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The Power and Limits of Small School Reform: Institutional Agency and Democratic Leadership in Public Education

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> The influence of social class characteristics is probably so powerful that schools cannot overcome it, no matter how well trained are their teachers and no matter how well designed are their instructional programs and climates.
>
> —Richard Rothstein, 2004

> My faith in the possibility that education can serve as a vehicle for individual transformation, and even social change, is rooted in an understanding that human beings have the ability to rise above even the most difficult obstacles, to become more than just victims of circumstance.
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> —Pedro Noguera, 2003

How can schools make a difference? Some argue schools worsen existing inequalities, others that they have no power to change them, and others that they are young people's only hope. While educational theorists and researchers engage in this debate, urban school administrators and teachers live it on a daily basis. Faced with students whose experiences are shaped by poverty and racism, working in under-resourced and over-regulated schools, each decision they make is a reflection of where they stand on this question. For some the work of overcoming the odds is left to students themselves; for others overcoming the odds *is* the work of schools. It is the latter group of educational leaders who create schools that enact *institutional agency*; that is, they work from a clear understanding and critique of the reproductive functions of education within the United States (Apple, 1990; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1997) but do not allow that understanding to represent what it far too often does: determinism without hope. They believe in, and are committed to, the mediating role schools can play (Apple, 1995; Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993; Fine and Weis, 2001; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2001) and so they use their power to question, redefine, and act.

This chapter brings together the theory of institutional agency with everyday practice to question the role schools can play in the struggle for social justice. First it looks inside of Bridges,[1] a small public high school that takes seriously the promise of democratic schooling and, in doing so, expects not only administrators but also teachers and students to be leaders. Second, it presents the post-secondary experiences of graduates of this school to understand both the power and the limits of such a commitment.[2] Together, the two parts speak to the debate of whether schools can make a difference and, more pointedly, to aspiring educational leaders hoping to develop their own visions—without illusion—of what democratic education *can* look.

Bridges: Institutional Agency in Practice

Graduation, June 25, 2004 (field notes)

Fifty-seven students, predominately Latino and African-American, stand tall in their blue and white graduation gowns before a cheering crowd. Their 12th grade literature teacher, who also taught them humanities in 9th and 11th grades, welcomes everyone in both Spanish and English and delivers a speech that he jokes about having revised three times, just as students' assignments were expected to be throughout high school. He presents students' own words from reflective pieces they wrote: "Bridges School has been like my second home for four years"; "What makes Bridges special is the warmth of the community where everyone is helping each other"; "Bridges School has meant a lot to me because of the way the school is structured...teachers care for students and are there whenever you need extra help." And he then comments, "What these students recognize is that community doesn't just happen because people are in the same place. Community has to be built on purpose. At Bridges we have built community through small classes, advisory, group work, close relationships with parents, after school help... And it is not just one community: each class, each grade, the whole school, the neighborhood, your families, are all interconnected communities. And you are part of a community of small schools—a movement that is spreading." His advice to them as they take their next step: "Wherever you are next year, build community for yourself...Get to know your professors and co-workers. Make friends. Join a political organization. Do community service. Study in groups. Spend time with your families. And keep in touch with your Bridges friends and teachers."

There is no valedictorian; rather all graduates are invited to speak. Fifteen choose to, among them: special education students, students with straight A's bound for competitive colleges, students who struggled to get Cs, males, females, Latinos and African Americans. Their words underscore the themes their literature teacher addressed: community, relationships, academic rigor, and the importance of speaking up.

It is a long graduation—lasting over three hours—despite the small size of the graduating class. It is a metaphor: the school takes its time educating those students it has; it thinks about each one deeply, wanting to recognize their individual strengths. No one is anonymous—no one walks away without saying goodbye—over 90 percent move on to their next step: college.

Bridges is both typical and atypical of urban high schools. Its population, while smaller in size (516 students, grades 7–12), is no different demographically than neighboring comprehensive high schools[3]: upwards of 80% qualify for free lunch, 26% for special education services[4], 60% are Latino, 28% African American, 6% Asian, and 6% White. There are no admission requirements to enter the school—no test scores looked at, essays written, interviews had[5]. With funding comparable to other similarly populated city high schools, Bridges faces struggles common to urban schools—ill-equipped science labs, small pools of qualified teacher-candidates particularly in math and science, limited social support services for students,[6] among others.

While these realities qualify Bridges as a typical urban school, there are others that make it distinctly atypical. It is a part of a movement of small schools in New York City, established in the mid- to late-1980s,[7] that provides an important example of institutional agency in practice. Educators, recognizing the devastating effects that the policies, practices, and structures of large traditional schools were having on low-income students of color (Anyon, 1997; Fine, 1991; Kozol, 1991; Nieto, 2000; Valenzuela, 1999), and the unequal educational outcomes that resulted (Orfield and Yun, 1999), reconceptualized schooling: the knowledge that got taught, the roles of teachers and students, relationships with families and communities, student groupings, and the meaning of assessment. The small schools they created, Bridges included, functioned despite the system they were in—one which was increasing expenditures for jails while decreasing them for education, neglecting the widening funding gap between urban and suburban schools, and allowing urban drop-out rates to soar (*CFE v. State of NY*, 1999). And they functioned despite prevalent reforms which ran counter to the goals of democratic education (Aronowitz, 1998). In fact, these small schools were a response to such trends, intended as a tool for social justice providing unselective populations of low-income students

of color an education most often reserved for the affluent (Anyon, 1980). As Meier (1995), founder of one of the first small schools, argued, "When people think 'those kids' need something special, the reply we offer … is, Just give them what you have always offered those who have the money to buy the best" (p. 49).

Like other small schools, Bridges statistically outperforms its traditional school counterparts (Fine et al., 2005; Foote, 2005; Klonsky, 1995). 85.5% of students who were 9th graders at Bridges in fall 2000 graduated by September 2004,[8] while city-wide only 50.2% of 9th graders from fall 2000 had graduated.[9] Furthermore, while nationwide only 57.4% of Americans (ages 25–29) have some or more college, 82% of Bridges graduates (ages 22–24) do.[10,11] Beyond the numbers—or rather beneath them—lies the real difference between Bridges and typical urban high schools: a commitment to *institutional agency* and a translation of that commitment into practice.

In its aim to provide a democratic education to all students, Bridges redefines "schooling." Structurally, it has made the most of its small size through mixed-ability classrooms, block scheduling, integrated curriculum,[12] advisory, small student loads,[13] teacher collaboration, and a system of performance-based assessment. The culture that ensues can be seen throughout the school. Classrooms are characterized by inquiry-driven collaborative learning, dialogue, and student respect for academic achievement. The hallways feature the fruits of this work—position papers on whether the United States should be at war in Iraq, student-designed math problems on linear inequalities, "additional" chapters to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Posters in every classroom display the "Habits of Mind" which teachers use to guide instruction—From whose perspective are we seeing, reading, or hearing? How do we know what we know? Why is this important? Could things be otherwise? The walls are covered with student artwork—paintings with political messages about the underfinancing of public schools, racial injustice, and sexism. The principal's office has one wall plastered with photographs of students and staff, another lined with books for teachers, and a third with books for students categorized into genres like "Latino authors" and "social justice." What one does not see is just as powerful as what one does: no metal detectors at the entrance, security guards stationed on each floor, bulletin boards listing test scores, or students hiding in stairwells.

In its commitment to engaging and rigorous education, Bridges prioritizes accountability; but rather than rely on mandated curriculum and assessments, it does so by prioritizing teacher development/collaboration and developing a system of performance-assessment for promotion. Beneath both of these practices lies a commitment to fostering leadership in teachers and students who are expected to speak up, make decisions, and be active forces in the school (Carlson and Gause).

Teachers as Leaders

The founding principal of Bridges was committed to creating a school where all teachers could develop as educators and become leaders. When she herself first became a teacher she was not introduced at her first staff meeting, told if she had a problem to deal with it on her own, and did her lesson planning in partnership with a curriculum guide. It was not until she began teaching in a small school that she came to realize what teaching *could* be. She explained, "I immediately became a part of a group of thoughtful folks who were always talking about their practice, about kids' learning…The principal always gave us interesting stuff to read, teachers welcomed me in their classroom. I felt like I was home. Now I could be a proud teacher…I was learning."

What evolved at Bridges over the years is a reflection of the critique and possibility this principal articulated. Teachers meet in a variety of teams during the school day and weekly for a 2-hour after school meeting[14]: grade teams discuss students and develop strategies to address their needs; curriculum teams plan and examine student work; department teams develop scope and sequences, common approaches to skill instruction, and best practices; and the staff discusses everything from family involvement to school tone. Most meetings are planned and facilitated by teachers themselves.

A glimpse at a few after-school meetings illustrates the translation of the vision into practice. At one meeting the staff set out to explore more closely how the cultural and class differences between themselves and their students affect practice. At another, the humanities team shared literacy strategies, while the science team redesigned 7–12 course content to address more of the sciences. At a third teachers, asked to provide collective feedback on school organization, policy, and teacher support, gave recommendations on everything from managing new testing requirements to retention policies to the budget.
What is clear: teachers are accountable to one another, and moreover, to their students.

Students as Leaders

Bridges's system of performance-assessment is intended to foster both academic achievement and leadership within all students. While New York City has a mandated testing regime of five exams, Bridges, along with a host of other small schools, has taken an active stand against this. Believing such tests are barriers to democratic practices and ultimately a disservice to low-income students of color (McNeil, 2000), many small schools opened with a waiver from them. When the state refused to renew the waiver in 2000, the NY Performance Standards Consortium was formed to regain it. While a variance was eventually awarded,[15] at one point Bridges had to administer all of the tests[16]; it never stopped using its system of performance-based assessment. Twice a year, in all subjects, students are required to create a portfolio, complete a written reflection, and present their work in roundtable formats—3–4 students with 2–3 adults.[17] Additionally, in their senior year students complete performance-assessment tasks and present them to graduation committees[18] in the format most commonly associated with a dissertation defense.[19] The purposes of both roundtables and graduation committees are explained in the principal's letter to participants:

> For most schools throughout New York State the end of the year is a time where student learning is being assessed through state-sponsored standardized tests … At Bridges we believe that learning cannot be sufficiently demonstrated within the confines of tests. This means that our students and teachers are challenged daily not only to prepare for tests, but also to read, write, think, share, explore, solve, create, collaborate, present, question, defend, negotiate, compromise, and, most importantly, reflect upon themselves as learners … Most students would be too scared to expose themselves to the public like this and most teachers too nervous to "put it all out there." … This is not an easy thing to do. Our students' work and our own work is not always as pretty as we want it to be. And no matter how hard they have worked and we have worked, we are never quite satisfied. However, we offer it to the public because it is to the public that we and our students are ultimately accountable.

A glance at the roundtables and graduation committees illustrates the principal's words. In a 9th grade math roundtable Juan, an ESL and special education student, read his reflective piece: he likes projects because he often freezes during tests; he has grown a lot as a student; he is especially thankful to his teacher for pushing him. There were several grammatical errors and it was short. Standing at an overhead projector he then explained a project he did and two sample test problems, demonstrating general understanding but stumbling over math vocabulary. Valencia then presented her work. Her reflective letter was several pages and began: "I am extremely proud of the work in this folder because it shows how I went from getting [Fs] to As in less than five months." New to Bridges, she explained that she began to understand math in this class in ways she never had before. Her presentation of how she used the Pythagorean theorem to construct a stable antenna for a rooftop was evidence of her mastery.

In a 10th grade humanities presentation, portfolios cluttered the tables and there was a lively hum of voices around the room. Handouts summarized the course: a study of the Rwandan genocide, the Arab-Israeli conflict, World War II, and South African Apartheid with a focus on what breeds oppression, how to resist violations of human rights, and the responsibility we have to our communities. As the students reflected on their work, debates that had taken place months before were reopened: What land should Israel concede to the Palestinians? How guilty were by-standers during the Holocaust? One student talked about her struggles with reading while another recounted the long list of books she had read; one student talked about the importance of activism and another about the memorial he constructed to the victims of Hiroshima; some presented a focused critique of the class and others of themselves. At the end their teacher closed the session: "Congratulate yourself on your success but you should also approach each experience with a beginner's mind. Do not wait for a teacher to start your process of inquiry."

In a 12th grade senior graduation committee, Yahaira presented her history research paper. She, along with all of her classmates, had to choose a topic of interest to them, research it with primary and secondary sources, and present it. Yahaira was the only student in the room with a committee of three adults. She focused her presentation on why she chose to study Trujillo's rule in the Dominican Republic—to learn more about her own history—and also focused on the struggles she faced in the research/writing process. She then answered a series of questions: What was the role of the United States? How was U.S. support of Trujillo similar to its support of Bin Laden during the Cold War? What would she advise Bush on foreign policy given what she learned? After over a half an hour of dialogue Yahaira left the room and her committee discussed the paper and the presentation. Opinions varied about specifics, but all agreed that based on the rubric she did an excellent presentation, demonstrated deep understanding, had a well-written paper, and she needed to revise her introduction. Yahaira was invited back into the room and given feedback.

As soon as she left she hugged her friends with relief and then sat down to rework her introduction.

What is clear: all students are active in their learning and are held to high expectations.

The Graduates

How did we do? What at Bridges prepared you? What worked? What didn't?

— Bridges's Principal

In redefining "school" Bridges's students, who might otherwise have been academically marginalized, are engaged, learning, and persisting through high school. The work of small schools, however, does not end with graduation from high school; in their struggle for social justice they hope to equip their students with what they need to achieve social mobility: a college degree. Thus, what happens to small schools' graduates as they move into post-secondary education is an important, underexplored,[20] window into the power and limits of small schools. While Bridges's graduates may have had democratic experiences in high school, they are not impervious to the host of obstacles college presents to low-income students of color. As one small school's principal posited,

> I know we have given our kids the kind of personalized education that has helped them to be successful human beings over the last four years ... *But is what we give them enough?* Will the students be able to overcome the inequities of college? Of the work world? Can they leave their families? Can they make schooling a priority? Will the scholarships be there year after year? Will they be resilient enough? (Littky, 2000, 167)

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, statistically Bridges's graduates persist in and through college at significantly higher rates than national averages (See table 14. 1). They are, for the most part, academically prepared, motivated to learn, and many carry with them the help-seeking orientations (Stanton-Salazar, 2001) needed to navigate the obstacles.[21] The result: significantly higher persistence rates in college.

Table 14.1[22,23]

College Persistence and Completion Nationwide vs. Bridges

	National (Ages 25–29) (%)	National Black[24] (Ages 25-29) (%)	National Latino (Ages 25-29) (%)	NYC (25 and over) (%)	Bridges (Ages 22-24) (%)	Bridges Black (Ages 22-24) (%)	Bridges Latino (Ages 22-24) (%)
Some College or More[25]	57.4	50.2	31.1	47.8	82	84	83
Associates[26]	12	16	19	5.2	13	16	16
Bachelors	28.4	17.2	10	15.8	35	33	34

At the same time these are not the numbers small schools' educators hoped for; the obstacles more varied and constant than many ever imagined. Looking inside of graduates' journeys reveals a complex story—one which captures graduates' intense desire to learn *and* how trying the journey through college is. Echoed throughout many interviews and surveys were critiques of college teaching, stories of money and family-related stress, and indications of alienation from campus communities. The complexity of these journeys is best narrated by the graduates themselves and so below you will meet three Bridges's graduates, each of whose journeys is representative of many more. Their stories are evidence of the power of institutional agency as well as the enormous obstacles poverty and racism present.

> Niki was the first in her family to attend college. Having watched her mother struggle with low-paying jobs and government assistance and her father move between home and prison, she wanted to distinguish herself. She chose to attend a private competitive college just outside of New York City because it was close to home, diverse, and offered her the best financial aid package.
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> When Niki got to college she immediately became involved in campus life, joining organizations and working two on-campus jobs. Within the first two months, however, she found herself disappointed that she was not learning much academically—"I felt like I was regurgitating everything that they taught ... like [they're] telling me I'm not capable of thinking"—and overwhelmed by financial stresses. She was unable to attend freshmen orientation because it cost extra money; her Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) money was late because of paperwork problems; she could not afford her books; and while she thought she was not going to take out any loans, she had to take out

three—"You have problems with everything here and … it always comes back to money."

These trends continued. At the beginning of her second year Niki learned tuition had increased $2,000 but her aid had not. She successfully advocated for more grants and worked three jobs while carrying a full course load. By April of her second year, when she learned tuition was increasing by another $2,000 and that the only additional aid she could secure were loans, she decided to leave. While she liked the community, she felt she was not learning enough to justify taking out another $10,000-plus.

Niki decided the best thing was to transfer to a nearby State school. Though it did not have the best reputation, it was significantly less money and "just a bus stop away." When Niki first arrived at her new college she was disappointed—she missed her friends, she lost eight credits in the transfer, and she had to adapt to a very different environment; but she only had to take out $1,000 in loans a semester and work one job. By the end of the year Niki had adjusted—she had made friends, been offered two TA-ships, and anticipated graduating within four and a half years of beginning college.

Malik was also the first in his family to attend college. He planned to go to a two-year State college several hours outside of the city immediately after high school. However, when financial aid complications arose, and he was faced with an arrest based on false charges, he postponed attendance until the Spring. Come December, with more aid and all charges dropped, Malik was anxious to begin school.

Soon after Malik arrived on campus he realized just how much of an adjustment college life was going to be. He found himself struggling with everything from finances, to academics, to social life. He had to take out two unexpected loans, could not get an on-campus job, and the only off-campus jobs available were too far to travel to without a car. While he had been excited to get back to school-work, he was frustrated with his educational experiences—"You're learning from a book … the teacher talks about what happened in the chapter and that's it for the day … No class discussions … You don't go to your room to talk to someone and say, "You know what I learned today?" And the social life was limited to parties with an abundance of drugs and fighting the dorms were covered in graffiti and had "weed on the floor," and there was a constant police presence. His reaction: "This can't be college … you [go to college to] try to get away from that atmosphere." Despite his disappointments, Malik returned for a second year. However, when he discovered he would have to double his loans to pay the increased tuition, he thought twice. "I [had to] ask myself, "Am I learning anything? … It doesn't feel like [it] … I'm just up here to get the degree," and decided, "It's not worth it."

Anxious to be back in school, Malik immediately turned to the easiest route: a for-profit trade school that promised a fast degree and job security.[27] As soon as he began, and was asked to do elementary school-level work alongside students who had been out of school for upwards of twenty years, he got his money back. But his desire to be back in school did not fade, "If I don't go back to college in January I'll be crushed." So he set out to find work and a new college. He sold everything from donuts to chocolates and put an application into the City University system. When he had not heard back by early January he contacted them and learned his transcripts had never been sent from his previous school; he still owed them $400. As the academic year progressed he saved his money, continued to explore colleges, and did everything he could to resist personal phone calls and abundant advertisements from for-profit trade schools. While tempted by what they promised; he saw them as a trap.

By his third year out of high school Malik secured a spot at one of the city's community colleges. He took four courses in his first semester but having failed the math and reading remedial placement tests only two classes were credit-bearing. While he liked a few of his classes, he wished more were in business and found himself frustrated with the instruction in the remedial courses where one instructor read the newspaper in class and another gave incorrect information. Malik was also disappointed with the campus culture—while he had hoped for a community of learners he found that no one spent time outside of class on campus, "Everyone's pretty much doing their own thing." But he remained focused on his end goal, the degree.

By the end of his first year in community college Malik had placed out of remedial reading[28] but not math and had done well in his other courses. However, several family and financial issues began to surface requiring Malik to take time off. His plan was to re-enroll in the Spring, despite his frustrations, and complete his degree.

Charles,[29] after graduating from Bridges, attended a very competitive private college in New York City. While he knew the coursework at this college would be rigorous, he was excited for the intellectual challenge. Once he began, however, he found that though he was "enthralled" by the scholarly readings and discussions, he was intimidated to the point of being unable to participate in class or complete assignments.[30] While he did not anticipate feeling out of place with a predominately white and middle-class student body, he quickly began to feel the effects of being "different." He was astutely aware of the social and cultural capital his classmates carried with them and more often than not found himself "wallowing in the pits of self-doubt" and "fleeing school" right after class. By the end of his first year, plagued by what he described as "intense writer's-block," Charles had not completed the work for far too many classes. He was dismissed.

Charles decided to accompany his mother, who was recovering from breast cancer, to Florida in hopes of finding a job and his way back to school. With little luck securing work he spent his nights doing what he missed most about school: reading, writing, and soul searching. His first email to me: "After reading 'Letters of a Young Poet' by Rilke, I'm having problems with my supposed craft. I've asked myself MUST I write? Would I die if I didn't write? Would the world even care?" Over the next two months he sent upwards of eight poems on everything from war to love. By January Charles was desperate to be back in school, "The fact that I'm itching to return to school after having it cause so much misery is testament to my desire to learn." The closest school, a community college, was an hour and a half's commute, but he was willing to make it if it meant reclaiming part of his academic identity and intellectual development. His plans were crushed however when he discovered that because he had been living in Florida for only six months he was not a resident and would have to pay

out-of-state tuition. "It seems that I will not be going to school this semester," he concluded.

By February Charles set into motion a process to return to New York and to college. He completed an eight-page reflection on why he failed his first year and sent it to admissions and the dean of his original college and completed applications for both State and City schools. In a trip back to New York where he met with anyone he could, he learned that while he could not attend a new four-year college until he completed community college courses he would be afforded another chance at his original college. Further complicating his journey, however, was the fact that having moved to Florida he was no longer a New York resident and thus ineligible for the funding he had initially received. After his mother re-filed her taxes so he could claim "independence," and he moved in with his grandmother, Charles was able to begin again.

Charles returned excited to "right his wrongs." By the end of his third year out of high school he completed a full year of college in much better standing than his first year; he would be able to return the following year. He continued to struggle with many of the same issues he initially faced, but what was different was that Charles reached out for help—to professors, counselors, students. He was clear, "I don't want to fuck this up. Not again—because I would be failing myself—more than anyone else. And I wouldn't know what to do after that."

Conclusions

> If education is not the key to social transformation, neither is it simply meant to reproduce the dominant ideology.
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> —Paulo Freire, 1998

The work of Bridges and the experiences of its graduates lend grounded insights into the debate on whether schools make a difference. The message: though schools can't do it all, they can, and therefore must, do something. Small schools alone can never "do enough" (Littky 2000) to overcome the enormous odds their students are up against; it's not as simple as just "[giving] them what you have always offered those who have the money to buy the best" (Meier 1995) and expecting that the opportunities will follow. At the same time, graduate experiences also reveal that institutional agency does change the odds for many and far surpasses the achievements of their traditional school counterparts.

Determinism without hope is not an option for low-income students of color, nor should it be for schools. Institutional agency needs a more permanent place within the debate on schools as tools of social justice—and more importantly, within the leadership of public schools. Yes, there needs to be more funding for urban schools; yes, there needs to be better social policy for the poor; yes, there needs to be more collaboration among organizations to build

toward a movement for social justice. But while we are waiting—and fighting—for those changes, educational leaders need to question what they can do in their own schools to demonstrate a commitment to social justice and equity.

Notes

1. The names of the school, staff members, students, and graduates have been changed.
2. The research for this chapter draws from a larger study conducted between June 2002 and June 2005 on the power and limits of public small school reform as understood through the post-secondary experiences of graduates. Using a multi-method approach to data collection, the study explored the vision and practice of small schools. Made up of an ethnographic school-based component and a graduate follow-up one, the former included participant observation, semi-structured interviews with staff members and students, and document collection. The graduate follow-up study was a three-year "go-along" (Kusenbach, 2003) with six graduates consisting of interviews, campus visits, collection of syllabi and assignments, email, phone conversations, and family interviews. Additionally twenty graduates of the same school were interviewed and ninety graduates surveyed (representing 55 percent of three graduating classes).
3. All data on Bridges is from New York City Department of Education School Report Card, 2003.
4. Bridges has a larger population of special education than most other New York City public schools. Only 13% of the neighborhood comprehensive school is classified as special education.
5. When students enter in 7th grade their test scores, in fact, are below district averages. It is important to note that Bridges has the advantage of working with the majority of their high school students for two years before they begin 9th grade.
6. Bridges does have a corporate sponsor to supplement its programming which it has used, primarily, to hire a college counselor. Additionally it has a Beacon program on site which provides some after-school opportunities for students.
7. These small schools were committed to a common set of ideals and practices. Since then many more small schools have opened; since 2002 upwards of seventy-eight small schools were established. In the process "small schools" have come to mean many things: some test students to enter and some are open to all; some focus on traditional learning and others on project-based learning; some are staff-run and others have traditional governance structure.
8. An additional 11.3% of the original 9th graders were still enrolled.
9. An additional 29.9 % of the original 9th graders were still enrolled.
10. This data comes from my own research rather than Department of Education data.
11. Foote (2005) shows that graduates of similar schools also have higher persistence rates in college. Of the sample she tracked, 78% enrolled for a second year; of those attending 4-year colleges 84% re-enrolled and of those attending 2-year colleges 59% re-enrolled. Nationally

only 73% of students who enter 4-year colleges re-enroll for a second year and only 56% of those who enter 2-year schools do.

12. Bridges began by integrating both history and English as well as math and science. As the school developed, however, it decided to separate the instruction of math and science, believing that it was difficult to maintain the rigor of each discipline throughout high school with an integrated approach.
13. While many schools focus on small class size, Bridges recognizes that it is not only small class size but also the number of overall students that a teacher teaches throughout the week that is important to personalized learning. As such, overall loads range from 40–80 students, with math and science teachers having the higher numbers of students.
14. While this time commitment exceeds the expectation set out in the Union contract, the staff agreed it was necessary and worked it into their School-Based Option plan.
15. In 2005 the Consortium was granted a variance from the State allowing its schools to administer only the English Language Arts Regents and add one other in for students entering high school in 2006. Students entering in 2008 will be required to take two exams and those entering in 2009 to take all five. The Consortium is continuing its fight in hopes to change the conditions of the variance. For more information go to:http://www.performanceassessment.org/.
16. During the time of my research all five exams were being administered at Bridges.
17. Roundtable participants include Bridges's staff, staff from collaborating organizations, student-teachers, and educators from other schools.
18. Committees are made up of educators from both within and outside of the school.
19. When Bridges graduated its first class of students, seniors were required to do a performance task in all subject areas. This policy has changed over the years as different tests were phased in and out. When this research was done there were graduation committees in social studies only; however, when the variance was awarded the school made a commitment to reinstitute committees in other subject areas.
20. There have been two studies to date on small schools' graduates in college. Foote (2005) analyzed college GPAs and persistence rates from year one to year two and Bensman (1995) conducted one-time interviews with graduates of a small school.
21. While this chapter does not provide analysis for why some graduates persisted and others did not, it is worth noting that those who had more access to help at their colleges and those who reached out for it persisted at higher rates than those who did not.
22. National numbers come from 2003 US Census data compiled in "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2003" (US Census Bureau, 2004), and New York City numbers come from 2000 US Census data compiled in Census 2000 Summary File (US Census Bureau, 2000).
23. Statistics on "Some College or More" derived from sample of 90—the graduating classes of 1999, 2000, 2001; statistics on Associates and Bachelors completion derived from sample of 60, as the class of 2001, when surveyed, had not been into high school long enough for degree completion.
24. Defined as African American and Caribbean American.
25. Defined as one or more years.
26. Includes occupational and academic associates degrees.

27. For-profit colleges have grown rapidly in New York State and New York City, serving predominately low-income students of color. Few of them offer degrees—giving certificates instead—and credits from these schools either do not transfer, or transfer to only a select number of colleges. Most overlook prior financial aid debt, offering students loans and Pell and TAP money (Arenson, 2005). Data on loan defaults shows a disproportionate number of borrowers who defaulted were in for-profit schools (Merisotis, 1988). Of Bridges's graduates, 17 percent attended for-profit schools at some point in time.
28. Evidence of the often arbitrary nature of these exams, Malik passed his reading exam at the end of his first semester getting only three questions wrong.
29. Charles's mother got her GED and then Associates degree as an adult.
30. This is a common phenomenon for students of color that Steele (1999) has termed "stereotype threat."

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