



Listening. Learning. Leading.



ETS/PEI Seminar *Wednesday, April 18, 2007*

Educational Testing Service, Conant Hall, Lounge C, Princeton, N.J.
Breakfast 8 a.m.
Program 9 to 11:30 a.m.

America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future New Jersey's Challenge

Sponsored by ETS and the Public Education Institute of Rutgers University

Welcome and Introductions:

Kurt M. Landgraf, *President and CEO*, Educational Testing Service

Moderator:

Henry Coleman, *Professor*,
Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers University

Presenter:

Irwin Kirsch, *Distinguished Presidential Appointee and co-author*,
America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future

Discussants:

Lucille Davy, *Commissioner of Education*, New Jersey Department of Education
Dana Egreczky, *Vice President*, Workforce Development, New Jersey Chamber of Commerce

James W. Hughes, *Dean*,
Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, Rutgers University

Kathy Krepcio, *Executive Director*,
John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers University
Daniel Santo Pietro, *Executive Director*, Hispanic Directors Association of New Jersey

Download the report and related materials at:

www.ets.org/stormreport

Register for the seminar at:

<http://ntis12.ets.org/onix/etspei.htm>

Daniel Santo Pietro, Executive Director of HDANJ
ETS Panel Commentary
April 18, 2007

We have to thank the Education Testing Service for putting out the “America’s Perfect Storm” report. It encapsulates the major challenge that faces our country. I will not spend time explaining the work of the Hispanic Directors Association, but at the end I will put up a slide with our website and other contact information if you want to learn more about us.

The report goes far beyond challenging the major premise behind our public education system and goes to the heart of what our society is and will become.

As someone born and raised in this country, born in Newark and raised in San Diego, from an immigrant working family, I always possessed an idealistic vision of this country. It is the greatest hope in history for a society not only could match the Pax Romana, but could put the world into permanent cycle of sustainable progress. Public education allowed me to earn a full scholarship to Harvard where interestingly my housemate was the same Professor Ben Freidman quoted extensively in the ETS study. We spent considerable time in the 1960’s discussing how we were going to revolutionize the world. The path I took was to work internationally with private sector programs that addressed international poverty. I saw the struggles of people in small villages throughout Latin America, Africa and Asia that made me see our country in an even sharper light. Those visions of poverty haunt me in everything I do.

These personal reflections are relevant to “America’s Perfect Storm”, because we did not get to this point overnight. Something happened to our idealism after two questionable wars, a wrenching civil rights revolution, our political hegemony leading to economic globalization. Now many of us realize that everything good we have built over three hundred years in this country could collapse in a global economy out of our control.

Let me reflect on the third force mentioned in the report that I was invited to comment on—The changing demographics. A fascinating aspect of demographics is that it is one social science that deals with the inexorable. Unless some one resorts to some type of “final solution”, our society has changed and the demographics will continue to change in largely predictable ways. Immigration is only one factor that is accelerating change. Perhaps, the most significant factor is that people who have the most resources – the wealthy -- have decided that one child is enough. Also the wave caused by the baby boomers is certainly a major factor in our short term demographics in this century. The retirement of my generation means that instead of building walls, our current immigration debate should be focused on how we are going to recruit foreign workers to our country in the next twenty years if we are going to have any hope of maintaining a competitive economy within the rapidly changing global picture!

Now what does this mean for public education? Public education is the most radical social program that this country has produced. Few, if any societies, have proposed to educate universally as diverse and demanding a population as we have in this country. It is the social program that underlies all other social programs and does more than all our other social programs together to determine what kind of society we will have. Keep in mind the more than \$20 billion we spend annually on public education in New Jersey is greater than all our human services, workforce development and children services programs combined. Clearly we have to be sure we are getting the most out of this education investment. There is also another overriding reality which is that there must be a basic equity built into how we spend this \$20 billion. The truth is we must ask people who have resources to spend a growing portion of their resources on poorer children, largely children of color, if universal public education is to succeed. In New Jersey we have the historic Supreme Court Abbott decisions that have forced us in this direction and even mandated supplementary funding for programs like Preschool.

Now as we propose in New Jersey a new school funding formula, we have to complete and expand to other districts the commitment inherent in the Abbott decision and not retreat in any way from guaranteeing every child, whether they are poor, from a family with little education or do not speak English a thorough and efficient education.

Now let me segue into an area I feel particularly passionate about as I hope most who work in education do. To meet this goal of universal public education, there is no way we can avoid two critical challenges: The education must be student-centered and the schools must involve the entire family. In my opinion these are the two greatest shortcomings of our Abbott reforms. We have by and large succeeded in creating greater equity in funding, but we have not made the kind of fundamental changes in our schools that will get us the outcomes we want for our children. Let us accept the reality that education reform is more than just focusing on standards and tests. Success will take using teachers in more creative ways and building the communication among school, home and community.

The National Education Association issued a report recently on the status of Hispanics in Education they called "Overcoming a History of Neglect". It reported on a summit they organized in 2006. The Summit noted: "The norms, values, expectations and relationships within the school often seem to negatively affect Hispanic students. It was felt that educators were more concerned with maintaining the status quo than educating Hispanic students." The report then went on to make more specific recommendations about classroom strategies and teaching strategies. Most were linked to specific challenges Hispanic students face, but frankly most of them would benefit all students no matter their ethnic background. Alejandro Portes, appropriately enough from our own Princeton University, has a new book called Immigrant America: A Portrait that builds on his years of longitudinal studies of immigrant children. It suggests that our schools are failing an entire generation of immigration children and left

unchanged will produce a disaster for our country and particularly a State like New Jersey. We have to change the climate that resists innovation and declare it a high priority to make our schools universally effective in becoming student centered -- to educate children who come from many backgrounds, live in complex conditions of poverty, have single parents and in some cases do not speak English. The last is not a deficit, but a factor to be built on so that all children can benefit from the advantage of speaking multiple languages.

Finally, the ETS report points out the education gap that exists in the families of many recent immigrants. As the report suggests the immigration in the last 5-10 years has been quite heterogeneous. In New Jersey particularly, we have benefited from the fact that much immigration including from Asia and many parts of Latin America has actually raised the education level of our adult population. In the past decade, we have had a spike of immigration in the last five years that is undercounted by the official census. It has included larger numbers of less educated workers from Mexico and Central America. This occurred in part because of push factors like civil wars, the dismantling of maquiladoras on the border when globalization led companies to shift production to China and other areas to find even cheaper labor. But mostly it occurred because employers in this country were seeking labor they could not find at wages that would sustain their businesses, specifically in sectors like construction, services and agriculture. At the same time in 1996 a conservative Congress passed the worst restrictive immigration laws possible, which created the most painful and unjust social problems since Jim Crow laws in the South. So what do we do and particularly what do the schools do?

As HDANJ has discussed with the Commissioner of Education, we have to pull out all the stops to use the schools as a means of engaging these parents. The goal should be to preserve and accentuate the positive values that exist in many struggling families. I do not think we expect most of our parents to help their children with algebra, but we do want them to

motivate, advocate for, and give their children every reason to succeed in school. In New Jersey, I must report our schools' current approach to engaging parents is not working. There are instances of success in particular schools, but by and large, what I hear from many parents is we have failed to create the community-wide approach that is needed to make these parents effective partners. Instead we have largely alienated and isolated them. As the Perfect Storm suggests and many studies confirm, we have to make these investments beyond the classroom. For immigrant families we need to create the most effective, welcoming type of programs using our schools as a vehicle to bring all our human service, health and adult education resources to bear on these families so their children can succeed in school.

The most fundamental question the report *America's Perfect Storm* raises is what kind of world do we want to pass onto our children? If America fails to be the beacon for democracy and civil society, as my classmate Ben Freidman suggests, what kind of world will we leave to our children? As we make decisions today about education and how to weather the storm, let us think long and hard about that question.