Mark Gonnerman: I’m Mark Gonnerman, the Forum’s director, and we’re pleased that you’ve chosen to be with us on this beautiful fall day for a conversation entitled “Only Connect: Reinvigorating American Public Education.” Our format today will be to begin with opening statements by two of our guests: Dr. Rudy Crue and Dr. Madeline Levine. Following their brief presentations, they will sit down and join Dr. Denise Pope for a conversation moderated by Professor Deborah Stipek, Dean of the Stanford School of Education.

Today, I will introduce our speakers one by one before they speak, beginning with Rudy Crue, a lifelong educator whose career has spanned from the classroom to the chancellorship of the nation’s largest school district, New York City Public Schools, where he served from 1995 to 1999 and was known during his tenure there as “the other Rudy.” After several years working to close the achievement gap that separates the nation’s underserved students from their higher-achieving counterparts, he worked for the Stupski Foundation as director of reform initiatives for the improvement of public education. In 2004, he was appointed to the position of superintendent of schools for the Miami Dade County schools, the nation’s fourth-largest school district. Rudy Crue is a reformer, and reformers tend to ruffle feathers, so recently he stepped down from his superintendent’s position and is traveling around the country to speak about the ideas in his book entitled Only Connect: The Way to Save Our Schools. I’ll just add that Rudy Crue came to my attention through an e-mail from Jeffrey Pfeffer, a professor at the Graduate School of Business, who wrote, “Rudy Crue is probably one of the most compelling, intelligent speakers on issues of organizational change, influence, urban politics, etcetera, I have ever had the privilege of hearing. He has come to my class many times. He is, in a word, in a league of his own.” We’re very pleased and honored to welcome Dr. Rudy Crue to the Aurora Forum stage. [Applause]

Dr. Rudy Crew: Thank you very much, Mark, and good afternoon to all. First, there’s a slight correction. I looked for a euphemism for what happens when you get fired and they do things, like they say, “You left,” “You got bounced,” and so forth. The truth of the matter is that I got fired from both New York City by Rudy Giuliani as well as recently in Miami. And I say that because the work that is the topic of today’s conversation is both perilous; it comes with an enormous risk that people who do what I do, or even if you’re a principal in a school or even if you’re a teacher in a school, you come through tremendous consequences for the decisions that we make. Yet these decisions have to be made because the issues before us probably have never been more complex and more vexing than ever before, so it gives me a great deal of pleasure to
come before you and to talk a little bit about not just the book but to share the stage with some of the people who will be introduced momentarily, because their work in many ways has deepened many of the concepts that are reflected in my thinking and in the book.

When I’m asked the question, Why this particular topic? Why this title? the conversation usually stems from something about, Well, we’ve spent the better part of a decade now talking about No Child Left Behind, and as a nation, that was the supposed antidote to low-performing schools, to classrooms that were not functioning, to children who were caught in the clutches of poverty and despair and whose communities had long languished in peril of both economic as well as educational ruin. And I don’t know about you, but I, having spent that many years watching No Child Left Behind, came away saying: There is really, really, really not enough of a difference – not a substantial difference – in what happens in America’s classrooms today anymore than what happened in America’s classrooms prior to No Child Left Behind. We essentially are still trying to crack some of the same problems – some of the same nuts, if you will.

So the book really represented a way of answering my own question: If not No Child Left Behind, if we didn’t do that, then what would we do? As a nation, how would we ultimately see ourselves gaining in the educational arena, both locally, but more importantly, internationally? How would we see ourselves looking at and thinking about scores, whether they are in math or in reading or in science or social studies? How would we see ourselves actually beginning to kind of orchestrate a campaign for a nation that concerns its children?

One of the things that we would probably do differently is we would ultimately create a different structure. I’m drawn to the idea that in some of the nations that we have been compared to in the last PISA studies and so forth, that many of these nations actually have fidelity to a curricular stance or to a curricular proposal that is, for the most part, nationwide. So if you’re going to do a reading series or a math series in Denmark, the nation does that math series. It’s not what I want to do or what my principal next door to me wants to do. It’s what does the nation really believe from the Ministry of Education. What does that nation really believe about math instruction or about science instruction and reading? We don’t necessarily have that in this country. What we have is essentially multiple states and multiple municipalities within each state deciding for themselves what they think third-grade math ought to look like or what they think first-grade reading ought to look like, and whether or not that ought to be a whole language approach or whether or not that ought to be driven by a textbook or a basal series. The structural impediments here (and I’ve noted them in the book) are essentially around this whole question of organizing around what should be taught, at what grade it is taught, and what are the assessments and the measures by which we’ll determine whether or not it has been learned? How do we prepare teachers and support staff for being able to actually help and provide the necessary conditions for the success of children in these schools? And equally as important – maybe more important than anything else – is the question of how community is situated in this, how parents are situated in this entire formula. And most importantly, for me, at least, was how leadership looks or could look in an
environment where the structure was really organized around a common, clearly understood, clearly agreed to set of academic standards by which children would be measured over the course of time.

A second issue for me – and the title for the book – was: You know, no one institution (if I’ve learned anything over the course of this many years and this many bumps along the road), no one institution can do this on its own. Public schools (I will be public in admitting) … public schools cannot do this by themselves. In Washington, D.C., the new President-Elect would do wonders for public education in America if he put his child in a public school. Whether it’s in Washington, D.C., or in surrounding counties, the fact of the matter is that what we suffer from largely in America is demand, not supply. There are, in fact, very, very good schools in our public school system across this country. What there is not is not as much of a demand for those schools in communities that are, for the most part, fractured, broken, and in some ways disenfranchised. So the question about how we would organize and how we would connect became substance for the title of the book.

We have to admit that if we can’t do it alone, then we’re going to have to ultimately put our shoulder to a collective wheel with other institutions. The mental health institution has been trying to work on these problems for years with dwindling budgets, with ever-dwindling staff, with huge regulations, with ins and outs of leadership at all levels. The same would be true for the people in the entrepreneurial or the business or the corporate world. People have been trying to figure out whether or not to give money to a school, whether or not to adopt a school, whether or not to provide additional leverage for various kinds of activities in the various schools and counties, and so forth. Some of that money is very, very helpful, but it’s never enough. Philanthropy really can’t necessarily shoulder this burden alone. The work of training teachers, the work of deepening the knowledge and the preparation of teachers, the work of providing the connective tissue between and among people within the community: that’s never going to be necessarily just the work solely of philanthropists. And most importantly, there is the issue of how we would actually focus these efforts if we could collect them – if we could put all the energy and all the synergies together – how could we then focus it on schools where, in my judgment, the performance has been lacking for some number of years and in communities that have had, frankly, very little hope to believe that any one person or any institution could actually arrest these problems.

This book with this title Only Connect suggests that we are better as a nation when we connect to each other, when institutions talk with each other, when we do away with isolationism and working in silos. We’re better and stronger in an educational institution when we can provide collective lift of some of the hardest, most seemingly intractable and insoluble problems in front of us, and that we basically fail, we fail either together or we fail singularly, when we try to do these things on our own. So in New York City, with a $13 billion budget, there were low-performing schools probably numbering somewhere in the vicinity of 200 low-performing schools out of 1,100 schools in New York City when I was there. There are probably fewer than that now, but needless to say, the growth in the higher-performing schools, the growth in the number of schools that
have actually taken off and done well, is a function of multiple city-wide, county-wide, state-wide, and federal-wide agencies all putting their energy and their shoulder behind the wheel to change the conditions of school for these children.

That is the basis of connection. No institution is going to be able to do this on its own. We will have to work in combination and in synergy with each other. We have to set aside some of the petty politics that has unfortunately governed our work in the past. And to the degree that we make this problem understandable, we will therefore make it solvable, and we will see it not necessarily just as a problem that is in urban America, albeit it is most intense there, but we’ll see it as a problem that really is about the infrastructure of our economy as fueled by educating smart, capable, occupationally capable young people going into the twenty-first century.

I’ll close on a very quick note, and then I know that there are other speakers who will come before us. The metaphor for this is for me, at least, interesting. There was a young girl in New York whose name was Clarissa. Clarissa was a first-grader when I first met her. She wrote me a note, which I got maybe six months after the time I was chancellor of New York City, and the note read as follows: “Dear Chancellor Crue: I saw you on television the other night. You were talking about children being able to read. You looked scared. I want you to know that my name is Clarissa Rose Hernandez, and I can read. Please come to my school, P.S.169 in Brooklyn, and I would love to read a story to you. Enclosed is a picture of me, so in the event you see me in the street, you will know who I am.”

I went to Clarissa’s school, and as you can tell, I’m not first-grader size, so the chairs in this first-grader school were something out of Gulliver’s Travels. I walked in and there were several tables, all with the first-grade class seated around them. Clarissa had her back to me, but her friend noticed that I had come into the classroom. And as I walked in, her friend obviously said something to Clarissa and told her that I was behind her. She immediately rose to her feet and she turned to me and she said, “Oh! And I wore my best dress today, too.” [Laughter] I say that in closing because the real question before us as members of this nation, of people in the tribe who care deeply about children, is whether we are strong enough of heart and of mind and of the capability of the nation to organize around wearing our best dress for these children. This is really going to be a fundamental question before the new administration and before all of us in front of the world. [Applause]

Gonnerman: Thank you, Dr. Crue. Next up, we have Madeline Levine, a psychologist who has practiced in Marin Country for more than twenty-five years. Through her clinical work, she has identified a new group of at-risk kids. As she writes in her most recent book, The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids, “They don’t belong to the group traditionally considered at risk: inner-city kids growing up in harsh economic circumstances. Surprisingly, they belong to the upper middle class, to parents who have comfortable incomes and high levels of education. Current research tells us that it is children of privilege, children long assumed to be protected from elevated rates of
emotional problems, that are, in fact, evidencing the highest rates of emotional problems of any group of kids in the country.”

I first heard Dr. Levine speak at Gunn High School last spring and was impressed by how tuned in she is to the pressures now faced by students, parents, and the people who run our public schools. I am also impressed by her ability to identify and communicate strategies that will mitigate these pressures and their perilous consequences for our youth. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Madeline Levine. [Applause]

**Dr. Madeline Levine:** Thank you, Mark. It wasn’t my clinical practice alone that had me interested in writing *The Price of Privilege*. There was a large body of research that was beginning when I was noticing this problem, which was about six or seven years ago. So while certainly I have practiced largely with affluent kids (I’m in Marin County with all that carries with it), much of the research was done by Suniya Luthar at Columbia University, who first identified these really high rates of emotional problems among not rich kids (we don’t really know a thing about truly rich kids). She was looking at family income of about $150,000, which, in most places in this country, as opposed to the Bay Area, is quite upper middle class, but not so much here.

What she found—and I don’t what to spend a lot of time on this because there’s something else I want to focus on—but what she found is that affluent kids in general had higher rates of substance abuse, psychosomatic disorders, depression, and anxiety. And I think originally the idea was, Well, these kids may have some period of difficulty because they’ve been spoiled so they’re entitled, or any of the things that people are fond of saying about upper middle class kids, but that they would get better given the fact that they would have the protective factor of educated, involved parents, because parental involvement is generally considered good for child development. In fact, what they found was that, for example, at the end of junior high school, affluent girls had twice the rate of depression as the general population of adolescent girls, but by the end of high school, they had three times the rate of depression. So there was an acceleration of emotional problems and no diminution of it. And of course now we’re looking at kids as they go through college and out into the world, and there’s nothing especially optimistic to say that these problems are lessening. So this is an at-risk group.

One of the very first talks I gave after my book was published…. I was in New York, and for anybody who speaks, NPR, while they do wonderful things, tend to do their interviews in these very crowded little spaces. It was me and the head of the foster care system in New York City doing an NPR broadcast in a tiny little brownstone, and the facilitator was elsewhere. We sort of looked at each other for about five minutes trying to figure out what we possibly could say to each other. Here I was talking about rich kids, and he was talking about the most disenfranchised kids in New York. So we did all these trial balloons and nothing worked. We got on the air, and the research on affluent kids shows that the reason their rates are so elevated is really about pressure and disconnection, so we talked for a moment about pressure and didn’t get too far with that topic because my point of view was that upper middle class kids actually are overly pressured, and his point of view was more that the kids he was seeing didn’t have enough
pressure on them, didn’t have enough standards or enough expected of them. But then we got to disconnection, and we were off and running because the issue of disconnection is the same regardless of the child’s socioeconomic status.

The fact that both of these groups of kids, and I won’t spend this entire time talking about the tail ends of the socioeconomic spectrum, but in groups of kids, regardless of family income, who don’t have present parents (that’s whether your family is fractured by divorce or poverty or the kinds of preoccupations that upper middle class families tend to have), it doesn’t really matter from a kid’s point of view what the reason is. We know that children do best when there is an involved, caring person who is capable of seeing the reality of that child in front of them, who is capable of loving that child and being willing to discipline that child. And that’s really the case, I think, across the socioeconomic spectrum.

And the more I thought about pressure in the intervening two years, I’m not sure that the pressure issue is something we don’t have anything to say to each other about, either, because I think that pressure, whether it’s inadequate pressure or too much pressure, is again the same issue of: If you’re able to see the kid who is really standing in front of you, if you’re able to really believe in the potential of that child, then you don’t pressure too much and you don’t pressure too little. You find … I guess you call it the “just-right challenge” … and you find the place just beyond the child’s comfort zone. That’s where you want to be working with kids regardless of who they are.

Now, unfortunately, I think, for upper middle class kids the vision of what they are supposed to be doing is incredibly narrow. We are tremendously preoccupied with these kids with their achievement from…. I just came back from New York where, on the Upper East Side, tutors go for $1,000 an hour, where there’s a pre-Ivy academy, which guarantees for $250,000 to get your child into an Ivy League school, and you have to start in preschool sixteen years down the road. This tremendous preoccupation with kids being at some stellar level of achievement, which is kind of crazy because coming to Stanford or an Ivy League or an Ivy League equivalent is a great place to be for a very slim group of kids, and the majority of children don’t go to Stanford. The majority of children don’t go to Harvard or Yale or Princeton. And I’m of the opinion that we are neglecting the vast majority of kids with this constant focus on Back to School Night, which is: how, in my community, do you pack an auditorium like this? You have somebody come in to talk about how to get your kid into an Ivy League school. You pack the auditorium with that.

The majority of kids aren’t doing that. And people like Sternberg with the Triarchic Theory of Intelligence … there are creative kids that we are missing. There are practical kids that we are missing. And it’s not part of what we do. There isn’t a Back to School Night on shop because shop doesn’t exist anymore. There isn’t a Back to School Night on the creative arts. My oldest son was an athlete, and I probably went in the course of his high school career (he was an athlete and a very good student), I probably went to 100 breakfasts and ribbons and events. He got to graduate with all kinds of stuff on his gown because he was an outstanding student. And my middle kid was very creative.
There weren’t as many opportunities because the arts are cut out unless you are in a community like mine, which is affluent, and then everybody puts money in so we can maintain arts, which I think are absolutely critical for psychological development.

But my youngest child, who is a totally hands-on kind of kid, is, in a sense, an average student. Now, to most of the groups that I talk to, the expression “an average student” is sort of anathema. I was a consultant at Brandeis Hillel for four years, and written into my contract every year was that I would be allowed to give a talk on the average student. I gave three of those talks to a total audience of nobody, so apparently I’m the only person in Marin County who has an average student. I asked his permission this morning to read a line that he had written in his college application that I think is relevant to this. The difference between your first child and your third child is that when your first child is doing his college application, you know every word. You breathe life into every word they’re writing on their college application. When you get to your third child, it’s like: “Did you write anything?” “Yeah, I did.” “Do you want to show it to me?” “Yeah, OK.” “Good job, sweetie.” [Laughter] And that’s for real, especially when you have your last child at forty-two. This is what my son said: “My older brothers were academically talented. I’m not so much. I’m good at different things. People like me. I’m a good mediator. I’m practical, and I like to visualize things in space and then make them with my hands. I’ve been told that I’m a kinesthetic learner. It’s really not the best kind of learner to be in a classroom, but I think out in the world, my kind of learning will be truly valued.”

Now, it makes me sad that this particular son – this is the son who takes my mom with Alzheimer’s out twice a week – that this son feels that what he has to offer is not going to be valued until he gets out into the world. And I think that kids sort of end up feeling like they have two options. Their option is either to burn out like a lot of the kids at the upper tier, or to opt out, which is what a lot of kids like my son feel because what they have to offer is not valued.

So one of the things Denise [Pope] and I are doing is we started an organization called Challenge Success along with Jim Lubdell. It’s a project with the Stanford School of Education. We’re very committed to the notion that unless we start broadening paths for success for all kids … and this doesn’t matter if you’re in an inner-city school or in an Atherton school … that we are losing tremendous numbers of kids who potentially are enormous contributors to society.

The other thing I think we’re doing is that if you took, for example, child psychologists and psychiatists, mental health workers, child care workers, educators, classroom teachers, and administrators, and you asked them to come up with a worst-case scenario for teaching children, I think you would come up with something that resembles our public school system. I was a teacher; this is not about bashing teachers or administrators or anything like that. They do yeoman’s service with very little remuneration and it’s very hard work. Believe me, it is much harder to be a teacher than it is to be a psychologist. It’s not about the people (well, some of the people it’s about), but it’s about the structure of public schools. I’m of the very strong opinion that the
difference between a successful child and a child who feels like a failure, between a child who has optimism and a child who has nothing but desperation, is the connection with a caring adult. And everything we know in psychology, and my colleagues are telling me in education as well, says you will have a better learner and a more motivated child, you will have better integrity and less cheating, and you certainly have less psychological problems when you have somebody available, preferably on a day-to-day basis, to connect with the children. I said I live in Marin County, one of the wealthiest counties in the United States of America. We have one counselor for every 500 children both in our junior high school and in our high school. So I come from a particular point of view, which is that there is no such thing as being successful without being mentally healthy. And until we start pouring resources into mental health for children, whatever tweaking they do in the classroom (they buy one more computer in my school district and I’m going to scream)....

Part of the solution is to refuse to be part of the problem. So, for example, (my husband’s here – you don’t know this yet, honey, but...) this year, our school donation went to the shop class or nothing, so I think there are small ways that people can make statements about what they value in the schools. But if you look at what educators and psychologists and the business world all say they need in children, they need creativity, out-of-the-box thinking. Well, how can you be an out-of-the-box thinker if you always have to get the answer right? The kids I treat – the affluent kids – never take a chance. They never take a chance because there’s always the risk that it might bring down their GPA two one-millionths of a percentage point, and so they’re not creative thinkers. They don’t have real attachments because they’re all about performance as opposed to learning, so they’re very invested in looking good for their teachers, for their school, for their peers, especially for their parents, but they’re not so interested in what they’re learning and therefore you don’t have engagement, whether it’s learning engagement or emotional engagement with the people around them, and I think this puts them at tremendous risk.

So as we continue this discussion (I’ll stop because my time is up), this is the position that I come from, that until we address the developmental needs of children in a way that’s realistic, and that would be regardless of what school district they’re in because the developmental needs of children don’t change, we’re not going to be turning out the kinds of kids that this country needs, and we’re not going to be doing our children the service that they deserve.

Thank you. [Applause]

Gonnerman: Thank you, Dr. Levine. Before our guests on stage enter into a conversation amongst themselves and we open up to an audience-inspired discussion, I’ll introduce Denise Pope and Deborah Stipek, our moderator for the remainder of this afternoon.

Denise Pope earned her Ph.D. here at Stanford and has taught as a lecturer in the School of Education for the past nine years. In 2003, she founded SOS, Stressed-Out Students, a
research and intervention effort to help K-12 schools counter the causes of academic stress. SOS is the precursor to, and shapes the mission of, Challenge Success, which Madeline just mentioned. I want to read the mission statement of Challenge Success: it is “to inform, inspire, and equip youth, parents, and schools to adopt practices that expand options for youth success by endorsing a vision that emphasizes character, health, independence, connection, creativity, enthusiasm, and achievement.” Denise’s book, Doing School: How We Are Creating a Generation of Stressed-Out, Materialistic, and Miseducated Students, received the Notable Book in Education Award by the American School Board Journal in 2001.

Our moderator, Deborah Stipek, is the I. James Quillen Dean and Professor of Education at Stanford. Her scholarship includes instructional effects on children’s achievement and motivation, early childhood education, elementary education, and school reform. She has served for five years on the board on Children, Youth, and Families of the National Research Council, and she directed the MacArthur Foundation Network on Teaching and Learning. Currently, she is completing a longitudinal study that follows children from kindergarten through fifth grade in three low-income communities in three different states.

So we look forward to listening in on your conversation, and when we get to the point where we invite audience participation, please line up behind one of the two aisle microphones and our moderator will recognize you.

Denise Pope: I was asked to discuss a little bit about what Rudy and Madeline said before we open up to our conversation. They made my life very easy because they are talking about very similar things. The key words that I heard, and that Mark mentioned too, is this idea of connection and structure. What kind of structure does it take to lead to the kind of outcomes that we would want to see in all of our kids? That’s really the question that we’re asking at Challenge Success. One of the ways that we usually start off talks is by asking people to define success. What does success mean to you? What does it mean to be a successful person or a successful student in life? I teach a class here at the School of Education on developing curriculum, and it’s the same question. What ought to be taught? What structures, what curriculum, what content, what kind of teaching, what kind of assessment needs to go on to help create the kind of people that we want for the future of our society? Some of the things that we know from CEOs and from the business world is that they are not happy with the kind of outcome – the kind of kids that they’re seeing coming out at the other end from both elite colleges and just kids who are ready for the working world. They’re seeing kids who are not resilient, who don’t have healthy connections, who don’t know how to think creatively, who don’t know how to communicate well, and who, according to some, quite frankly, are not team players. And when you go to give them their six-month performance review, they bristle at the thought of taking any kind of criticism and they tend to pass the buck and they don’t have the loyalty that we’d like to see.

Levine: And then they call their mothers.
Pope: And then they call their moms, right.

The question that we’re asking is what truly makes for a successful person and citizen for what the global economy is calling for. We’re playing around with different kinds of answers. We know in classrooms, for instance, that you don’t want it to be all about getting the answer right. You don’t want it to be all about passing the test because that doesn’t lead to the kind of thinkers that we’re going to need to solve the global problems that we see. We know from Madeline’s kid that you need a space for the different kinds of learners. There are different kinds of learners, and you need kids who are hands-on and kinesthetic learners in this world just as much as you need the verbal and the logical and the mathematical thinkers that tend to do well in school. How do you make space for that in classrooms? How do you work with other organizations, going back to what Rudy said, so that it’s not all on the schools to solve all these problems?

I’m going to give two quick examples of what gives me hope for the future, and then we can talk about it amongst ourselves. One is that San Mateo County right now has pulled together a bunch of different institutions: schools, hospitals, government workers, Boys & Girls Clubs, mental health folks, as well as a whole host of others – anyone who basically comes in contact with kids: coaches, and so on. And they have put together what they call a Bill of Rights for Children. What they realize is exactly what Rudy was saying: we’re tired of reinventing the wheel and we’re tired of doing it alone as the Lone Rangers. We’ve got to get together and build upon our strengths and pool our money and pool our resources and really think about what is in the best interests of the children of our county. And instead of just doing the same-old, same-old, how can we change the system and start really working across the aisle? I sound a little bit like our President-Elect, but really getting beyond what usually stops us from working together and saying, How can we do what we do as experts in our own areas better for the health of the children, and how can we work together, because together we’ll be even better.

We at Challenge Success have done a similar kind of thing. We decided that you can’t just work with the schools; that you have to get the parents and the youth and the other institutions involved. And so what I’m very proud of in our organization is that we get people around the table who don’t usually talk to one another. At Challenge Success, you come to a conference and you bring a team, and you must have the principal (you’ve got to have leadership from the top), you must have a school counselor, you must have parents, you must have teachers, and you must have the voices of the youth themselves all around the table saying, What is the problem, how is it manifested, and what are the solutions? And just to get even a little bit more concrete, some of the solutions that we’re working on at Challenge Success come from the voice of the students themselves. We survey. We have 5,000 students whom we’ve surveyed, and we asked them things like, How would you relieve the stress that you’re feeling if you’re feeling stress at school? What makes your classes most interesting? If you had a magic wand and could change something at your school, what would it be? And it’s not: make the food better in the cafeteria. These kids are basically saying, The classes need to be more hands-on, we want to be stimulated, we want to know that the teachers care about us, we don’t feel that there is someone we can go to at the school whom we trust enough to share a problem
with. So the solutions that we’re working on at Challenge Success are the very solutions that we know from the educational literature work for kids, which is getting them engaged, getting them truly, authentically involved in seeing the purpose of what they do instead of just getting through the next hoop of passing a test, and getting them involved in solving their own problems, listening to them, giving them voice and choice over what they learn, and really working with the system as a whole to say: If the system is broken, it’s going to take everyone from the different components of the system to work together to fix it. And that includes the parents. Actually, on our Web site we have specific guidelines for parents. And I tell the teachers now: You’re not just teaching kids; you’re also teaching parents. And then you tell the parents: You can’t just bash, bash, bash; you’ve got to get in and help solve the problem. You’ve got to work together with the teachers and not be afraid of them or just point your finger. And we tell the kids: Your voice matters here, we’re listening to you, and we want you to be a part of the solution because all of this revolves around your health, your well-being, your engagement. And if you’re disengaged at whatever end of the spectrum you are, the system is not working and we’re not doing our job.

So there are two concrete examples, I think, of organizations that are working to change the structures that Rudy was talking about to build connections between institutions and also between the people that you rarely see on a day-to-day basis in schools and in families, where the kids and the parents and the teachers and the administrators are all sitting around the table working together to try to solve the problems.

I’ll let Deborah take over as moderator, but I wanted to get a little concrete.

Deborah Stipek: Good examples. Thank you, Denise. Thank you all. I’m going to start with a question. All three of you are talking about structure, and I wonder whether you mean the same thing by it, so I want to focus first on the school structure. Madeline, you talked about the connectedness and how school structures aren’t organized really to promote the kind of connectedness between youth and adults that we know is valuable. Rudy, you also talked about the fact that school structures in a kind of fundamental way need to be changed; they’re not working the way they should.

Maybe we can start with you. What do you mean by structure? Can you give some concrete examples? And what do you envision as the structure that would work for effective education?

Crew: The architecture of the schools right now (it’s how I think of structure), whether it’s elementary or middle or high school, is an architecture that is predicated on a sort of obligation to follow the person in front of you. If you aren’t either willing to do that or if your needs are such that they exist outside the parameters of what the person in front of you has done, your footprint is a different size than the footprint of the person in front of you. You run the risk of a system expelling you, of not responding to you, or, worse yet, of responding to you in a very negative way. So in some ways, I look at the issue of structure as meaning the school day, the school year, the means by which we convey and structure a high school diploma, the rote nature by which we bring children in and make...
them go through a very, if you will, traditional track or course of study and give no other alternatives that are equally valuable and perceived as being equally as valuable in the eyes of those after the post-secondary, for example. We do have alternative programs, but they are alternative programs in the same sense as purgatory is to hell [Laughter], so it’s not exactly where you want to go. So my sense is that the structural impediments are in many cases statutorily driven. They’re obligated by law, but they are changeable within the confines of one’s local board policy and one’s local school system. And the lift that’s now required of people who are trying to do this work collectively is the lift of changing the architecture. When you talk about the mental health institutions collaborating with schools, that’s an extraordinary body of work, but the current structure can’t contain it. We don’t even know what to do other than to put you into a slot in a place called a fifth-period classroom where there used to be somebody. That’s a slot. So we slot you into that fifth period whether you actually fit there or not, whether the kids can make it there or not, and so on and so forth. Even the question of parents and parent needs don’t fit on the conventional architecture of American public schools, so we’ve got to change that structure.

**Stipek:** So, just to press you a little, when you said you’re basically supposed to follow the path that others before have followed, it sounds to me like you’re suggesting that there’s some resistance to that change – that there are reasons why the school board or whoever has the opportunity to be able to support change isn’t doing that. Is that your point? Is the resistance really in the law or is it in human fearfulness of change?

**Crew:** Oh, it’s at multiple levels. I think of it as just the inertia and the push-back that comes with change. People just simply look at it and say, Oh, I don’t think so, not me; give that to the freshmen or the young people coming in.

Let me give you a very practical example. The business community in almost every city that I’ve ever worked in says: Give us a kid who is occupationally prepared, at least for the interview if not for the real work. [Laughter] Let’s at least start there. Give me a kid who’s not going to come in to the office wearing a New York Yankees hat. Then you say to yourself, What experience in a four-year high school diploma track … what experience is going to help a child, regardless of where he comes from? What experience is going to tell that child, give that child, that young person, an opportunity to know the rules of the road for occupational preparation or for going in for an interview? There really aren’t. So if you try to amend the current structure, you’ve try to change it so that you have an internship, for example, where if you have an internship that lasts for six weeks, you run into the institutional impediments that I was talking about: Where’s the bus? Who’s going to get them to? Who’s going to get them from? What time is this due? Is this going to be at the expense of social studies and history or is this in concert with social studies and math, and so on and so forth.

So you’ve got to find a way of being able to look at this architecture that right now is predicated on simply a kind of cattle-call theory of getting kids through. That is not a proxy for substance and engagement and the kind of relationships that I heard from the
other two speakers. Relationships require time. Time has to be built into a structure. That structure currently mitigates against the relationships.

**Stipek:** Madeline, do you want to elaborate on what you meant by structure? What kinds of structures in schools would you envision supporting mental health?

**Levine:** Sure. It seems to me that we know a great deal about what the developmental needs of children are. So just to be really concrete, for example, we know that young children are natural explorers and they are curious and they like to experiment, whether it’s your four-year-old with a paintbox or a six-year-old with something else in the classroom. That’s what young kids like to do. Now, if you say (I have three sons, so I may be sensitized to this) … if you say, The best thing you can do is sit in your seat and never get up…. I’ll not name the school. We took my kid to look at a school in Marin County and they walked in and the headmaster said, “See, you could hear a pin drop.” And she thought that that would be appealing. I knew that my kid would have a dunce cap on his head for the next four years if he went to that school. He’d be in trouble all the time. So when I say structure, it’s sort of like how parallel is the structure of a classroom where kids are expected to sit quietly and where that’s valued … how parallel is that with the developmental needs of young children? It’s not parallel and it doesn’t work. It favors a particular group of kids and sort of pathologizes. You know, I’m a psychologist. There are definitely kids with Attention Deficit Disorder. Fairfax County has 70 percent of their kids with Attention Deficit Disorder. It can’t be; it just can’t be.

So I think we’re totally out of synch with what the developmental needs are of kids. And just some very concrete things: I think it’s inertia. I also think that certainly in upper middle class communities, it’s tremendous anxiety. If you change something, then you may lose whatever advantages you’ve had under the old system. So at my son’s high school, the kids requested a culinary academy, which I thought was a fabulous thing. Of course, as I said, I have this hands-on kid, so it would have been great. It was a request from the kids, and at the end of the day, they had the money and the school administration and the board nixed it. Why? Because, they said, actually culinary workers, for the most part, make very low wages because most of them are flipping burgers somewhere. Therefore it’s not an appropriate activity for our community. Everybody has to eat. What do you mean, it’s not an appropriate activity for our community? So there’s value added that isn’t all about measurable bottom-line things. It’s about self-management skills, it’s about communication, it’s about collaboration. So there were a whole bunch of values that went completely unnoticed in that. Those would be my examples.

**Stipek:** When you said structure, I was actually envisioning one thing that has sort of caught on in structure, which is the small high school movement. You mentioned Gates, who of course has been very instrumental in promoting that, which is a structural change. Rudy, I know, is bursting to say something about that. One of the reasons I mentioned it is that not only has it been a reform that is focused on inner-city schools where the thought was that they’re too big, too many kids get lost in the cracks, no one even notices when kids don’t show up day after day after week after week, but it also presumably is a
structure that supports that child-adult interaction because you only have about 300 kids so you have an opportunity for the adults to get to know them. Do you want to just free associate to that as a structure?

**Crew:** Well, I think that that’s right, and I think it’s certainly a step in the right direction. The issue is that small isn’t necessarily better unless there are some preconditions, some understandings about the value of the relationship that we’re trying to build small around. Smaller schools actually operate because, first of all, they’re driven by having some money to be able to move in that direction. But they function in ways that families could, in effect, function. For many children, the unit of change for them in their own lives is the adult relationship that is most near and dear to them. It could be a football coach, it could be an art teacher, it could be a piano teacher, it could be a band leader, or whomever it might be. But it’s that adult relationship that feeds them with confidence. The structure, then, that I’m talking about is the structure that allows that for every child, whether you’re in a small school or whether you’re in a comprehensive high school of some size; whether you’re in Harlem or whether you’re in San Rafael. So the question for me has always been: Yeah, I follow the small school bouncing ball. I buy it, I think it’s fabulous, and I think we ought to do more of it. But for the vast majority of children who are going to walk out and try to get a job someplace upon graduating from high school and/or college, the set of experiences that they will need, the kind of look into their lives that they will need to have happen, won’t necessarily happen unless somebody thoughtfully – thoughtfully – engages that child in not just a small school but in experiences that are really productive and really meaningful for shaping that person’s life, and that can happen in a larger school. It doesn’t have to happen in a small school.

So the emphasis in my mind, whether or not it’s always been about small schools or not (I taught in one of the first alternative schools here in California, in Pasadena, so I totally get that), but the issue is going to be that the vast majority of kids are not going to be in that. The vast majority of kids are going to be going to Marin City or some school in San Rafael or some school in Oakland, or some school wherever it is. So the question becomes for the teacher and the principal of that school: How do you organize around that relationship and who do you need on your faculty and what do you need from your faculty in the way of mental health providers, in the way of nurses, in the way of support personnel? That’s where I think America has really sort of turned a deaf ear to public education.

**Stipek:** We don’t do that anymore in California. I know in counselors we’re fiftieth. We used to say, Thank God for Mississippi. Now we say, Thank God for Guam. I think it’s the only country that’s below us.

**Pope:** I agree absolutely with Rudy. What I don’t want people to get confused about is that it is a heck of a lot easier as a teacher to have fewer kids in the class that you then are trying to have that one-on-one relationship with. Some of the kids in our survey were saying, “I just wish my teacher knew my name.” You have 170 kids you’re responsible for. That’s a lot of kids. I know the twenty in the classroom rule that we have here in Palo Alto and it’s been disproven. That’s because it’s not sufficient. It’s not just make it
smaller and then, pouf, it will get better, but it is a heck of a lot easier to teach when you know the kids, when you have relationships with them and their families, when you feel like it’s a community, when you can say: I’m building this unit on dinosaurs because I know, Johnny, you are in love with dinosaurs. And don’t worry, next week we’ll build in something that’s going to hit you, and really knowing and being able to care for the kids. And I also think it’s much easier to change a school (we’re working on school reform) when it is a little bit smaller because we can have a handle in doing professional development for the staff and getting all the staff on board to do this when we have a staff of this size as opposed to the many. So just a little push-back, but I absolutely agree that it’s not sufficient to just, boom, be a small school.

Levine: It brings up for me, and this is at the very simple level, that I don’t think it’s particularly about the size of the school. When I was writing *The Price of Privilege*, I had this form on my door, and any kid who walked in my house had to say what one change they would like to have in their life at school. I thought it would all be about homework, but it wasn’t. It was about a lot of things, but my favorite one was the kid who said, “Ten minutes with a sane adult every day.” And that doesn’t mean that we’re all bad parents, that we’re all crazy parents; it just means that in adolescence, there is tremendous value to having somebody outside of your parents who knows your story – not just your name, but your story. And I think what this little back and forth on this raises for me is, as a psychologist over the years, I’ve seen many kids who are interested in teaching – some really smart, bright kids who wanted to be teachers. My oldest son did. He ended up being a lawyer because he felt that there wasn’t enough money; he felt that there wasn’t enough support; he felt that there wasn’t enough respect. And it’s a constant discussion with bright kids about how to pull them into this profession. Whether it’s a big school or a little school to me is secondary to the quality of the teachers you’re bringing in.

Stipek: But it raises for me the issue that Rudy mentioned, which is time. I think probably time is educators’ worst enemy. As America organizes its school day, my daughter had the advantage of going to a school where teachers had two periods during the day, plus they were there before school and during lunch and after school, totally available to students, so there was a fair amount of time that any student who wanted to talk with a teacher, joke with a teacher, get help from a teacher, that resource was there. And in most of our public schools, there’s no time for that. Teachers might have 45 minutes a day to do all of their preparation for the whole day, and they’re spending that time at the photocopy machine rather than interacting with students. So I’ve been thinking about how we organize time. The schedule is a critical issue.

Pope: Well, I can tell you at Challenge Success, the schools that we work with, the first thing we have them do is look at how students spend their time during the day. Modified block and block scheduling and alternative scheduling have been taken on at some of the schools here, and we do see a difference. If you think about it, nobody in their normal daily goes through very deep periods of thinking for 42 minutes and then has five minutes to go grab some food and go to the bathroom and worry about your friends and the acne on your face and are you ready for the next test, and then, boom, you’re sitting
in a completely different class and you’re told to think completely differently about something and you can’t talk and it’s not about you and you don’t know why you’re there, and there’s a lot of pressure and you have to do well. And then, boom. This happens seven times a day. You know, when I was shadowing kids, I was sneaking food out of my backpack because I was hungry. You can’t learn when you’re hungry. There’s new research out that says it takes a kid thirteen minutes to transition between periods. It doesn’t matter how long your passing period is; it’s going to take you thirteen minutes to stop thinking about what happened in English class and start being ready to actively think about history. You know, thirteen minutes is not exact. The point is that the current way of organizing students through a school day is ridiculous and it doesn’t meet the developmental needs, and it’s pretty darn hard to do if you try to do it on the other side of the desk, and that’s why we need to change it.

Crew: The second you elongate the day or do something different with the day, my sense is parents, first, and politicians, second, in reaction to parents, will be on your throat, and they’ll be on your throat will all kinds of data (some of it bogus, to be perfectly honest with you) about it’s too late, it’s too early, the kids don’t get enough sleep. So there’s a way where no good deed here will go unpunished. And for people who do what I do … did…. I have to keep remembering I’m unemployed. [Laughter] For people who do what I do, you actually have to pick one and go. The struggle with America in some ways is that the fickleness that has guided our educational policy and the sort of to and fro in the last several years has made people sort of jaundiced and there have been lots of staggered starts. Oh, yes, we’re going to raise achievement: every superintendent tells you in the interview, We’re going to raise achievement. How are we going to do it? All kids can learn. Everybody’s going to have to be able to do the sort of…. We’re going to put mentors in and we’re going to…. So everybody’s got their shtick. The problem is that then there’s reality and there are people who will say, I don’t want my kid going to school any later. I’ve got music lessons for them. And part of this is, and I say this to parents a lot, which doesn’t endear me there either, but I oftentimes say, You have to be willing to demand more of your own child. I didn’t bring this child into the world; you did. So you need to actually stand still here and actually say, There is going to be homework and you are going to have to spend a little more time in this particular class or on this particular work, and the school is offering you an extra period or an extra time frame in the scope of the day to be able to do it, but you’re going to have to make use of this. Because, failing that, if there’s no support for it it won’t happen. If parents don’t do it and politicians don’t want it then board members will not let you do it and you can have all the dreams and structural adaptations to what exists in your mind, but essentially it will lie fallow because it has no second vote.

Pope: Absolutely. Getting the buy-in before the change is huge. You’ve got to get it from all the stakeholders, which I think we’re starting to learn pretty well. But I think it’s so funny because you’re saying to the parents: They’ve got to do the homework, you’ve got to have high expectations for them. At the other end, we’re saying: OK, your kid is doing three to four hours of homework every night. They’re not sleeping, they’re feeling so much pressure, and when they get a B, they believe it’s like failing. So we’ve got on
the one hand: Come on, guys, this is serious, let’s engage, we need you to start pitching in. And on this end, we’ve got to say to the parents; OK, hold back a little bit; putting this kind of pressure on your kid is unbelievably unhealthy, and not putting any kind of pressure and just disengaging from all things is also unhealthy.

Stipek: So what you’re saying is we need to individualize instruction for parents just like we do for students. [Laughter]

Pope: Very much.

Stipek: A question I have about this is why is it so incredibly hard? We have research about child development. We know the sleep research backwards and forwards in terms of cognitive development and all this kind of stuff. Why is it so incredibly hard to convince people, for example, just to be concrete, that a play-based pre-school is a better idea than an academic pre-school? I mean, why is this even still part of the discussion? I’m throwing that question out to you as educators because it feels to me that there are whole arenas in which public health messages get out. Sure, they take some time, but they do get out and they end up being accepted, and I feel like the message is pretty thin.

Stipek: You know, I think part of the reason is the way you worded it. It’s not play versus academics, but if we word it that way, parents are going to say, “Well, I don’t want my kid just to play all day because he won’t even get into community college if that’s what he does.” So I think to some degree the responsibility is on the educator. As you said, parents wouldn’t have to work so hard to say, “You have to go to school” if school was engaging and interesting, if it was playful. You can learn a lot in the context of…. Doing experiments in science can be great fun if they’re presented in a way that students have an opportunity to have a hands-on experience and to create and to work collaboratively and that sort of thing. So the dichotomies that we tend to think about … we need to get past those and we need to think about how can we make education a way that really does promote academic excellence, but in a playful and engaging way.

Levine: But Deborah, why is it so difficult, from your point of view, to get that information to parents? Denise and I talk all the time to parents who say, “Yes, I know, but….”

Stipek: Well, probably because that’s not what they see in education. The most common word that children use to describe school is “boring.” We all know that and it’s sort of like we accept it as though that’s the way school is. It doesn’t have to be that way. I’ve seen some schools that are absolutely fun and engaging and exciting, and you don’t have to work hard to get kids there at all, but most parents don’t see that, and so more of boring isn’t very appealing to them. And I think that we need to develop more models of what a school with a really engaging environment can look like so that parents have a vision of what they want for their kids and can be pushing for that.

Stipek: I think we should open this up to the audience now, so if anyone has a question of any or all of our panelists, please just go up to the microphone.
Question from the Audience: My name is Mike Forester. I just wanted to comment on the change in the school structure and time frame. I just learned last week from my granddaughter in Fremont that her school actually has broken some of this paradigm. Her classes are an hour and a half, an hour and forty-five minutes each, and four per day, instead of six. They didn’t get longer and in fact they change classes more often. Instead of every class for twenty weeks or so, they have a class for fifteen weeks. They get the required amount of State of California minutes in per subject; they just get it faster. And then they change subjects three times a year instead of twice, that kind of thing. So some of these changes can happen. I was quite pleased. And she really likes it because she commented that they’re able to actually think about something a little longer than fifty minutes.

Pope: Absolutely, and a lot of our Challenge Success schools are moving to longer periods, fewer periods a day, and changing the length of the semester and whatnot. You have to be careful though, because that has to be combined with a lot of professional development because there are a lot of teachers who don’t know how to do that, and then a 90-minute period or even a 70-minute period of the same old boring Spanish teacher becomes deadly. So you have to do that. You need the buy-in; you need the buy-in from the parents and the students and the teachers to understand what this means and what it’s going to look like. In Saratoga, we almost had a riot because they tried to make this change because people spent so much money on buying houses in the Saratoga School District, which had a good reputation, so any kind of change is looked upon as very scary and doing something that they don’t want to do. So you have to have a lot of education around that. But we’re pleased to say (it’s probably one of the schools that we’re working with in Fremont) that is is working and the kids are responding. Even the most curmudgeonly teachers or the ones who were the most afraid to do it, and the parents, are on both sides saying, “You know what? This is working better.” Thank you for that.

Question from the Audience: A comment at the low end of the age range and a comment at the upper end. Whatever happened to the notion that play is the work of children? Has that gotten lost somewhere?

Levine: When I was in Naples, Florida, a little boy comes over to me and he’s pulling on my pants and he says to me, “I speak Chinese.” And I get down on my knees to talk to him and I say, “That’s terrific. What made you decide to learn Chinese?” And he says, “Because I want to go to Harvard.” So he’s four and he’s résumé-building. And it’s not unusual. There’s a constant stream of phone calls about how many activities can I have my child involved in before it’s damaging to them. So I think that parents have unfortunately been sold a bill of goods. When I was asking you about why this is so hard to get through, it’s kind of like, What’s profitable and what’s not profitable? My husband over there says, “Always follow the money.” So it’s like Baby Einstein videos. You put in a Baby Einstein video. It costs $50. You think you’re having your child accelerate language development, and actually you’re retarding language development with it. But there’s a profit to be made in it, and I think parents are scared to death. I think that there
is a mythology about a scarcity of resources. Is there a demographic blip? Absolutely. They didn’t build a new Stanford. But there isn’t the kind of scarcity of resources that parents (between U.S. News & World Report and a whole bunch of other media outlets) have come to believe that their children don’t have the time to play. I wish we had another word. You said it’s a dichotomy. I wish we had something besides “down time.” Down time sounds like down for the count, like nothing’s happening, but that’s exactly where children internalize the rules. When they have their dolls do things, they internalize the rules. They play collaboratively. You can’t hit somebody over the head. If you do, they’ll take your shovel away. Play is not lost time. It’s the most fundamentally important time of childhood. I agree with you.

**Question (continued):** The other comment I’d like to add is one that I usually give people in a legislative context, but I think it actually applies here, too. This has to do with measurement, educational measurement in particular. If we measure the wrong things, or if we mismeasure the right things, or if we misinterpret the measurements, then three things happen: we make poor decisions, we waste money, and we hurt children. Which of those were you trying to accomplish? I have that conversation repeatedly with people in the state legislature and leaders in school systems, and yet everybody keeps focusing on a set of numbers that don’t actually represent what I think we all care about.

**Stipek:** You just described No Child Left Behind, right?

**Question (continued):** Well, that’s one piece of it, but it goes back to the Public Schools Accountability Act, it goes way back. It goes back to the real estate market in Palo Alto and other towns around here, which is driven by average test scores in schools. I don’t know that my child is helped by the average test scores in the school any more than my marriage is harmed by who else might have one, or things like that. People focus on the wrong things and it’s very hard to disabuse them of that.

**Stipek:** I think five points on the API score for a school increases the cost of houses by at least $10,000.

**Question from the Audience:** I’d like you to give us some comments about the recent requirement to test all eighth graders in California in algebra.

**Pope:** I feel very strongly about this. I’m talking to the National School Board Assembly about this in December because the California School Board came out very much against this. It’s not that we don’t believe that in the long run we want everybody to do well in math. Of course we do, but you can’t just say: Boom, everybody’s going to take a test and everyone in eighth grade is going to take algebra. Not everyone in eighth grade is ready for algebra. Not every math teacher in California knows how to teach algebra in eighth grade. This is part of the problem with No Child Left Behind. You can’t just make these blanket statements and then not give the scaffolding to help make it right. We have math teachers who don’t even agree that you should be doing this, let alone…. How did this even come up? It just shows how craziness works in education.
I’m very biased against this, and I see doom and gloom because we know it’s not going to work.

Crew: It’s an interesting thing, though. I was on the other coast when I read about this, and I have two views. One is that when you do this sort of thing as a blanket policy, what you’re really saying is, Hell, I don’t know what else to do, so I need to at least be doing something. And this represents a coherent, easily marketable, understandable thing that we’re now going to do. So let’s understand what it would be. It would mean that therefore every subject, every mathematics subject, every course title that we now have in this state (I used to teach and work in this state before going to Miami), every course title that you get approved that’s approved by the state department that is in any way connected to mathematics, if it were taught prior to the eighth grade, will now have to be aligned to being able to get kids ready for this eighth grade algebra class. If that were to happen, it could be a good thing because America’s mathematics curriculum is really all over the place. Science is in the same way. By comparison to what happens in other nations, we are very broad and they are very deep. So what constitutes a mathematics course in America is…. My gosh, I can’t even tell you the number of titles we’ve had in Miami alone or in New York of something that would be considered mathematics. Then when I would go in and watch it in classes, I would think, My God, I wouldn’t want my child sitting in this; it’s not a precursor to algebra, it’s not even a precursor to the next level of math, whatever it might be. So I think if it required some clean-up and some consolidation of what really constitutes preparatory work toward being able to take advanced mathematics, including algebra, that would make sense to me. But the problem is, and I think what’s likely to happen is, it really isn’t going to result in that. What it will result in is somebody being able to make a speech that we now have eighth grade requirements, including algebra for all kids, and the kids in Compton, the kids in Watts, the kids in East Palo Alto will never make that standard, not because they cannot but because nobody went back and actually prepared teachers for it. Nobody went back and built the scaffolding in terms of student assessment for it. Nobody went back and actually consolidated courses that don’t have anything to do with math but in fact are on the books. Nobody went back and made sure that people who are teaching math actually took it and did well in it themselves, and so on and so forth. So my fear is that this is that this is sort of all hat and no cattle.

Stipek: But it’s symptomatic. It’s basically, I think, an illustration of what is wrong with most educational policy making now, and that is: there’s an assumption that if you set a standard, somehow people will meet it, but there’s no emphasis or effort in building the capacity for people to meet it. And we all know that standards alone don’t give people the wherewithal to get there. It takes all of the kinds of things that Denise and Madeline have been mentioning. We don’t invest in helping people meet those standards that we’re so free to make.

Question from the Audience: How do we go about finding more of the child-centered progressive education in public schools? Does it exist? Is our alternative only private schools? There’s so much pressure, especially in this area, for an academic education, whatever that means.
Crew: My own view is that I think we’ve asked people in public education, much like we’ve asked children in public education, to essentially fit a mold, and you will now pay the consequence for not fitting. That’s what AYP was about, that’s what No Child Left Behind was about, and they build conformists. They built leaders as conformists. So with that came essentially a kind of washing out of progressive-minded people who essentially will find a way of using the arts to teach mathematics. Those schools exist, but they exist in a kind of Tale of Two Cities environment. They exist tremendously in places like New York City; they’re all over New York City. They’re all over big metropolitan areas. To some degree, the charter school movement has tried to figure out a way of capitalizing on this because this is a market to be built and they have greater flexibility and greater freedom in doing it, particularly since they end up mostly with our money on the public side (hint, hint). So I think that they do exist, but you have to recognize that insofar as finding them, you are in a Dickenesque environment; this is truly the Tale of Two Cities. You will find it either here but not over here. In Palo Alto, I can’t speak to it, but in major big cities, these places do exist, but they are one-offs; they are outliers. They are not the way the system works. They are the way that school works, and it functions almost exclusively away from the rest of the system, sometimes at its own peril.

Question from the Audience: I went to a variety of different schools. I went to a Catholic school from the first to fourth grade, and I went to an inner-city school from fourth through sixth grade, and an affluent middle school for seventh and eighth, and then to a pretty good school in Fairfax County for public education. One thing I noticed, and I never even thought about it until I was listening to you all speak and discussing the collaborations and the call for connections and parental involvement: I don’t have any memory of parents being involved in the classroom other than we had the PTA, and my parents were involved in that, and they had the Back to School Nights, and they had parents at the football games. But I was just curious if there are any opportunities or if you experience it now with the different efforts to involve more community members, but what opportunities are there, particularly in high schools, for parents to become involved so that if a child or a student doesn’t make a connection to a teacher or to a coach, that maybe they’ll have a relationship with somebody who is a teacher’s helper, if that even exists at that level?

Levine: Well, in my suburban school, there is tremendous opportunity for parental involvement, whether it’s in the library or on field trips or the booster club, and I think it’s critical to be involved. Our parents didn’t go to school because there was a much bigger social net around families and around education, and this is not simply to romanticize things, but divorce rates were lower, families were less fractured, and so the school was, I think to some degree, able to limit its focus more. I think now, my experience is that people are incredibly lonely – not just these kids who say they need ten minutes a day, but the parents as well. And the parents would actually do well to look to the schools and have the schools be made inviting to the parents as places to develop a community, just like the faith-based community, just like the kinds of communities that over and over when Denise and I speak people say, “We have no community.” What a logical place the school is to develop that.
Crew: This is an interesting thing. This is back to the structural question. When I look at… Miami had 350,000 children. Many of their parents were recent immigrants to the United States, largely from some Caribbean or South American points. What I saw was lots of parents who, probably like our parents, at least in my generation, a generation or two ago, didn’t know what to do. “PTA? What?” [Laughter] “I don’t want to come. As a matter of fact, I don’t want you in any trouble that’s going to bring me down to that school.” So I had a lot of parents who essentially said, Tell me what I need to do, but don’t ask me because I don’t have the money to join and I’m not a joiner and I don’t want anybody even to know I’m in this country and I don’t speak English, and on and on and on.

We started something called the Parent Academy. The Parent Academy is essentially a university-like environment where parents come to actually ask all the hard questions about raising their children. It is everything from “How do I provide a safe and quiet place for my kid to study?” to “How do I get a loan for a house that I want to be able to buy so that my kids can ultimately have their own separate rooms?” to “What do I do when I notice that my kid is starting to use drugs?” to whatever the case may be. They have to have this ten minutes. Now, when we first started this (this is the push-back), people said: They’re not going to come; there’s no menu of courses that you’re going to offer that parents are going to want to participate in. One hundred thousand parents later, in eight months…. People left me alone. Now, this was not paid for out of public school money; the business community paid for this. But it was a building of a new part of the scaffolding. It was adding to the menu of what a school system does to enable parents to act responsibly for their children. And that’s what we’re going to have to do more of.

When I talk about connecting, it’s enabling parents to connect to the institution without them having to do it in the traditional way we understood that connection to be manifested. My father would never have joined the PTA, especially if the Dodgers were on, or something like that. [Laughter] But he would have made the demands if he had known how to frame them. He would have made those demands on me at home. And I think that’s really what I’m asking parents to do. There are things you can do to simply raise your child in a thoughtful and engaging and powerful way, and you don’t have to surrender to the institutional lore of he’s mine now, or she’s mine now, and you’re out of the equation. No, you’re very much a part of the equation, but you have to know a little bit about how the system works, what you can do at home, and so on and so forth. Parent Academy has actually taken off in about ten or twelve other school systems around the country, so that would be a model that I would suggest you take a look at.

Stipek: Unfortunately, I think in a lot of low-income communities, the people in the schools make an assumption that the parents don’t care or don’t want to be involved, but they don’t test that assumption very much. I think the Parent Academy is one good example. I could give you hundreds of examples where, if you invite them, they will come if it’s a meaningful experience. We run a charter school in East Palo Alto, and one of the things we do in the elementary school is invite parents and their kids for a Saturday math day, so they come together, often bringing younger siblings, and play math games under the supervision and guidance of a math teacher. So it’s an opportunity for them.
Instead of saying to them, “Help your child with their homework,” we bring them in to engage in the kinds of activities we hope they will engage in. And they all went home with math games, which we expect they are still using. We really underestimate, I think, how much parents want to be involved if you give them just a little bit of support and a little bit of guidance.

Levine: And useful information. I think we’ve all had the experience of going to Back to School Night and doing laundry lists and shopping lists, and the one-shot parenting education night, which I think is spectacularly unsuccessful because there is no follow-up. So I think what I’ve read about your program, Rudy, is that it took place over time, it addressed multiple needs, and I think that’s what parents are just desperate for.

Question from the Audience: I went to Pre-School Family, which is a program in Palo Alto where they educate parents starting at birth, and parents are required to work in that program, to talk about the parents being involved. That was an amazing opportunity to have somebody start with the developmental milestones, talk about play, all those kinds of things. It’s offered through the City of Palo Alto Adult Education for a minimal fee. It was a place where, of course, your children would make friends, but more importantly, the parents would make lifelong friends. It’s a tremendous thing. What you were mentioning (I’m not familiar with what you did with the 100,000 program) should actually start at birth or six months, because there are a lot of parents out there who know they should read the book, but they don’t know some of the questions and they don’t know what to do. And I think that fits right into that whole pre-school model.

Anyway, my comment is about developing more interesting models. I’m a teacher, and you were talking about ninety minutes. I’m an elementary school teacher, and ninety minutes is a long time. They get fidgety, and so on and so on. When I went to ed school, it was the traditional type of thing, and my problem as a teacher is that I see all the testing, I see everything being pencil, paper, fill in the little blip, OK, now there are some more essays. I don’t often see teachers take the time to verbally ask a student something or to test in a different way using different modalities. I’ve been to lots of seminars and I’ve learned about the intelligences and making choices for students through my school district, but I just want to say that, once again, we’ve got the “Let’s test them again at the eighth grade” thing. We’re not acknowledging the different ways brains work, and we have the fMRIs, we have all the proof for this, and yet it seems as though somebody up at the top…. I hear intelligent conversation here, and I hear it at other schools, and I read this stuff, but why don’t people listen to you?

Stipek: We ask that same question. [Laughter]

Question (continued): Seriously. I keep reading the government…. I keep reading these beautiful articles, and I don’t understand it. I’m really perplexed.

Levine: You know, one of the things that struck me, Rudy, was that you used the word “thoughtful” several times. “Thoughtful” is a hard sell. The media doesn’t like thoughtful, it’s not good for sound bites, it’s hard to make a profit on, and I think a lot of
people get their information from places where thoughtful is not particularly valued. So trying to ... as with Challenge Success or your Parent Academy ... trying to change a culture without the help of the media is a hard thing to do because you can’t put it into a sound bite. What Rudy’s talking about is thoughtful evaluation of programs and projects, but you can’t get that into a sound bite. Nobody wants to know about it. Denise and I speak, and I’m sure you do, too, all the time to the New York Times and the Washington Post. They want a sound bite, that’s what they want, and this is a much more complex issue.

Question (continued): Well, we need to get you on Larry King.

Stipek: Did you have anything to add?

Crew: Well, only that this issue that this person is raising, I’ve really been very frightened about this question of assessment, because I think this sort of eighth-grade, throw it at a wall and if it sticks, great, if not, don’t worry about it kind of thinking is exactly what in some ways has gotten us where we are right now. And a more thoughtful approach to assessment is really what’s going to have to happen, and the highest form of that assessment for me ... when I go into classrooms and I watch teachers teach, what I’m really interested in is, How do you know? How do you assess what’s happening for your children? And the measurement of that is rarely.... The best teaching and best instructional programming that I’ve seen are in places where teachers use assessments that are, for the most part, student driven. The kids can tell you how they got what they got, why they did what they did, where they made a mistake. We’re choosing to make assessment cheap, fast, and seemingly ineffective. That’s a choice we’re making when we do this eighth-grade craziness. The worry that I have is that that’s what teachers coming through ed schools will understand as being assessment...

Stipek: Not our ed school. [Laughter]

Pope: No, I teach that class!

Crew: ... present company excluded. But my worry is that I’m seeing lots of people who are forced into an environment in which they understand that assessment means: Give them a test, and make it a multiple-choice test that I can put through Edusoft, scan it really quickly, and be done with it.

Stipek: I don’t think it’s educators who are looking for tests like that. My answer to why aren’t people listening to people like us (and there’s are lots of us; it’s not just the four of us) is because the message that we have is hard and it takes an investment. And we want to do it easy, we want simple solutions, and we don’t want to invest. Why do we have multiple-choice tests? As Rudy says, because they’re cheap. Why don’t we have the kind of creative, engaging instruction that we’re talking about, the creative and meaningful involvement of parents that we’re talking about? Because it takes a lot of training to be able to do that. It’s not someone who’s had five weeks of a summer program to teach who can do that kind of instruction, particularly in some of the more
challenging environments. So until we invest in preparing teachers well and providing
them the support they need to meet these high standards, until we invest in better, more
effective tests that actually assess what we care about, we’re going to get what we pay
for.

**Question from the Audience:** I’m a retired professor from an eastern university and a
visiting scholar here. I’m not in the education field, but all afternoon I’ve heard some
very enlightening, insightful comments about organization, structures, missions,
psychological realities. Something has been bothering me, and I guess it stems from
some articles I read by Jonathan Kozol in *Harper’s* some months ago. How do you
protect yourself from the voracious and mostly greedy huge educational consulting
business that has goals and aspirations that are totally different from yours? They
couldn’t care less. They want to make money. And the most egregious example of this, I
guess, are those schools in Philadelphia, the Edison schools. Kozol talked about them.
But having been teaching for a long time and seeing what high school kids have to deal
with, textbooks, and also in higher academics, too, this has been bothering me.
Everything you’ve said is so meaningful and so sincere, and you’re really trying in terms
of organization and sustainability, and so on, but how do you deal with those commercial
enterprises?

**Crew:** I haven’t done it very well. The people who eat my lunch are not generally the
people out of the private side. I’ve had very, very good experiences, frankly, with the
vendor community, the business community, and so on and so forth. I really don’t find
that at all. They’re willing to kind of put the bit in their mouth and go in the direction
that you want them to go in if, in fact, you can identify that direction and it’s coherent
and it makes sense. The people who are, for the most part, the chief impediment for
change, in my book, really have to do, frankly, with politicians, people whose agendas
are really self-serving, some of whom are on school boards, and the whole governance
question, which I think for the most part in the last several years has gotten a complete
pass. People don’t want to tackle it, they don’t want to talk about it, they don’t want to
say anything to the National School Board Association, but there are some bad school
board members out there. I’m still trying to get a job, so I’ve got to be careful about how
I say this [Laughter], but there are some very bad people who, just because they have an
address in the community, does not necessarily constitute eligibility for leadership of a
school system. They bring very little portfolio to the real issues of governance. Those
are the ones that I’m more worried about than the private side people, because the private
side people do want to make money, but they know that they’ve got to negotiate with you
to do that. The school apparatus, the whole governance apparatus, is very, very
troublesome because it operates with a sense of hubris that assumes that they not only
know but they have the right to execute against it, so if you’ve got bad ideas and you
have the power to put them in place, it makes you a pretty dangerous person.

**Stipek:** I’m not going to let the private side get so much off the hook here, only because
there is an industry out there that is preying on the fear of parents. It’s the tutoring, it’s
the Kumon, Sylvan, Score learning centers, which as individual centers could be just fine
and just right for your kid, but a lot of these test prep and also the College Board are
really making a lot of money off of preying on the fear of parents. And not every kid needs to have a tutor when they have an A-. You get all of these things in the mail. I have three kids, so I get these: Don’t you want your kid to get into Harvard? Well, then, do this. It starts when they’re really, really young. There’s a place in Menlo Park (I’m sorry if anyone in here owns it) that’s called Exceptional Babies: “We make your baby smarter.” Well, no they don’t. [Laughter] On top of that, actually they could be hurting the kids. So I think one way that I fight it is through education. Just as we teach kids not to believe everything they read in the media and we teach media literacy and we teach them what sources on the Internet are appropriate sources and how you look at the different sources, and primary sources and secondary sources, we are out there teaching parents to do the same thing and to really look at what they are being asked to believe and buy in to and really, is this good for your child? And don’t just do it because you have peer pressure from other parents to do it. What do you mean, your kid is the only one who hasn’t taken the SAT prep test course? Really start to ask, What is best for my kid? And know that there are a bunch of people out there who are preying on this parental fear and taking your money when they really shouldn’t be.

Question from the Audience: I recently read an article in Business Week by Michael Porter, the economist. He was just touching on education, but in that brief mention of it he said that the major problem had to do with district organization, and I was wondering if you have any comments or thoughts about that. He said the major problem in public education is the lack of district consolidation, and he basically proposed district consolidation as a solution to problems in education. If you have comments on that, that would be great. If not, do you have any ideas of any macro, reorganizational ideas in schools or school districts that may help them to be more successful?

Crew: I’m not familiar with the article, but if the article is suggesting that there are just too many school districts and that consolidation of those school districts would be a good thing, I suspect eating more wheat germ would be a very good thing for all of us, but I don’t know that it’s necessarily going to completely make the quality of our life better. Are there places where there could be consolidation of schools? Yes. California, I know, has gone through this to and fro all the time about the county offices versus non-county offices. There’s conversation always about L.A. and the consolidation of schools in L.A., and on and on and on. But I just don’t find that argument to be persuasive at all relative to the quality of schooling. This is fundamentally about an investment, and whether or not you’ve got 1,100 schools or 730 schools or 350 schools, regardless of whether or not you take off ten schools or 10 percent or whatever it may be is an immaterial fact to the issue of how are the children being educated in that school. We could cut 10 percent of the schools. If someone wanted to just sort of play with numbers and cut 10 percent of the schools, I’m going to guarantee you that you’ll show no appreciable difference in the outcomes of those schools unless you make a better than 10 percent investment in public education.

Question from the Audience: What do you think about behavior – including emotional intelligence development as part of the curriculum? I think many times we just teach the children academically, but what about moral ethics? Then they go to university and this
is also part of making a decent human being – letting them know how to treat each other, to know what is the right and wrong thing to do.

**Levine:** I think as long as people perceive this sort of scarcity that it’s very hard to teach integrity, which is a fundamental need for people to learn. But if you’re in competition with the kid sitting right next to you for the one spot that your school gets at Harvard, then you can’t afford to be collaborative. You can’t afford to say, “I’m not understanding that; could you help me out,” and have the kid next to you say yes, because his gain is your loss. One of the things I talk about always is the rolls that are in the school newspapers. There is only one roll. You go into California this past year, and it’s the Six Pillars of Character, and they’re all over the gymnasium – big banners: integrity, responsibility, compassion, and so on. There is no compassion roll in the school newspaper; there is only the honor roll, the academic roll. There could be other rolls, and there are schools around the country that have started created alternative recognition – places to recognize students who show character, who show integrity, who show a whole bunch of other things. But as long as the only thing we value is the number at the end of the day, then we are not going to have children with high levels of character. There are three baskets, as I see it: there’s an academic basket, there’s an athletic basket, and there’s this sort of character basket. And 75 percent of parental attention goes into academics and some percentage goes into athletics, and nobody’s asking questions that pull for integrity, that pull for “what would you do” in this situation. It’s all about winners and losers, and that’s no way to develop any of the kinds of the things we want: compassion, empathy, and collaboration.

**Question (continued):** In my opinion, I think that should be one of the subjects that has to be “Pass or Fail,” because we don’t want to just create a person who is highly intellectual but who is at the same time using that knowledge for the wrong thing.

**Stipek:** But one thing I know for sure is that you don’t teach integrity or honesty or compassion as a course. I think Madeline is right: when you have pressures that are contradictory to that, it’s very hard to even create a school culture that supports it. But those kinds of values need to permeate the entire school culture. It needs to be modeled by adults. It needs to be part of the everyday interaction. Reminders need to be moment to moment. You don’t do integrity on Wednesdays from 10:15 to 11:30. It really needs to be a school-wide, strong commitment that this is a school that values that and is organized around it, that models it, and that encourages it, and that doesn’t support or tolerate behavior that is contradictory.

**Pope:** One thing you might want to look up just for more information just because we don’t have time to go into it here is the Service Learning movement, because what we have seen is that you actually learn better when it’s related to a topic that you truly care about and are doing a project that maybe has a component that will serve others. It makes it more authentic, it makes it realistic, and the kids feel that they have a purpose. At the same time, you’re getting the community involved and a lot of other people. So rather than saying, “We’re teaching integrity today,” we’re teaching English or Spanish
or math or science through these incredibly rich academically rigorous service projects
that we’re doing. That’s one way of teaching some of what you’re trying to get at.

**Question from the Audience:** My name is Rosemary, and I’m going to be making some
comments and then I’ll ask my question. First of all, I’m a former board member, and we
do have ethical board members. I’m also an educator and a community advocate.
There’s a lot that was stated, and my mind is just swirling because I know that education
is an equalizer. It’s the opportunity for all of us here in the United States to be able to
compete in the global economy, which we’re really having difficulty with. I work with
children who are gifted and I also have the same spectrum of those who have been
affected by the academic achievement gap. Now, in No Child Left Behind there are a lot
of wrongs, but one of the rights about it is that it ended up showing and highlighting what
I’d known for over thirty years: what was not being done. So accountability came into
effect. This algebra comment: it really scares me that we’re having to have a statement to
say that we have to have algebra at a certain point, but I know for a fact that algebra is the
gatekeeper. It’s going to be the indicator, if a child has not had it by ninth grade, if
they’re going to be successful in getting into college, but getting through college. So I
have all of this background and I’m working with people who are wanting to be
welcomed into the school – parents and such. So I work from the perspective that I have
a 37-year-old, a 22-year-old, and my children have been in public and private schools.
The thing that I have always realized is that the accountability is the integrity and the
respect of whomever I’m at the table with, and that’s something that needs to be shown
as an action and also as part of the school program, and it has to be infused. I’m really
concerned with our educational system and the future for our people.

Now my question: if you had an opportunity to tell something to our President-Elect,
what would you say? Thank you.

**Crew:** There are many things, but given the time, I think I’d want him to know that the
hill he is now having to climb, having gotten to the presidency, with respect to education
is even higher and the challenge is even greater in terms of really getting his hands
around public education in a meaningful way. It’s even higher than it was with him
becoming the president. The work, as I said earlier, can’t be done by allowing people to
exist nicely, however good and well-intended it may be, but they can’t do this in separate
corners of the country. We need to have his team begin to pull us together, whether
we’re K-12 and research in the university community, or whether we’re mental health
people and nutritionists, or whether we are a faith-based community, charter schools, and
so on and so forth. There needs to be a way where we understand this next assault, this
next climb, against the tyranny of ignorance, really, is going to have to be done together.
I would want to lay out for him what that strategy would look like. I truly think we have
got to start creating models on the ground where that collaboration takes place. We’ve
got to start using what few dollars there are to fuel these relationships among and
between colleges and universities and K-12 institutions. The work that these people have
been talking about doing, they’re doing on the cheap, to be perfectly honest with you.
When I say that, I mean that respectfully. But they’re doing it without any real additional
resources. They’re cobbling together money here and there to do it. It can’t be that.
Somebody has got to make this investment. There’s a quid pro quo, however: If you make the investment, then we’ve got to be willing to say there is an outcome that we can hit; there’s a next place on the mountain where our children will be and a time definite when they’ll be there. And we’ve got to be willing to say that. I don’t think this is just: Love my children and they’ll be better if you just love them more. I think that this is really going to be about manifesting that in some collaborative way that has money behind it and has real gains that are targeted for all kids to be able to make over the course of time. And I just think that without a hard-hitting, compelling three-year launch of that, it’s just going to be sort of tinkering at the edges, and I don’t know, at this point in my life, I don’t tinker well. [Laughter]

**Stipek:** I think that is an excellent note to end on. I know that we have one more question, but I’m going to, for the purpose of people catching their buses and getting home for childcare, grant this person a private conversation with the panelists. So, for the rest of you, thank you very much for being here, and thank you very much to our panelists. [Applause]

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**Rudy Crew, Former Superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools**

When Rudy Crew took the helm of Miami-Dade County Public Schools in 2004, he has set a clear and compelling vision for the nation’s fourth-largest school district. Prior to his appointment in Miami-Dade, he served as director of district reform initiatives at the Stupski Foundation, a private philanthropic organization created in 1996 to support the improvement of public education. As chancellor of New York City Public Schools from 1995-99, he led a number of reforms including adoption of curriculum standards for all schools, elimination of tenure for principals, and introduction of school-based budgeting. His new book, *Only Connect: The Way to Save our Schools*, offers an optimistic vision for school reform by a visionary superintendent who remains a teacher at heart and in practice.

**Madeline Levine, Clinical Psychologist and Author**

A clinical psychologist in Marin County for the past twenty-five years, Madeline Levine has used her practice with privileged adolescents and their parents to write books that challenge one child-rearing myth after another. She has published *Viewing Violence* and *See No Evil: A Guide to Protecting our Children from Media Violence*. Her most recent book, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids*, offers useful advice to parents of any income level about ways to foster healthy autonomy, impulse control, and a strong sense of self that comes when young people are able to construct healthy “inner homes.”

**Denise Pope, Author and Educator, Stanford School of Education**

Denise Pope has been a lecturer at the Stanford University School of Education for the past 7 years, specializing in student engagement, curriculum studies,
qualitative research methods, and service learning. She founded and directs the SOS: Stressed-Out Students project, a national research and intervention project for K-12 schools to counter the causes of academic stress and increase student health, engagement with learning, and integrity. Her book, “Doing School”: How We Are Creating a Generation of Stressed Out, Materialistic, and Miseducated Students was awarded Notable Book in Education by the American School Board Journal. She is a three-time recipient of the Stanford University School of Education Outstanding Teacher and Mentor Award.

Deborah Stipek (moderator)

I. James Quillen Dean and Professor of Education at Stanford

Deborah Stipek’s scholarship concerns instructional effects on children's achievement motivation, early childhood education, elementary education and school reform. She served for five years on the Board on Children, Youth and Families at the National Research Council, she chaired the National Research Council Committee for Increasing High School Students’ Engagement and Motivation to Learn, and she directed the MacArthur Foundation Network on Teaching and Learning. Currently she is completing a longitudinal study that follows children from kindergarten through fifth grade in three low-income communities in three different states.

Comments?

We welcome your comments and suggestions via email to auroraforum@stanford.edu or via the feedback form on our website: auroraforum.stanford.edu.

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