left Behind is not just an attack on public schools. It's an attack on public school districts.

So I think there is a place there for conversation and real dialogue and I hope and wake up every morning hoping that that dialogue will actually be based on evidence and based on a rigor of when we report things and say things, that we have done some due diligence about what we are saying. I do disagree with some of Craig's characterizations about the reform at Fremont. For example, where in the summer before we began our incubation year, we actually, hearing some of these issues, did a listening campaign and had an independent person come in and interview and talk to every single faculty member, crunched that data and put it back out to the faculty, and it showed that there was very strong support for these schools. So I'll stop there and hope that we have a rich dialogue.

Deborah Meier: Since I didn't take all of my time in the beginning, I want to just take a few, because there are a lot of things about, partly – I just said to Dan, "Why are we here?" (laughter) Maybe we should just go home. [Dan: We'll sit in the audience.] And some of you in the back may be wondering the same thing.

Some of the issues that the two of them have raised, however, actually have come up in Boston and will come up in any place that I know of. So there's something in this controversy here that doesn't have all the particulars in each place, but that's worth our attending to. And there are some larger principles involved that we all have to struggle with. You know – who said earlier –

you can have two very good principles and then what happens if sometimes in life is, are there times when one goes over the other? How do you deal with them when they are in conflict with each other? And this is a marvelous example of one where I have trouble.

But also hearing it, but less involved, I can hear some things that are easier for me to criticize from both perspectives. So when you [looks at Steve] say, “Well, we’re interested in the kids,” there is in that formulation an implication that teachers’ unions aren’t. And I just think we have to watch out our each saying, that we’re— I’m always suspicious when someone says, “I’m here representing the children,” as though there’s anyone who would ever get up and say, “I’m not.”

And I want, after all, kids to have a chance to grow up. I’m just as interested in grown ups as kids. I didn’t go into education because kids are more valuable than grown ups, because, as I keep reminding us when we get mad at grown ups, they, too, were once kids. I mean the point of kids is for them to grow up. [laughter] And when they’re grown up, I don’t think they’re going to have a very good world to become grown ups in if we don’t put unions— I mean that’s an ideological – I don’t know what you want to call it – conflict I can have with some people. I think that unions are too important to say— too important to our children and our futures. So I can’t solve this problem by deciding between you. And therefore I have to figure out what is the aspect of each of you that we have to take into account.

Now in Boston we have a conflict right now, because two schools were added to our pilot schools in a different way. Prior to that, all our pilot schools were to a large degree initiated from the bottom up, even though there were other conditions involved. Then the city decided to open two large new buildings and they opened three large new buildings and designated two of them as pilot schools. They were large buildings. And they said these two will be pilots. There were no teachers in them. There were no principals in them. They designated them pilot. Up to that time teachers had to vote to become pilot. But these two schools, there weren’t any teachers to vote. They said the building is a pilot, the building just voted. And then teachers were either excessed in – it was during a shortage period – but teachers came into these schools with no choice about being there. Or I guess they could have said, “I don’t want a job. I won’t go there.” So they came into these schools, which were then told they were broken up into smaller schools, so there were now six small pilot schools in Boston. [Looks at Dan] Am I saying anything wrong yet? Am I accurate so far?

Dan French: You’re on par— uh.. [laughter] I might throw in some nuances, but I think in general, yeah. [more laughter]

Deborah Meier: I’m just trying to get at the thing that I think is in common here that we’re facing, that’s shared.

So suddenly we’re faced with six small pilot schools whose teachers do not think they bought into this, whose principals, in some cases, do, and in some cases, less do, think they’ve bought into pilotness. Who didn’t have ahead of time a particular pedagogical idea about why they were going to be this kind of school or that kind of school. And this differs. In one of the schools the principal of the building is someone who is very close to the coalition principles (Dan says something indicating agreement), and in the other something totally different.

One of the teachers from our school became one of the sub-principals in the academies. She was suddenly faced with the fact that the teachers were required to put in five extra hours a week, which the teachers in our school do do. That's part of our agreement with each other. And we have figured out a way in Mission Hill School where they get some additional stipend for the extra time that they put in. But in these schools these teachers were told they had to put in five extra hours a week. They would get no extra funds for it. It was part of their being pilots, and they had no voice over what the agenda was for those five hours. One of the hours, according to the teacher who used to work our school, is the principal gives them a lecture. And the other four hours are for what sound to me like largely useful things, but not things the staffs at those schools decided to do.

So the head of the union there decides, on the basis of that experience and his own history and what not, to make a big issue about the overtime question. And people like the teachers in our school and the teachers that Dan represents are angry because they have voted to spend their time in a certain way, and now the union is mad at them. But on the other hand from his viewpoint I think that he's got a good argument. That if the status "pilot" simply becomes a way in which principals have more authority to decide what teachers must do and doesn't give teachers any authority over it, then it is simply a union busting tool, pilots.

And yet we need the friendship of Tom Payzant, who is the superintendent, and the system and we need the friendship of Richard Stutman, who is the head of the union. We need to worry about how this will play out in *The Globe*, which is our local newspaper. And I won't tell you how we resolved it, though maybe Dan wants to pick up on this. But I think there's the element, even though we're not a community organizing base, I think many of the same issues that you're both playing with are issues that we're seeing. So it would be nice if, in some way, we could use this time together not to fight out the Oakland issue, but to think about the larger conflict.

Dan French: I just want to add one very quick thing.

Craig Gordon: Before you do – and I want you to go – and I'm in kind of an awkward position, I'm obviously not a – what do you call it – a good faith broker here, but after you go, then let's try have a lot of comments from the audience, because we've used up a lot of the time.

Dan French: Yeah. One very quick thing, listening to the tensions here. My only comment would be that ultimately the folks that are within school, the folks who are going to have the most impact on kids, are the teachers. Teachers are members of unions. And so ultimately, I think, it calls for a strong partnership with unions and the district and the community organizations and organizations like ourselves to bring about the change. If unions are not in the equation, I think what happens in schools is going to be incremental.

Craig Gordon: (question asked, not fully audible)

Dan: No, if unions are not part of that equation, ultimately I think what occurs is going to be somewhat incremental. Regardless, I think, of where a teacher union starts from, you've got to meet them where it is and try to engage in those conversations that gets to a different place of mutual agreement.

Craig Gordon: OK, so how should we do this?

Greg Hodge (Oakland School Board member, who is in the audience): Can I make a suggestion? Can somebody in the room volunteer to facilitate?

Craig Gordon: That's a good idea.

Audience member: You do it, Greg. You're good at it.

(Someone else says Greg should ask his question or make his comment first.)

Craig Gordon: We had one school board member who was going to do it, so it might as well be you.

Greg Hodge: OK, well, tell you what. I will wear my participant hat for about a minute, and then I'll come up and try to facilitate. And I promise to be neutral. [laughter] So here's what I'm seeing. And I thought it was great that this actually took place. And I'm sorry if people who are here from other places, you feel like this is like two parents who are not getting along and the kids are having to watch it [laughter], it's kind of like that, right? For me, I really like the quote, Craig, you borrowed from Frederick Douglass, but again, history always gives us the nuances. Because Freddy Douglass, a great abolitionist, a great orator, fell out with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the suffrage movement, right? Because the question became, "Do we fight for women to get the vote? Do we fight for black men to get the vote?" And the answer should have been, "Yes." It shouldn't have been women or black men or women and black people, it should have been: yes.

So in some ways the conversation is more about, like could we stipulate to some things like: This is about kids. You know, Deborah's comment, right? And our schools are failing, by and large, most kids. And particularly kids of color and kids whose families live at or below the poverty line or working class parents. Number two: That we've got to have some kind of change that has maybe some of these features. We got to decentralize the critical decisions that central offices used to make and devolve them down to the sites. That the site has got to be involved in it, so teachers, principals, parents, students, anyone who's working at the site ought to get some of that power.

Interestingly about our debate in Oakland, the Results Based Budgeting, if you'd have asked people about this three or four years ago, they'd have called it something different, they would have called it Site Based Management. And the elements of Site Based Management that everybody supported, including the unions in my recollection, was that we wanted people at the site level to have more decisions. The question is: How? The question is that it is the devil in the details.

The second point is that public school financing in California is inadequate, period. We're 41st in the country in per pupil spending. So we're fighting locally over the crumbs we get from Sacramento, while Arnold Schwarzenegger says he's not raising taxes, the Democrats are losers, he doesn't want to work with folks. That's where the battle is in a lot of ways, in terms of public school financing.

And then lastly, central office has to be reformed to be able to support whatever good innovation happens out in the community at school sites. And the central office, as we currently know it, in my opinion, is obsolete. And so we've got to figure out what does that look like.

So the big question for me are: What strategies do we use to get more resources? What partnerships will serve our children's interests the best? And I mean real partnerships. And how do we get beyond blame, rhetoric, insult, distrust and outmoded strategies that typically include protest or demonstration or yelling at each other across the dais at school board meetings and other places, how do we get past that stuff and deal with the real issues at hand?

So that's my comments and if you still want me to facilitate, I will. (laughter and applause)

OK. How much time do we have left?

Craig Gordon: About 50 minutes.

Greg Hodge (from here on, acting as facilitator): OK, well here's what I'd like to do. I'm going to call on three or four hands at a time. I promise I won't editorialize anything. If you have someone up here you want to answer your question, fine, then say that person's name. And I'm going to ask folks, in the interest of time, to make it more of a question and a quick comment than a soliloquy like I just did. (laughter)

OK, there's Bill Balderston, there's the gentleman here in the middle, and then there's Ben Visnick.

Bill Balderston: Thank you, Greg. And Greg has been the recipient of my yelling at times.

Greg Hodge: And it's good natured.

Bill Balderston: It's good natured. We've also had some very productive discussions.

I also teach in Oakland. I teach at another high school that has recently been divided into small schools. And I'm going to try to stay away from the specificity of some of that and look at what I think are some of the broader issues. And one is, and this, to me, is something not simply endemic to small schools, but to the broader reform movement. Is that in trying to adjust to the needs of our members – and I'm talking as somebody on the Executive Board of the union – we're very concerned that people buy into things where they're promised things that can't be maintained over a long period of time. That is, they are built on soft money. The person who was the previous superintendent— well, was the last superintendent in Oakland, Dennis Chaconas – when we first spoke with him we discussed this issue. And we said that the tail is wagging the dog here. And he said that won't happen here. But then all of a sudden, Gates money came in, and a very different tone was set. And I know that that's not unique in Oakland. That's something that increasingly is a national issue.

And so when schools are given certain authority to make decisions based either on allocating soft money or cutting back, it seems to me that's a warped kind of democracy. That is, it's deciding whether you'll cut this index finger or this thumb. And that's one of the conundrums we face. Not that we don't – If it was a different context of what's going on, I think many people would be less suspicious. But it's specifically, we know there's a downsizing of public education in this country. We know there's marginalization of urban working class youth, especially youth of color. And so when certain reforms are raised by those who say they're for these young people, and yet we don't see them addressing some of these other issues, I think that's where the tension arises.

Greg Hodge: So, Bill. One of your colleagues is saying two minutes.

Bill Balderston: I'll stop there.

Greg Hodge: And I definitely don't want to do that two minute thing, you guys, because you know I don't like doing that anyway. But did you want a response?

Bill Balderston: The question is, I assume in Boston similar things are happening, that some of this is based on soft money. And it seems to me, is there any way around this conundrum?

Dan French: I will say I agree with you that small schools should not be built on soft money. They should be built on total restructuring of the system. So in pilot schools you get one lump sum figure. Instead of your budget of staffing allocations, everything is computed in terms of lump sum per pupil budget. As well, there's about 400 bucks per pupil in central office discretionary items that you can say either I want those services or no, I don't want those services, they get added to my budget, and we'll spend them the way we please, thank you. And that is the fundamental formula upon which pilot schools are built. They were never built on soft money. And so I totally agree with you. It has to be about fundamentally restructuring this system to place as many resources as possible, with as much flexibility as possible at the school site where teachers, administrators and parents decide on how those resources are used that's to best advantage kids.

Deborah Meier: There's just one other similarity I just wanted to mention is the state of Massachusetts not only has a Republican governor, but the head of the Department of Education in the state is a leading member of a real right wing, anti-public education think tank. And so are the majority of the board members in Massachusetts. And, like you, you're right, we tell kids to do this, why wouldn't we tell ourselves to do it, that we have to pay attention to who is funding reforms, who's behind them, what other agendas they have. That doesn't mean we have to have a reflex reaction. Sometimes I'm happy to take money away from my enemies to use for good, but we, at least, have to be aware of the state of conditions in this country. And there's absolutely no question that the President of the United States would like to get rid of the National Education Association, the NEA, and as you know, he considers it a terrorist organization. I have to take that into account when I'm looking at the battles, and it makes it harder. But if we assume that the people in this room, and I really do believe, have good intentions, we should

realize we're all struggling with this in some way or other and trying to figure out from our own organizational viewpoint how to put this together in the best way.

Dan French: Last quick thing which I'll say, which Steve reminded me, is that people don't give up power easily. And particularly at the district level they don't give up power easily. And so when pilot schools were first created, it was a nice idea to deal with an immediate problem of charter schools, but I think, in their minds, planned obsolescence. So all the pilot schools – the original five – were struggling on their own, doing individual negotiations with the district and losing most of those battles. It was when we came along and sat down with the pilot schools and said, "We are getting beaten up. How about if we formed one collective union, and we will be your advocate and we tell the district from now on if you want to negotiate around anything, we negotiate as one voice at the table." That's when we started making gains and really getting the full maximum autonomies that we now have.

Greg Hodge: There's a gentleman here, then we're going to Ben, and then one, two and three. And then we'll make another round. And, Bob, what you just did (signaling time to Greg) was great. And I'm asking again that people stay as brief, and try to put a question or comment out there quickly, so as many people as possible – but I got a timekeeper over here, and I'm not going to tell you how much time he's giving you, but, go. And tell us who you are.

Jack Gerson: My name is Jack Gerson. I teach at what used to be Castlemont High School, and I teach at Leadership Prep High School, one of three small schools that Castlemont's been broken into. And I'm the OEA site rep at my school.

Unlike Bill, I will give a few specifics before making a general point. And one of the specifics relates to the question of soft money. Of the three schools at Castlemont, one of the schools has gotten a fairly substantial amount of [soft] money. That school has been able to give laptop computers to every teacher and train them, to give them a PDA, Blackberries, for everyone who is familiar with them, for downloading email, has renovated many of the classrooms and this year should get another million dollar grant to do a full renovation of the school. It has new textbooks, new equipment, has much smaller class size than do the other schools. One of the schools, the school I teach in, is in the opposite situation. It's terribly under-funded, it's undergoing consolidation of positions, in the past two weeks we've had at least five substitutes, out of fifteen or so positions, teaching our classes in the academic subjects.

Now, I could go on about conditions which are horrendous and unsanitary there, but what I want to talk about is the lack of equity that comes from the way in which the soft money is distributed, which is being perpetuated in these schools, and which I'm afraid is going to continue if more schools are broken up in this way in Oakland. So I'd like to hear about that and how you plan to get equity from that.

And I have to give a few of the specifics. When the schools were broken up, French was eliminated. Castlemont always had French. We have no course in French now, because none of the small schools felt that they could fund it. The library, well, I'll say it's virtually unusable, only because some will point to it and say, well, there's a library. There's a library like if I put a little sign in my classroom over a little bookcase saying "Library." It's not usable and it's not used by classes. In a school which had drive-by shootings and is well known to be in a violent area with a lot of violence, we lost 25% of our security guards.

There are redundancies which occurred because of lack of resources, so the second question is: Don't you think, and this is to Steve Jubb, that it's essential that your organization join in a fight for more resources and for more resources where they can be found? How can these reforms succeed without more resources? How can you have small schools with larger class size and fewer resources, without supplies? So will you join with us in that?

Greg Hodge: Alright. So, I don't know, Steve you want to address that, or anyone on the panel that wants to address the question that was in that.

Steve Jubb: So there's a lot of components to your question. Most of the money that has been used from the money that we have secured is used for training, development, opportunities for people to go see other schools. It's because there's so many difficulties around the restrictions of state money that this has been the most flexible money that schools have had.

The other issue is, particularly in schools, but not – Castlemont's a different case in point – but schools that start up a grade level at a time. There are extra costs associated with starting that way. Many schools have had to deal with that. We call them start up costs.

There are some schools that have used some of – actually, it's a very small percentage, I think we can provide you actually with this information, if you'd like. Marilyn?

Marilyn: I think the school that you're referring to is associated with the Napa small schools. Isn't that the school?

Steve Jubb: Yeah, I was going to talk about that.

Jack Gerson: You mean the school that has the money.

Marilyn: It's not money that came through a BayCES grant, but I think Steve should explain that.

Steve Jubb: And I can actually get you the percentage of the money that actually went to some kind of staffing. It's very, very small. Most of the money, as I say, went to these other things, and I saw some people nodding their heads, because they know. And, again, we can look at the budgets together and we can talk about that.

The particular case in point is that part of what we have tried to do, because we are in such a situation of lack of resources and lack of opportunities to find new things and learn new things, we've been very entrepreneurial in trying to connect people with different sources of support. So many, many, many of the schools have partnerships with local agencies, statewide agencies or, in this case, this is the Napa New Technology Foundation, which is doing what they call a replication. So what we did was we made the marriage, and then it was a matter of the school leadership making that connection. So we do that whenever and however we can on behalf of all schools.

Now it is a serious problem, the inequities that sometimes get formed, because some people are very entrepreneurial and get those things and some people are not. Our position has always been it's better to get and then try to backfill and get from somewhere else, than to say, well, if everybody can't have it, then nobody can have it, which has been the stance that we've taken for many, many, many years.

So we have varied connections for our schools. Met West, which is a small alternative school, has a relationship with The Big Picture company in Providence, Rhode Island, again, that provides them not so much with money but a lot of technical support that otherwise would have cost money. So that is why the situation that you see exists.

Deborah Meier: In New York City, where I used to work, there was a period in which the chancellor, for the reasons that you're describing, said that no school could raise any money for anything – and we had districts – unless the districts could distribute it evenly. And, of course, the result was that all parents associations stopped raising funds for anything. Now the motivation behind it was good, that the schools in rich neighborhoods, the parents were able to, when there was a budget cut, get the money to keep class sizes small, keep the librarian. And there's one school that runs a wonderful fair and raises a lot. People said, well, you could run a fair, too. But it was easier to run a fair if you were on the fancy, chic white West Side, while I was on 106th Street in East Harlem. If we'd said fine let's have a fair in our back yard, we'd have made 100 dollars and they'd have made 100,000 dollars each Saturday.

So the dilemma, it's like some of the segregation debates to me. You can rule in favor of equity in one sense and lose out everything, or you can not worry about it so much, then you have inequities. But I think it's vital for us to all realize where this is happening and make it public and clear, so the schools are not doubly penalized when they're not getting anything. That is, they're penalized because they're not getting it, and then people point a finger at them and say, look, your results aren't as good as they are over there. I could wait a little while, until I get my goods, but I can't wait if meanwhile you're blaming me.

So I think we have to figure out a way in which we can play this game together, so that the pain— When I would go visit some West Side schools from East Harlem, I mean I really wanted to murder them. I would be so angry at things they were proud about. Of course, I would love to do that, but I haven't got the resources in East Harlem that you have on 65th Street and 5th Avenue. And it's not fair then to show this, as though how clever you were that your kids all could pass this test and how clever you were that you could give kids high class sports

and music and dance and so forth, as though there was something about us in our school, we didn't have high enough expectations and that's why we were doing those things.

Greg Hodge: Craig.

Craig Gordon: I just want to say that it's not really about not taking money from Bill Gates or the Carnegie Foundation or any other group, any rich corporate group that's giving money. That's not the point. The point is really about not succumbing to illusions. And not being sidetracked again. And small schools are not a side track in the way that they were initially done and the reasons for which they were done by the people who created them. And they contain a lot of the elements, when done right, for student success. But so do a lot of other reforms that have been made in the past. I mean, very powerful and important progressive reforms.

The problem is, and I think this is what Jack was getting at, we have to recognize that the one thing – and I said this earlier – that all of these reforms ignored in the past, because they sell themselves short or they're afraid that it's impossible to get it, is the demand for really full funding for the kind of resources that we need. And it's not talking about a little bit more, a program here, a program there. We're talking about a permanent, full funding. I have in mind multiplying the kind of money we get several-fold at least, because we have a huge job. And it's not going to be accomplished by – We will have some small schools, there are many examples, and I was just at a meeting in Chicago with some people who were from El Puente, which I'm sure [Deborah] you're familiar with in New York, and they seem like they're incredible people. I'm not familiar with what they're doing, except that I know that people in these small schools succeed, because usually they're true to the principles, for one thing, that they're founded upon, which is not happening at a lot of schools in Oakland, and because, like in Oakland, there are some really amazing people who just drive it and make it work in spite of the conditions.

But then a lot of them fall short, because people are human. And the fact is, we can't depend upon, we're not going to take to scale a reform that depends upon those unique human beings who I admire. I'm a good teacher. I think I could be a great teacher under the right conditions. I think very few teachers are great teachers under the conditions, I mean they're great for what they're dealing with. But they have to spend so much time dealing with, "I have to sweep up my classroom, I have to chase down a mouse that's running through my room, I've got to—" I mean all the kinds of things that you have to do. And I think that under the right conditions good teachers could become great teachers, and average teachers could become good teachers. That's what we have to fight for.

And I think people assume, well the money's not there. They're fooled by the illusion when the people who run this society have billions of dollars to spend on war, billions of dollars to squirrel away in the corporations and spend privately. We believe, somehow buy into that that's not ours, that we don't have a right to demand that. That's what we're saying. We've got to get over that hump. And that's why in Oakland, one of the things that we're going to start to do – it's not against small schools, we'd love to continue to have small schools; it's got to be done with the resources that they need to succeed. Otherwise, we just kind of get suckered into believing a promise that is not going to come true, and we wait another generation.

Dan French: Very quickly. One of the things that I think builds strong coalitions is when you look for natural points of alliance. And I think the issue of budget cuts is a natural point of alliance between organizations like ours and teacher unions. Boston and Massachusetts have suffered two years of double digit budget cuts. The first year we went to the union and said how about if we form a statewide coalition around the budget cuts, bring in other unions, community groups, which was a way to get community groups allied with the teacher union. We did. We held press conferences at the state house, etc. Now I won't say it's all because of that, but certainly one contributing factor to [the fact that] there was some budget relief that then got – not to restore the double digit budget cut but – restored some of that back in the months that followed. To me that's a natural point of alliance between organizations like the one that I represent and teacher unions.

Greg Hodge: OK. The hands I got right now are Ben, Ken, Dave – I think it's Dave – and the young lady with the gray shirt, and then we start another round, one, two, three, something like that. And particularly folks that are from other places, if you feel a little reluctant to get in this, it's OK, raise your hand, get in. Because I know most of the folks so far have been from Oakland. OK, Ben.

Ben Visnick: First of all, I think it's important that we recognize Craig Gordon and Steve Jubb. I was there at the BayCES office when both of them sat down and came up with this flyer (announcing this session). This really is the beginning of a dialogue that is critical to our future, so I wanted to say that.

I also want to offer a full disclosure here. I'm the President of the Oakland Education Association, the teachers' union. And I think it's appropriate Boston and Oakland are both in the American League. (laughter) Although since 1972 the A's have won four World Championships. (laughter)

Dan French: How about since 2004? (laughter)

Ben Visnick: But I also grew up in Boston and attended Boston Public, not the TV show. I went to Chittick Elementary School in Hyde Park, the Lewenberg Junior High in Mattapan and the Latin School. And I know both Mike Contompasis [Boston Public Schools deputy superintendent] and Rich Stutman [head of the Boston teachers' union]. So I definitely think the Oakland connection with Boston needs to be strengthened, because we need to compare notes, the union, the [Center for Collaborative Education in Boston], because I think there are a lot of similarities between the two cities.

My point and my question here is: Who is the horse and who is the rider in all this small schools stuff. I just read that Bill Gates, who's given a lot of money to small school reform, was defeated, thankfully, in Washington state, the Washington Education Association defeated Bill Gates (applause), who was sponsoring a charter initiative in Washington state. So when we take money from Bill Gates, what his view is of the future of public education or the lack of public education, when you take this money, I'm not saying there's always specific strings attached, but

we're dealing with people who have really a vision that is counter-posed, I think, to what most of us believe in here.

The other thing, we have Broad in Oakland, the Broad Foundation. Now these people started out as liberal Democrats. I talked to John Perez, who is the president of the LA teachers' union. They defeated Broad in LA. What Broad is doing now is he's coming up out of LA, and I won't mince words, I think these people are vultures and parasites. They feed on the carcass of poor school districts in California. You look at the districts, folks, who have been taken over by the state. It started with Richmond – if any of you who know California – Valejo, Oakland, Fresno is a possibility. I just heard Eastside San Jose. What do these districts have in common? And what is the motivation of the soft money people who come in specifically to these districts that are in desperate shape? And what is this district going to look like five years from now? So these are the questions we need to ask. The basic question is, who is the horse, who is the rider, how do we get real reform and not be used – and I say used – by these soft-money philanthropists who have their own agenda, but it's not to strengthen the basic structure of public education.

Greg Hodges: Does anyone want to respond to that?

Deborah Meier: I have no answer to that. I like the part about Boston and Oakland banding together. And I know a family out on the west coast. I'd be glad to come out and consult with you.

Dan French: What I will say very quickly – because we get Gates money too – is that I think all foundation money is dirty money if you trace it back to its source. You don't make huge amounts of money to give away if it's not dirty in some way. So you always got to accept that money with your eyes wide open and with the understanding that the only reason why I'm taking this money is to use it for my beliefs and principles and purposes. So I'll leave it at that, that ultimately it comes down to how you use that money to foster progressive, equitable and democratic reform. And that it's not used to usurp – as you said – usurp the system.

Ben Visnick: Look at Boston Latin School. They raised a hundred million dollars, folks. This public, quasi-charter school now raised a hundred million dollars. And why can't we say, when these schools go out and raise this money, whether it's one million or a hundred million, tax that money, let's distribute that money equitably throughout the whole public school district. We're not saying to that school, no you can't fundraise, right? If Viacom –

Greg Hodges: You're saying some method for spreading it around...

Ben Visnick: – great, whoever can give you five million, but the point is, let's put a string to it and say, yeah you want to give to the Latin School, you've got to give the same amount to all the schools in Boston.

Greg Hodge: OK, so we got Craig and then we have several other people who want to get in.

Craig Gordon: I'll be brief, but I just want to say that – I'm trying to remember what I was going to say. In terms of working with these foundations or working with the school district, with people who are in places, who are not in the classroom, who are not working really close to the ground in this, it's not a matter of you shouldn't try to take money from the foundations or work with the superintendent or anybody else in power. But's that why you have principles. You establish principles, not because they're moral –

Deborah Meier: P-a-l or – l-e-s? [principals or principles?]

Craig Gordon: L-e-s. Like the principles of how those schools will work. That they need to be run democratically. When people bring that up it's not because they're trying to be purist – “Well, it's not good, because it's not democratic, because we know that democracy is good for its own sake” – It's because it's what maintains a process that's honest and really does serve, that works. Not only it works for the students, but we're often seeing a dichotomy between what's for teachers, what's for students. Generally, we're in the job because we're trying to succeed, and what we're frustrated with usually is the conditions that make it impossible to succeed and that burn us out. So it's really about sticking with those principles.

And so, Steve, you mentioned that the first time I contacted you being when the state administrator came in. It was really much earlier than that. It was when it [the break up into small schools] started at Fremont. I said, look, aren't these supposed to be [from the] ground up, they're doing it top down. And it's so wrong, and it's so obviously not going to be beneficial. And that's where the rubber meets the road. That's when you see whether or not you're being used or you're maintaining control of the process. And if you're supposed to be shepherding a process that's really progressive, you have to tell the district and Gates that it's going to be done the right way or we're going to speak out against it. That's what this is about today, I hope, is talking about we have to keep this honest and we have to be forthright.

Greg Hodge: Steve, and then we're going to take one, two, three, four.

Steve Jubb: What's driving me crazy here a little bit, and I'm trying to avoid not just have this be a back and forth. But I really would like us to have some dialogue with some real data and have it not be so rhetorical. And, for example, we do an annual survey of our teachers in our schools that show high levels of satisfaction, high levels of collegiality, high levels of believing that it's a better environment for them to teach in. Not that there aren't issues, of course there are issues.

Furthermore, the assertion that Fremont – Fremont was a very messy process, there's no doubt about that. It was very messy. And there's a lot of disagreements. And I think what happens is often we extrapolate from our own experience the experience of others. I've talked to dozens and dozens and dozens of teachers at all of the schools, big, small, whatever. And it is ludicrous, at best, to characterize that all Oakland teachers are of a single mind about these things. There's lots and lots of disagreement. There is lots and lots of feelings all across the map that some voices are being heard and some voices are not, not unlike other areas of our life. And I think that one of the reasons that I said let's do this session, one of the reasons I said, Ben and Craig,

we'll keep meeting on a monthly basis, because I feel the only way we're going to get through now is to begin to, really begin to have some, both some willingness to stay in the conversation to really try to air our differences, but then go beyond that to develop a common fact base: a common base of understanding that says, here's the evidence. This is what you teach people to do when your in schools, this is what we hope to teach people to do in our schools is to really question our own assumptions about things.

As a teacher, I can spot rhetoric and my question I always ask is, what's the plan? What are you actually thinking about doing? On what data and what evidence is that plan based, and how will you bring the constituencies together to achieve that? I mean saying you're not for increased funding in education is like saying you're not for kids. All of us have worked toward that all of our lives. Again, the devil is in the details. Hard work requires detailed, complicated work. Which is, I think, many of us are willing to use these dialogues as a basis to resolve these problems, but only if we can get beyond the characterization of foundations or whatever in these kind of rhetorical ways, and really start saying, "OK, what is the evidence on which we're basing these assessments?" And then move from there.

Greg Hodge: Alright. Ken?

Ken Epstein: Ken Epstein, teacher, adult education. I have a question for Steve. My concern is that this discussion so far doesn't really deal with the different situation under which we're operating in the last two years. Within the context of state control, do decentralization, Results Based Budgeting really mean anything in terms of increase democracy or increased decision-making at the sites? My experience is that the sites, and particularly principals, have dramatically, incredibly less influence over the decisions. So under any new form of organization, the way we reshuffle it and reorganize it, we may have smaller schools, we may have more resources, but I don't see democracy increasing. And the issue of equity is not worked out by an equitable plan, it's worked out through give and take arguments. It's worked out when you have a democratic school board and people fight – People always talk about how they hated school board, because – but that's where democracy was worked out. So how are we going to work out this equity where there's no forum to do it? And how are we going to move forward to really having democracy in a context where— I don't see it happening and I don't see that the new organizational structure wants any of it.

Greg Hodge: Let me ask Steve to respond to it and then anybody else – Debby or Dan or Craig – also want to respond to that same question. I'm sure there's probably some similar example in Boston or New York or somewhere else around the country that you've seen in regard to this. And we've got about fifteen minutes left. Steve, you want to try to address that, and then we'll try to catch these last three or four questions, and I see we have some women in the room who haven't had a chance.

Craig Gordon: Maybe we should – I'm going to hold my comments for a while to see if we can get some of these –

Greg Hodge: I'll tell you what. Why don't we do this: one person respond to this and then we'll go to the next question, the young lady in the gray, and Dave, and then I think I had a hand here and then, is it Kevin? Steve, sorry. Oh, I'm sorry, Dave was next then.

Steve Jubb: So I'll just say really briefly, because I want to hear more of what other folks have to say. Again, it's very across-the-board what different schools are saying about Results Based Budgeting and its impact. It has not been implemented very well, which is something that our colleagues at the district, they'll tell you that. We have very, very serious infrastructure issues. I mean huge infrastructure issues at the central office level, which I'm only now learning more than I ever wanted about just how deep those things are. The fact that we can't seem to figure out, still, how much money we actually really have at any given point... It's astounding on the one hand, but actually not unusual for urban school districts at all.

So I'll tell you, Ken, that I am extremely hopeful, though, about the possibilities. Results Based Budgeting – forget the name – it's the same lump sum budgeting that Dan is talking about. That's where this practice comes from. Which is not specific— I'm not blaming it on you, Dan. But it is the same practice. Dan's organization, just to be clear, is in many ways, in effect, almost like a mini-district with its schools. That's not the way we have positioned ourselves, because it wasn't any sort of possibility for that here. So, Ken, my answer is it will be nice to see it more fully implemented, because I think part of the experience we had, particularly in the initial cohort of schools, was that they spent money much more wisely and intelligently than centralized budgeting.

Greg Hodge: I'm sorry, so the order is actually Dave, and then, what's your name? Jennifer. Janet and Steve. And if we have any more time, we'll get these last ones in.

David DeLeeuw: I'm David DeLeeuw, and I've been a teacher and a leader of a small learning community at Oakland Tech for eighteen years. And I'm also an OEA site rep. And when I came into teaching, the Coalition of Essential Schools was my idea of what kind of school I wanted to do.

So I want to make a couple of very big picture points. First one I want to make is, what a difference austerity makes. Steve says it's the same system. I say, yeah, on paper it's the same system, but it really isn't the same thing. That is, doing it now is poisoning the well, quite simply. Because what teachers' experience of what this lump sum budgeting is, is it's a disguised way to make them decide how to make the cuts. And we all know that's what's going on in Oakland schools. And, so you see, that means for a generation the teachers who don't know, who aren't here, who haven't been in this dialogue, are poisoned against this idea and will be. And that's a horrible result, because, you're right, there are possibly positive things to be done with that in a different context.

So the first thing I want to say is that austerity is what divides us. Let's be clear. Yeah, fights against budget cuts are the most concrete symbol of our alliance, because under conditions of austerity we cannot help some dividing of ways that we could help under the context of a little more resources.

Second thing, though, is Steve you started your remarks with something I thought you were going to follow on and hoped you would, which is about if we don't do something there's a huge train wreck in our future. And I want to say that that's the other big picture issue here. Which is that there is an assault on American public education, and those of us with this perspective on it who look at that go, "Hey, this does not look very good." Our teachers' unions are not strong enough, organizations that are promoting reform are still tiny and incremental, none of us looks to be in a position to prevent the train wreck. However, that said, I will say that I think we have to work to protect public schools. That means we have to work to support public education teaching as an attractive career. Forget about our little schools. Let's look at the big picture. If we don't want American education to fail, we have to stand up for that.

And that brings me to the last point, which is, Steve, you asked for data, so I'll give you data on something I do know about. Which is that, if you'd asked me a few years ago, there were quite a lot of people in my union who were really in favor of small schools and were active union reps and positive about the union. And what I will say quite concretely is that those ranks have shrunk dramatically over the couple of years of austerity and the changes, particularly with what happened at Fremont and Castlemont. The other schools now have deep distrust of the new small schools. Most of my fellow teachers feel like this is an attempt to use soft money to undermine their position. And, again, this is a horrible result. This is the context I teach in and continue to try to keep my program alive in. It's not a favorable one. It's not favorable to lots of people within the schools who wish both of these movements well.

And so my big comment is that those ranks of people who are in the union and who support small schools and school reform have shrunk. And I want to say, in the train wreck that's coming, unless there are a lot of people within the teachers' union who support these ideas, small schools will be too incremental and too – We will be the flotsam and jetsam of what results, and we will be fighting against the charters for our lives. And so that's the other big picture thing, is that if we want to have any chance of a good outcome, we need to build the number of people who feel at home in both of those environments and can try to support both those sets of principles.

Greg Hodge: Thank you, Dave. What I'm going to do is take these next couple of hands. That was a comment, and what we'll do at the very end is give everybody on the panel a chance to respond to respond to Dave's comment or any other general, ideas, comments or observations that are put on the table. Jennifer.

Jennifer: I'm the daughter of a union worker, and it was because he was in a union that I got the privileges to go on to college. And I worked in my teachers' union for about four years very intensely, and now I am an administrator at a small school.

Greg Hodge: In Oakland?

Jennifer: No, in Portland, Oregon. (Laughter, appreciation expressed to hear someone from another city.) I'll say that as a history teacher I see this as a crisis time in our history for unions and for public education. And it benefits us all for unions to maintain, it adds to opportunities in

our democracy, and public education ensures our democracy. And as I sit here I just get so sad as I hear us all who are for the same things fighting each other. I have to tell you that, yes, we hear –

Ben Visnick: This is light –

Jennifer: I know, I get that. (laughter) But I also understand, and we hear more and more, it's not enough funding. Ladies and gentlemen, until we start acting differently, I don't know anyone who's going to give us more funding, because if I were not an educator and listening in on this and someone who identified as a taxpayer and didn't know really all that we know very well, listening to this, it's not looking good. So until we begin acting differently, because I've really tried to listen to you, and some of you, from your body language, didn't look like you were listening.

And so, as I work on myself, and we all work on ourselves in education, just be cognizant of that. Because, you know what, I do not believe it's going to be when we have better funding that we can teach better. It's on us now. We are culpable for that now. I take ownership that if this doesn't work, it's on me. And I have to explain to someone, I was there, I lived at the time when it was a critical – when unions, whether they would continue on in this country or not – I mean, if it's going to happen, it's going to be in this country for this world, when public education was on the brink. And you know what? I didn't listen enough and wasn't aware of what was going on in my mind enough to make it so that we could work together.

And, I'm no longer a young lady, because today, I'm thirty. (applause)

Greg Hodge: Well, you're young-er than me, so— Thank you, Jennifer, so much for coming. And Janet.

Janet: Jennifer, can I talk to you before you leave, because I'm from Portland, too.

And this might be rhetorical, but I went to the pre-union meeting the other day and I left really charged, because I'm very active with my local union and the state union in Oregon, and just starting to get involved with the national union movement.

My high school is a brand new high school and we're one of the eight recipients of that huge OSSI (Oregon Small Schools Initiative) grant*. And the school was started with the idea of academies. Yay, great. So here we have nine hundred thousand dollars to spend, not on computers, not on hiring more staff – all my classes are over 40, 48 to 1, 48 to 1, 44 to 1 – and I'm wondering, am I – and my colleagues – are we wasting time developing these new

* The Oregon Small Schools Initiative is a 5-year, \$25 million statewide program to start “innovative new high schools that promise to increase student achievement, particularly among students of color and those from low-income homes.” Employers for Education Excellence (E3), founded in 1996 by the Oregon Business Council, leads OSSI with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Meyer Memorial Trust.
http://e3oregon.org/small_schools/index.html

paradigms in education if we're still dealing with a 1950s, we're-educating-all-white-students mentality that the town outside of Portland, not Portland, and the school board and the superintendent, who all gave lip service and signed off on this grant— But here I've got four other high schools in the district. They're all huge comprehensive high schools. We have this one special thing: What's going to happen in three years when our grant is up? Are we going to go back to being a large comprehensive high school? Or what?

So, this is what I'm wondering: Should I spend my time proving what small schools can do? Should I be collecting lots of evidence? I'm still teaching 48 kids in an English class. Does somebody really expect that I'm going to be able to get to grammar when I'm working on democracy in my classroom? And social justice? What's going to be my priority and what's going to impress people enough that they think that this is valuable?

Greg Hodge: Any response? We only have a couple of minutes, OK. Steve, you get the last comment or question. We're going to hear from the panelists, sorry that's all the time we got.

Steve Miller: I'm Steve Miller. I teach at Life Academy in Oakland. We were the first small high school in the first wave. And I think that Mr. Hodge's analogy with the abolition period is very important. Abolitionists were accused of being absolutely impractical. All they could talk about was that slavery had to be abolished. "Well, we can't do that. How can we do that?" Especially after 1856 when the presidency, the Congress and the Supreme Court were firmly in the hands of the slaveholders, and they appeared to be riding to total dominance. And yet four years later the Civil War broke out, led and inspired by the action of the abolitionists.

So we're not going to get anywhere trying to piece an old system together. We're going to do the best we can. We're going to struggle as best we can. But the train wreck is most definitely coming. UC Berkeley estimates that in three years two to three thousand schools in California will be sold off for charters. That's the train wreck, and that's just the beginning of the train wreck. So we're going to try our best and we're all going to struggle, but really we have to fight forward. You can't fight back to the old system back [to] the way it was. We have to fight forward for something different. And we all have part of that picture. We all can put it on the table, but we're going to have to be a lot bigger thinking and avoid this kind of small thinking that we always get trapped into.

So that was my comment.

Greg Hodge: OK, great. Let's do this. We're going to give each person up here a minute to wrap up. Bob, you did a great job giving us the time check. Thank you. Give me a time check when they hit the one minute mark. And I'm going to ask Craig to start, then Steve, then Dan and we're going to end with Debby.

Craig Gordon: Yes, there are many things I love – I'm responding to something I guess that Steve said earlier in terms of people are not all of one mind. I happen to love many things about my small school. There are many things that are better due to small schools. But there are many

things that aren't, and some things are worse because of the austerity and whole idea that we're moving forward while moving backward is very problematic. It pacifies people.

I guess my major point is that progressive change doesn't happen behind closed doors. We discuss this in our union. You're going to have to negotiate, and BayCES chose, as you described it, to be engaged with the district, engaged with one community organization, and if –

Steve Jubb: That's not true.

Craig Gordon: OK. Well, OCO was your major partner, so – [an inaudible comment from Steve Jubb] OK, and OEA was— you talked to people, OEA never opposed it, but OEA was not the priority. Like, “let's get OEA on board, let's get the teachers on board.” And I think that if you're going to make change, I really think it does come down to – and I know you're going to say this is rhetorical – but you really have to remember which side you're on. And you really have to be aware of the fact that you're not going to get those changes from people you're in a closed room with just because you convince them or because of their good will. You have to organize the people who are closest to the conditions you're trying to change and have them move forward with you, and you'll never get the change with the superintendent or anybody up at that level without organizing that first.

Greg Hodge: Thank you. Give Craig a round of applause. [applause] (to Steve) One minute.

Steve Jubb: So there are actually a lot of things I heard that are really encouraging. I liked what Steve said about the forward looking, something new has to come out of this. We have stood in these places or sat in these places before, and we'll continue to do so because, like David, for example, really one of the exemplar teachers that I've seen in Oakland – has a great program – and I think he's right, that we're not going to ever be successful unless the vast numbers of hearts and minds of teachers are sort of captured and connected to a movement to improve education.

I do, however, believe that it doesn't have to be conditional, that we don't have to stop committing ourselves, we don't have to make our commitment to continuously improving our performance, continuously figuring out how to get resources to classrooms, continuing to think about how we can do it better, while we at the same time, I'm mindful of the many parents that I have also listened to. Parents who say, you can't tell them to wait ten years before they have access to a good school and that's our dilemma. It's the dilemma of urgency and capacity.

Greg Hodge: Thanks Steve. [applause]

Dan French: So quickly, I do think that public education is under attack. In fact, it's an all out war to privatize. And we're seeing it on many fronts. And so the only way we can successfully fight back is to have strong coalitions. And ultimately I go back to David, who said it as well, that it is going to be incrementalist change unless teacher unions are front and center in a coalition that does include progressive educators within the union – they're not one and the same

thing – as well as organizations like ours, district, community organizations together. And certainly we've had our disagreements with the Boston teachers' union, they have been upset at us at times, but ultimately we've come back to the table to seek those common interests and alliances. And I do think, to beat back the privatization and all-out assault on education, it's going to take that kind of mighty, strong coalition to get there.

Greg Hodge: Please thank Dan. [applause]

Deborah Meier: First of all, I think it was an extraordinary event you put on, even if we remained a little puzzled. (laughter)

Dan French: Why the hell were we invited here in the first place? (laughter)

Deborah Meier: I actually read the invitation, the thing that described it, and there's not the word "Oakland" in there anywhere, except that you happened to be in Oakland. So I didn't know. But in any case... (laughter)

But I'm impressed that you did it. And I hope that you're going to do dozens more of these and, I hope, all over the country we do open our so-called dirty linen in a serious political discussion of what we need to make that alliance. Unions and public education have a common history. Universal education was the product of two conflicting forces, and one powerful one was the development of unions. So the very idea has common roots, a belief in democracy, the title of this conference.

The Coalition [for Essential Schools] itself was an organization around school people. It wasn't a foundation. There are a lot of good foundations out there and a lot of bad ones. But it was a coalition of school people. I think we were mistaken not to see that coalition of school people had to include more families, parents who were not employees of the school, and I give a lot of credit to the work of BayCES for having realized that school people has to include the community of the school beyond teachers. But I think we would [have] an enormous loss if, as school reformers, we didn't— it's not just teachers, it's the unions that they create. And the questions you're facing here are universal across the country. And I think we can go back to back to Lani Guinier's opening comment [on the opening evening of the CES Fall Forum] about sometimes we're in a losing situation, and at those moments we have a lot to learn by thinking about who has set the rules of the game and reset them so that we are working more closely together.

[applause]

Greg Hodge: Before we close, I just want to thank everybody who helped put this together, particularly Craig Gordon and Steve Jubb. I want to thank Bob Mandel for serving as impromptu timekeeper, thank all of you for being here. A wise person once said, "The season of sorrow is the best time for planting seeds of success." Thank you very much.

Craig Gordon: Thank you, Greg, for stepping up and being our facilitator.

[applause]