How Program Officers at Education Philanthropies View Education

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This paper examines the educational views of program officers at education philanthropies. It reports the results of a survey conducted in 2005. The survey was inspired by a 1997 survey of education professors conducted by Public Agenda. Published as *Different Drummers: How Teachers of Teachers View Education*, the findings revealed that "professors of education have a distinct, perhaps even singular prescription for what good teachers should do—one that differs markedly from that of most parents and taxpayers."[1] Education professors were found to value process over content and learning how to learn over mastering basic skills. They did not favor memorization, rewards and punishments for good behavior, basic skills, and tough discipline. The report concluded, "While the public's priorities are discipline, basic skills, and good behavior in the classroom, teachers of teachers severely downplay such goals."[2] Indeed, the professors seemed well aware that they held views contrary to the general public. More than three-fourths, 79%, agreed with the statement, "the general public has outmoded and mistaken beliefs about what good teaching means."[3]

Why Survey Philanthropies?

The record of philanthropic foundations in promoting education reform is known more for its failures than its successes. In fairness, the reputation does not come from a systematic evaluation of a large number of grants over an extended period of time, nor from a meta-analysis of individual evaluations, but from a few very large and very famous cases. The last half of the twentieth century is bracketed by two such examples. The Ford Foundation launched a major initiative targeting K-12 education in the 1950s. In the 1960s and early 1970s, one component, known as the Comprehensive School Improvement Program, supported what is known today as

systemic reform—seeking fundamental changes in governance, curriculum, staffing, and teacher training in communities across the country. Remarkably ambitious, the program was based on the conviction that in order to change schools, everything must be changed. By the early 1970s, however, Ford had concluded, in the words of one program officer, that "generally the projects did not firmly establish innovations in practice or produce widespread improvement in the quality of educational programs."[4]

The Annenberg Challenge grant of $500 million in 1993 was, at the time, the largest single gift to public education in history. The money funded a multi-pronged school reform effort: challenge grants in nine urban districts (eventually expanding to fourteen localities), a rural schools initiative, programs to support arts education, and an endowed national school reform institute at Brown University. Twelve years later, most accounts describe the results as disappointing. A 1999 report commissioned by the Challenge concluded that the award "left small yet encouraging footprints," an accomplishment the Fordham Foundation called "less than staggering."[5] A 2002 series in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* described the results as "mixed." [6] Frederick M. Hess quotes Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of Great City Schools, as saying that the lesson from Annenberg is "don't do that again." [7]

The experiences of the Ford and Annenberg projects, spanning the past several decades, have contributed to the impression that philanthropies are ineffectual in promoting school reform. Several explanations have been offered, including faulty theories of change, the undermining of reform by the social environment of schools, and a dearth of ongoing, unbiased feedback to foundations on program effectiveness. Some explanations are contradictory. Foundations have been accused of being too timid in seeking fundamental change and yet too

ambitious in seeking systemic change; too reliant on the status quo and yet too willing to rely on outside experts to change local practices.[8]

These explanations are all about implementation. Missing from them is a consideration of what is being implemented, of the content of reform initiatives or the philosophical premises on which they rest. What are the problems with education that philanthropic reforms are attempting to change? And what are the proposed solutions? Content is not divorced from implementation. One would hope that a bad idea does not survive even if guided by a wonderful theory of institutional change. Unpopular school reforms, especially if they alienate teachers, parents, taxpayers, and other key stakeholders in education, will undoubtedly be difficult to implement in any lasting way.[9]

Which brings us to surveying education professors and foundation program officers. In the Public Agenda study, education professors' ideas were found to fall mainly in the camp of progressive education, a philosophy or "world view" of schooling that has held sway in academia since the dawn of the twentieth century. Central tenets of progressive education include a reverence for student-centered learning, a preference for active learning and instruction involving "hands-on" materials over didactic forms of teaching, and the conviction that expecting students to learn such traditional material as the rules of spelling, grammar, and punctuation is largely irrelevant to good teaching.

Educational progressivism is controversial. Critics of education schools, E.D. Hirsch being the most well known in recent years, argue that progressive beliefs are unsubstantiated by scientific evidence. Idealistic about learning, based on romantic notions of childhood, cutoff from the self-checking regimens of traditional academic disciplines, and isolated in education schools, educational progressivism, Hirsch argues, has hardened into dogma, a "thought world"

that permeates the scholarship of educationists.[10] The historical record of how progressive programs play out in schools and classrooms is certainly discouraging. Diane Ravitch's *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms* could just as appropriately have been subtitled, "A Century of Failed Progressive Reforms." For indeed the book was about just that—how decade after decade in the 20th century progressive reform movements sprang forth, at first full of hope and enthusiasm, then crashing to earth in frustration and failure. But progressivism is not consigned to history; it lives on in many contemporary reforms. Elements of educational progressivism can be found today in whole language reading instruction, contemporary math reform, numerous programs promoting "critical thinking" and "higher order thinking skills," instructional reforms that cast teachers as coaches and facilitators instead of instructors who impart knowledge to children, portfolios and other non-standard measures of student assessment, constructivist approaches to pedagogy, and the small schools movement.

The perennial disappointment of educational progressives is at least partially attributable to their failure to win over parents, teachers, and the general public. Another fascinating study by Public Agenda found high school students hostile to the progressive cause.[11] The views of education professors place them outside mainstream opinion on American school reform. What about education philanthropies? Have program officers, like education professors, adopted a world view that is in opposition to the beliefs of ordinary Americans? If so, that would constitute a reasonable hypothesis for foundations' disappointing track record on school reform. The Ford and Annenberg initiatives are solidly--and famously--in the progressive tradition. Among the innovations that Ford money supported were open classrooms, team teaching, and inter-disciplinary curricula—mainstays of progressive education.[12] Annenberg supported the development and dissemination of student-centered, hands-on learning materials. Two heroes of

contemporary progressive education, Ted Sizer and Deborah Meier, played key roles in the formative years of the Annenberg Challenge. Sizer served as the founding director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, and Meier was instrumental in putting together the coalition of education groups that became the New York Networks for School Renewal, the sponsor of the Annenberg Challenge in New York City.[13]

Program officers are the primary contact point between foundations and grant seekers. They represent a foundation's mission and beliefs in a concrete way. A survey of their views will help answer the question of whether foundations operate within the mainstream of public opinion on education or whether, like education professors, they march to the beat of a different drummer.

Methods

The survey of program officers was conducted from January to March in 2005. Surveys were mailed in three waves, with postcard reminders approximately one week after the mailings in Waves 1 and 2. A total of 240 surveys were mailed to foundations that are active in K-12 grant making. Responses were received from 128 program officers, a response rate of 53.3%.

Survey questions were drawn from previous Public Agenda studies, and the wording of questions was unaltered. Topics such as vouchers, charter schools, and other forms of school choice were not included. Like all mail surveys, self-selection may introduce bias if respondents differ markedly from non-respondents on their educational views. The 53% response rate reduces but does not eliminate the potential that selection bias has affected the results. Program officers who are most passionate in their opinions may have been more likely to answer the survey, but whether this tipped the results and rendered specific responses unrepresentative is

unknown. One aspect of the survey lessens the possibility of systematic ideological bias. Some questions ask respondents to react to statements expressing a point of view. These statements were well balanced, meaning that a question with a bias toward a particular point of view is mirrored by another question on the survey expressing the opposite point of view.

Public Agenda interviewed education professors by telephone. Are results from a mail survey comparable? The research literature on how different survey methods affect results is small and atheoretical. Cui (1993) describes the key differences between mail and telephone surveys as:

> "1. Order effects were less likely to occur in mail surveys than telephone surveys (Bishop et al., 1988). In other words, which questions are asked first appears to influence respondents more during telephone surveys than mail surveys.
>
> 2. Telephone respondents tend to select more extreme answers than mail respondents when vaguely quantified scale categories are used. Mail respondents tend to distribute themselves across the full scale (Hochstim, 1967; Mangione et al., 1982; Walker & Restuccia 1984).
>
> 3. Mail surveys are more reliable than telephone and face-to-face interview surveys (DeLeeuw, 1992)." [14]

Phone and mail surveys probably have trade-offs that wash out with samples of the sizes examined here (the sample size of education professors was 900). The second point above—that more extreme responses are produced on phone surveys and answers are distributed more evenly

across the scale on mail surveys--may be germane to interpreting the responses in Table 4 below. Readers will be cautioned when those results are discussed.

Survey Results

We first asked the program officers to supply some background information. Table 1 displays the results. Program officers have worked an average of 6.6 years at their current foundation. About one in five (22.8%) have an education degree. Four out of ten (40.4%) have no teaching or administrative experience. About one-fourth of the program officers have school administrative experience, and they served an average of 11.3 years, a significant tour of duty. More than half (56%) of the officers have teaching experience, and they taught for an average of six years. The overwhelming majority of former teachers, 80%, taught in public schools. Let's now turn to the survey questions.

TABLE 1 Background of Program Officers

	Mean	Median	N	Std. Error
Years at Foundation	6.6	5	109	0.7
Education Degree	22.8%	n/a	101	4.2%
No teaching or administrative experience	40.4%	n/a	104	4.8%
Administrative Experience	26.9%	n/a	104	4.4%
- Number of years as administrator	11.3	10	25	1.8
Both teaching and administrative experience	23.1%	n/a	104	4.2%
Teaching experience	56.0%	n/a	109	4.8%
- Taught in a public school	80.4%		46	5.9%
- Taught in a private school	34.8%		46	7.1%
- Number of years teaching	6.0	4.5	58	0.8

Note: Public/private school break down are not mutually exclusive categories.

Questions are discussed below in the same order as presented in the survey. Questions are grouped into five categories: teachers, classroom activities, perceptions of the nation's public schools, school reform, and the problems of local public schools. For the first three categories, I will compare program officers' responses to those of education professors. In the last two categories, the officers' responses will be compared to those of parents, K-12 teachers, and the

general public. Unless otherwise noted, differences that are singled out for discussion are statistically significant using the significance tests detailed below each table.

Teachers

The first group of questions address teaching. Although soliciting opinions on the qualities teacher training programs should impart to their students, the real significance of the questions is in revealing what respondents consider to be the characteristics of good teachers. Table 2 reports the percentage of respondents describing a particular characteristic as "absolutely essential."   Program officers and education professors rank the attributes of good teachers quite similarly. Any differences are in emphasis. Look at the top three characteristics. Approximately three-fourths of both program officers (78%) and education professors (72%) believe "teachers who will have high expectations of all their students" are absolutely essential. A clear majority of program officers also believe it is absolutely essential that teachers promote active learning by students (72%) and that teachers be life-long learners themselves (66%). Education professors embrace these goals even more emphatically, with 82% believing that students should be active learners and 84% believing that teachers should constantly update their skills.

The content knowledge of teachers is valued more by education professors than by program officers. A majority of education professors (57%) believe it absolutely essential that teachers are "deeply knowledgeable about the content of the specific subjects they will be teaching." Less than half of program officers (47%) grant content

TABLE 2 Teachers

Teacher education programs can impart different qualities to their students. Which qualities do you think are most essential and which are least essential? Please use a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 means least essential and 5 means it is absolutely essential to impart.

Percentage responding "absolutely essential":

	Program Officers	Education Professors
Teachers who will have high expectations of all their students.	78	72
Teachers committed to teaching kids to be active learners who know how to learn.	72**	82
Teachers who are themselves life-long learners and constantly updating their skills.	66***	84
Teachers who are deeply knowledgeable about the content of the specific subjects they will be teaching.	47*	57
Teachers prepared to teach in schools with limited resources and where many kids come to class not ready to learn.	45	45
Teachers trained in pragmatic issues of running a classroom such as managing time and preparing lesson plans.	27**	41
Teachers who are well-versed in theories of child development and learning.	27***	46
Teachers who maintain discipline and order in the classroom.	18***	37
Teachers who expect students to be neat, on time, and polite.	14	12
Teachers who stress correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.	12	19

Note: * $p < 0.05$ level, ** $p < 0.01$ level, *** $p < 0.001$ (test for equal proportions).

Source: Data for foundation officers were collected by the author for this study. Data for education professors are from Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, *Different Drummers* (Public Agenda, 1997).

knowledge such importance. State laws on teacher certification hold schools of education responsible for producing teachers knowledgeable in content, which may explain the education

professors' responses. But it does not explain the lukewarm response of program officers to the notion that teachers must thoroughly know the subjects that they teach.

Program officers are also less likely than ed school professors to see the importance of teachers who are trained in pragmatic issues of running a classroom (27%, vs. 41% of education professors who consider this absolutely essential), teachers who are well-versed in theories of child development (27%, vs. 46% of education professors) or teachers who maintain discipline and order in the classroom (18% vs. 37%). It is important to note that both program officers and education professors give the lowest priority to characteristics related to teachers enforcing rules. Only 14% of program officers deem it absolutely essential for teachers to expect students to be neat, on time, and polite, and only 12% believe stressing spelling, grammar, and punctuation is absolutely essential.

In sum, education professors value characteristics in teachers that they have a hand in developing in teacher training programs—an active learning approach to instruction, the constant updating of skills, knowledge of content, a grasp of child development theories, and classroom management. Program officers join education professors in valuing teachers with high expectations for all children, teachers who promote active learning, and teachers who are life long learners themselves. They are not as keen, however, on classroom management skills or deep content knowledge. And, in a pattern that will be reinforced by data still to be examined, program officers do not place great importance on teachers who maintain classroom discipline and control, teachers who expect students to be neat, punctual, and polite, or teachers who stress such basic skills as spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Classroom Activities

The next table examines classrooms (see Table 3). Respondents were asked whether they would like to see more, less, or about the same amount of several learning activities. Again, there are differences in emphasis, but the relative ranking of priorities is similar between program officers and education professors. About 78% of education professors would like to see portfolios and other authentic assessments used more, compared to 68% of program officers.

Four activities that are considered mainstays of traditional classrooms are shunned by both program officers and professors of education—homogeneous grouping, memorization, prizes for good behavior , and multiple-choice exams. Opposing these practices are hallmarks of modern progressive education. Three to fours times as many program officers say they want to see less rather than more of these activities in classrooms. Only 16% support more homogeneous grouping, while 53% want less (the figures for those wanting less of an activity are not shown in the table). Only about one in ten (11%) program officers support more memorization, with 57% wanting less.

TABLE 3 Classroom Activities

Thinking about the typical K-12 classroom, would you like to see more, less, or about the same of the following learning tools?

	Percentage responding "more"	
	Program Officers	Education Professors
Portfolios and other authentic assessments	68*	78
Mixed ability grouping	49	50
Computer programs that enable kids to practice skills on their own	45***	69
Homework assignments	21***	41
Penalties for students who break the rules	19**	37
Homogeneous grouping	16	15
Memorization	11	14
Prizes to reward good behavior in the classroom	11	13
Multiple-choice exams	4	2

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ level, *** $p < 0.001$ (test for equal proportions).

Source: Data for foundation officers were collected by the author for this study. Data for education professors are from Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, *Different Drummers* (Public Agenda, 1997).

Eleven percent would like to see more prizes to reward good behavior, compared to 49% who would like to see less. A paltry 4% of program officers support the use of more multiple choice exams, swamped by the 70% who would like to see less.

Interesting differences between the two groups of respondents appear in the middle of the table. Program officers are less enthusiastic than education professors about computer programs that enable kids to practice skills on their own. It is impossible to say whether it is computers, practicing skills, or students working on their own that dampens enthusiasm for this idea. Only 45% of officers endorse the activity, compared to 69% of education professors. And program officers are more hostile to homework and penalties for students who break the rules. Among program officers, only 21% want to see more homework assignments (vs. 41% for education professors). Only 19% want to see more penalties for students who break the rules, compared to 37% of education professors. In other words, education professors are about twice as likely as program officers to endorse more homework and penalties for students who break rules. Program officers have a difficult time supporting classroom practices that can be construed as arduous (homework) or punitive towards students (discipline).

Perceptions of the Nation's Public Schools

Unlike the previous tables, substantial differences emerge between program officers and education professors in Table 4. The survey asked respondents to evaluate several common perceptions about the nation's schools. Included are both negative and positive assertions that might be encountered in a newspaper editorial, at a cocktail party, or in discussions with neighbors or colleagues at work. Table 4 shows the percentage of

TABLE 4 Perceptions of the Nation's Schools

Here are some perceptions about the nation's public schools. How close does each come to your own view – very close, somewhat close, not too close, or not close at all?

Percentage responding "very close" or "somewhat close":

	Program Officers	Education Professors
Public education is the nation's most critical democratic institution and should be protected at all costs.	92	95
The general public has outmoded and mistaken beliefs about what good teaching means.	74	79
Too many school systems are top heavy with bureaucracy and administration.	70	77
More often than not, teacher tenure is an obstacle to improving schools.	65**	52
The schools are expected to deal with too many social problems.	64***	85
Academic standards in today's schools are too low and kids are not expected to learn enough.	63***	78
Even when the schools get more money, it often does not get close to the classrooms.	60***	78
The schools should pay very careful attention to what business wants from high school graduates.	59***	75
Considering the differences in the children they teach, private schools don't do a better job than the public ones.	48***	67
Too many kids get passed on to the next grade when they should be held back.	46**	61
Many of the criticisms of the public schools come from right-wing groups who want to undermine public education.	46	54
Much of the decline in public confidence in public schools is a result of negative press coverage.	37***	65
One of the most effective ways to improve schools is to give them a lot more money.	30***	54
Most of the problems facing schools today are confined to urban school systems.	11**	22

Note: * $p < 0.05$ level, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (test for equal proportions).
Source: Data for foundation officers were collected by the author for this study. Data for education professors are from Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, *Different Drummers* (Public Agenda, 1997).

respondents saying a particular statement is "very close" or "somewhat close" to one's own point of view. The striking thing about the education professors' responses is that only one statement—the last one in the table, which asks about urban schools—elicits less than 50% support. It appears education professors consider themselves on the frontline in debates about public schooling, and when hearing opinions—whether positive or negative—they react strongly to them. Program officers are more ambivalent in their responses. Please note, however, as discussed above, the stronger opinions of education professors could also be an artifact of being collected by a phone survey. The differences may not be as significant as the data presented here suggest, although most of the differences are so large that tempering the education professors responses—or strengthening the responses of program officers on the Likert scale--would make very little difference [15]

Many of the statements in Table 4 defend public schools' performance and characterize popular criticisms as unwarranted. In general, program officers are not as sympathetic to these defensive statements as education professors. Program officers exhibit independence from arguments put forth by what is often referred to as the "public school lobby." Almost two-thirds of program officers (65%) support the accusatory statement that "more often than not, teacher tenure is an obstacle to improving schools," the only item on which the percentage of program officers in agreement exceeds that of education professors (52%). A solid majority of program officers, 64%, believe schools are expected to deal with too many social problems" but among education professors the figure is a whopping 85%. Attributing the decline of public confidence in public schools to negative press coverage is only supported by 37% of program officers, but 65% of education professors hold this belief. About half (48%) of program officers agree that "considering the differences in the children they teach, private schools don't do a better job than

the public ones." That is significantly less than the two-thirds (67%) of education professors who doubt that private schools really do a better job. Interestingly, since they are in the business of giving money, the wisdom of giving schools "a lot more money" as a means of improvement is only supported by 30% of program officers. More than half, 54%, of education professors believe a lot more money would improve schools.

One response stands out for echoing a pattern noted above, that program officers do not like to see anything resembling punitive action taken with students. Less than half of program officers (46%) endorse the view that "too many kids get passed on to the next grade when they should be held back." Such ambivalence towards holding kids back is not shared by education professors, with 61% of them endorsing this statement critical of social promotion. Another position places program officers shoulder to shoulder with education professors in wanting to change traditional views of teaching. About three-fourths of program officers (74%) and 79% of education professors believe "the general public has outmoded and mistaken beliefs about what good teaching means." Both program officers and education professors see themselves as reformers who are not supported by the general public.

School Reform

Table 5 covers questions on school reform. Respondents were asked to rate various proposals for changing how schools teach on a one to five scale, with five meaning the change would improve academic achievement a great deal and one meaning it would not improve academic achievement at all. In addition to education professors, K-12 teachers and the general public have answered the same questions, and the responses of these groups are tabled so that they may be compared with the responses of program officers.

Program officers are frequent outliers in their views on school reform. To fully appreciate this point, for a moment only consider the data on the three other groups—education professors, K-12 teachers, and the general public. Education professors are frequently the outlier group, the least enthusiastic about ideas that parents and teachers overwhelmingly support—for example, permanently removing from school kids caught with drugs or weapons—and the most enthusiastic about ideas the public and teachers do not support—for example, mixing fast and slow learners in heterogeneously grouped classes. Indeed, as noted in the present paper's introduction, that is precisely why Public Agenda named the report presenting the survey results on education professors, *Different Drummers*.

Program officers appear even more different than the different drummers in the education professoriate, diverging sharply from the general public's views on how to improve schools. On only three of the ten reforms presented in Table 5 are program officers' views close to those of the general public—expressing mild support for replacing multiple choice tests with essay exams, skepticism about mixing fast and slow

TABLE 5 School Reform

Here are some ideas for changing the way public schools teach. For each, please indicate if you think it would improve kids' academic achievement. Please use a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 means it would not improve academic achievement at all and 5 means it would improve academic achievement a great deal.

Percentage responding "4" or "5":

	Program Officers	Education Professors	K-12 Teachers	General Public
Setting up very clear guidelines on what kids should learn and teachers should teach in every major subject so the kids and the teachers will know what to aim for.	76	71	80	82
Not allowing kids to graduate from high school unless they clearly demonstrate they can write and speak English well.	62**	76	83	88
Emphasizing such work habits as being on time, dependable and disciplined.	49***	78	93	88
Replacing multiple choice tests with essay tests to measure what kids learn.	44**	60	47	54
Raising the standards of promotion from grade school to junior high and only letting kids move ahead when they pass a test showing they have reached those standards.	34**	49	62	70
Mixing fast learners and slow learners in the same class so that slower kids learn from faster kids.	33***	54	40	34
Permanently removing from school grounds kids who are caught with drugs or with weapons.	32***	66	84	76
Taking persistent troublemakers out of class so that teachers can concentrate on the kids who want to learn.	30***	66	88	73
Adapting how schools teach to the background of students, such as using street language to teach inner-city kids.	23	18	15	20

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$ (test for equal proportions, program officers and education professors).
Source: Data for foundation officers were collected by author for this study. Data for education professors, K-12 teachers, and General Public are from Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, *Different Drummers* (Public Agenda, 1997).

learners in the same classroom, and opposition to adapting how schools teach to the background of students, such as using street language to teach inner city kids.

Program officers stand alone in either not supporting or tepidly supporting five proposals that garner the backing of at least 70% of the general public. The five issues deal with student accountability, basic skills, and discipline. Sixty-two percent of program officers believe kids should not be allowed to graduate from high school unless they can clearly write and speak English well. Although a convincing level of support, it falls significantly short of the support the idea receives from education professors (76%), K-12 teachers (83%), and the general public (88%). About half of program officers (49%) believe emphasizing such work habits as being on time, dependable, and disciplined would improve academic achievement. This is far below the level of support registered by education professors (78%). The stunning contrast is with K-12 teachers (93%) and the general public (88%), who are nearly unanimous in believing that student achievement benefits from better work habits.

Only about one-third (34%) of program officers support requiring students to pass a test as a condition of promotion from grade school to junior high, short of the support of education professors (49%). Teachers and the public give even stronger support to the idea (62% and 70%, respectively).

As has been indicated by other survey items, program officers are reluctant to endorse proposals for tightening student discipline. The gaps are enormous between program officers, on the one hand, and education professors, K-12 teachers, and the general public on the other. Only 32% of program officers want to see students who are caught with drugs or weapons permanently removed from school, an idea that enjoys the broad support of education professors (66%), K-12 teachers (84%), and the general public (76%). Only 30% of program officers think

it would be a good idea "taking persistent troublemakers out of class so that teachers can concentrate on the kids who want to learn," with education professors (66%), K-12 teachers (88%), and the general public (73%) strongly favoring such tough measures.

Local School Problems

Table 6 asks program officers to evaluate their own local schools. It has long been noted that poll respondents offer different perspectives on local and national education performance. The Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup Poll, for example, has consistently uncovered an "I'm OK, you're not" phenomenon. Americans think their local schools are perfectly fine while simultaneously believing that the nation's school are going to hell in a hand basket. For the questions in Table 6, program officers were asked to gauge the seriousness of several problems in their local schools. The percentage answering "very serious" or "somewhat serious" is tabled. Data from four additional groups of respondents that Public Agenda has surveyed in the past using the same set of questions are also tabled—the general public, white parents, African-American parents, and traditional Christian parents.

TABLE 6

Please tell me how serious a problem each is in your own community's public schools. Percentage responding "very serious" or "somewhat serious":

	Program Officers	General Public	White Parents	African-American Parents	Traditional Christian Parents
Schools are not getting enough money to do a good job	75***	58	67	77	69
Kids are not taught enough math, science, and computers	71***	52	46	66	56
Academic standards are too low and kids are not expected to learn enough	71*	61	49	70	57
Classes are too crowded	66***	50	55	63	54
There's too much drugs and violence in schools	61**	72	58	80	66
Schools are not clear and specific enough about what they want kids to learn	51	47	43	56	45
There is not enough emphasis on the basics such as reading, writing, and math	42***	60	52	61	56
Schools don't teach kids good work habits such as being on time to class and completing assignments	41*	52	36	47	37
Classes and textbooks stereotype minorities and women	31	30	24	53	30
Too many teachers are more concerned with making kids feel good about themselves than with how much they learn	30	37	32	39	38
Too many teachers are more interested in being popular than in requiring respect and discipline	17***	41	35	43	38
Schools fail to teach religious values	6***	47	51	65	70
Schools are too graphic and explicit when teaching sex education	5***	24	19	27	30

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (test for equal proportions, program officers and the general public).
Source: Data for foundation officers were collected by author for this study. Data for education professors are from Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, *Different Drummers* (Public Agenda, 1997). Data for general public and parents are

from Jean Johnson and John Immerwahr, *First Things First: What Americans Expect from Public Schools* (Public Agenda, 1994).

Three things stand out in Table 6. First, one conclusion drawn from earlier data must be tempered. Three-quarters (75%) of program officers believe that "schools are not getting enough money to do a good job" and about two-thirds (66%) hold that "classes are too crowded." The public supports such arguments, but not as strongly as the program officers. A little more than half of the general public (58%) believes schools are not getting enough money and exactly half (50%) believe classes are too crowded. Education foundations are located predominantly in large cities, so if program officers are using urban schools as their "own community's local schools," their responses may reflect problems particularly acute among urban schools. Recall from Table 4 that program officers were significantly less sympathetic than education professors to the claim that "one of the most effective ways to improve schools is to give them a lot more money." The officers do not reject the claim altogether. Their own community's schools, the program officers believe, would benefit from getting more money.

The second headline from Table 6 is that program officers do not recognize student discipline or deficiencies in basic skills and work habits as severe problems. Complaints about "too much drugs and violence in schools" and "teachers who are more interested in being popular than in requiring respect and discipline" are more likely to be voiced by parents and the general public than by program officers. Drugs and violence are seen as serious problems by 61% of program officers, short of the 72% figure for the general public. Only 17% of program officers see permissive teachers who seek popularity as a serious problem. Among the public, the figure is 41%. The statement that "there is not enough emphasis on the basics such as reading, writing, and math" finds agreement with only 42% of program officers compared to 60% of the general public. The charge that "schools don't teach kids good work habits such as being on time to class

and completing assignments" is supported by 41% of program officers versus 52% of the public. These data add details to a pattern consistent across the survey. Program officers not only doubt that cracking down on discipline or emphasizing basic skills and good work habits will improve schools, but they also do not agree with the general public that these are urgent problems.

The third headline is that program officers diverge sharply with the public on the importance of teaching values. Only 6% of program officers see it as a serious problem that "schools fail to teach religious values." But the general public is far more concerned, with nearly half (47%) saying that the failure to teach religious values is a serious problem. Among black parents, the concern rises to 65% and among traditional Christian parents to 70%. Nor are program officers worried about schools teaching sex education that is "too graphic and explicit." Only 5% judge that a serious problem compared to 24% of the general public.

Let's sum up. Program officers disagree with the general public, parents, and K-12 teachers on the most serious problems facing schools and the bests way of addressing them. Three issues stand out—discipline, basic skills, and student accountability. Program officers appear humanistic on questions regarding discipline--critics may call it permissive--skeptical that poor student behavior is a pressing problem and wary of stricter treatment of students who break rules. On basic skills, program officers stand decisively in the progressive education tradition, believing that basic skills should not receive great emphasis in the classroom. In fairness, the program officers are not anti-intellectual. They support high expectations for students, more learning in academic subjects, and clear standards. But support plummets for any learning activity that hints at "basic skills," such as requiring student to memorize material or to learn the rules of punctuation and spelling. Education professors join program officers in standing apart from the public, parents, and K-12 teachers on these issues. But, in most cases, the views of

education professors are closer to the general public than those of program officers. Let's now dig deeper into the data to examine one factor that may influence the views of program officers.

The Influence of Teaching Experience on Program Officers' Views

As noted in Table 1, about 56% of program officers have experience as a classroom teacher--44% do not. Tables 7-9 compare the views of these two groups. With all responses on the survey items arrayed on Likert scales, I grouped items addressing the same topic into clusters, then computed the sum of each program officer's responses (some scales were reversed to make the direction of opinion consistent). The cluster sums by the themselves are meaningless. But they do allow for a comparison of the teachers' and non-teachers' mean responses. Any difference that does appear can be significance tested (i.e, generate a p-value) to compute the probability of the differences occurring by chance alone if in fact the two groups' means are equal.

Table 7 displays the means of the clusters by topic. Recall that program officers are generally wary of proposals to strengthen school discipline. They are not monolithic in that response, however. Program officers with teaching experience are much more likely to support stronger discipline in the schools than program officers without teaching experience ($p<.001$). Program officers with teaching experience are also significantly more likely to support an emphasis on basic skills and good work habits ($p<.01$). And they are more likely to support policies holding students accountable for learning, although note that this last finding barely misses the conventional threshold of $p<.05$ for statistical significance ($p=.06$).

TABLE 7 Topic Clusters

Survey items clustered by topic area, responses of program officers with and without teaching experience.

	Teaching Experience	No Experience	
Cluster (no. of items)	**Mean**	**Mean**	**P-value (t-test, between group means)**
Discipline (5)	14.5	12.4	0.0005
Basic Skills and Work Habits (5)	13.6	12.0	0.0094
Student Accountability (3)	9.3	8.3	0.0642

Table 8 breaks down the discipline cluster for closer scrutiny. The former teachers support stronger discipline on all five survey items. On four of the items, the differences are statistically significant. The teachers and non-teachers exhibit significant differences on permanently removing kids from school grounds who are caught with weapons or drugs ($p<.01$) and on taking persistent troublemakers out of class ($p<.01$). The former teachers are also more likely to see teachers who favor popularity over respect and discipline as serious problems in local schools ($p<.05$) and to believe that maintaining discipline and order in the classroom are attributes of good teaching ($p<.05$). Program officers who do not have teaching experience are less likely to support policies promoting stronger discipline, less likely to see classroom control as a crucial characteristic of good teaching, and less likely to see discipline and order as prominent problems of local schools.

TABLE 8 Discipline (5)

	Teaching Experience	No Experience	
Question	**Mean**	**Mean**	**P-value**
Permanently removing from school grounds kids who are caught with drugs or with weapons.	3.23	2.57	0.0052
Taking persistent troublemakers out of class so that teachers can concentrate on the kids who want to learn.	3.20	2.60	0.0077
Too many teachers are more interested in being popular than in requiring respect and discipline.	2.07	1.72	0.0118
Teachers who maintain discipline and order in the classroom.	3.95	3.58	0.0148
Penalties for students who break the rules.	2.09	1.96	0.2634

Table 9 examines questions addressing basic skills. On all five questions, program officers with teaching experience are more likely than officers without teaching experience to support an emphasis on basic skills. On two of the items, the differences are statistically significant. Program officers with teaching experience are more likely to believe emphasizing such work habits as being on time, dependable, and disciplined will boost academic achievement ($p<.01$). They are also more likely to say that there is not enough emphasis on the basics such as

reading, writing, and math ($p<.05$). Although the differences do not reach statistical significance, program officers with teaching experience view homework, memorization, and correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation more favorably than program officers who have never taught.

TABLE 9 Basic Skills and Work Habits (5)

	Teaching Experience	No Experience	
Question	**Mean**	**Mean**	**P-value**
Emphasizing such work habits as being on time, dependable and disciplined.	3.85	3.25	0.008
There is not enough emphasis on the basics such as reading, writing, and math	2.57	2.11	0.0117
Homework assignments	2.14	1.98	0.1827
Memorization	1.59	1.43	0.2311
Teachers who stress correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.	3.50	3.29	0.2679

Summary and Conclusion

Whether progressivism is good or bad for American education lies beyond the scope of this paper. Its merits have been debated for over 100 years. The debate continues today. The survey data above show that education professors and program officers at foundations active in K-12 education have taken the same side in the debate—in support of key tenets of progressive education. It is not a forgone conclusion that the side they have taken is the right one for improving American schools. The jury is still out, in terms of conclusive scientific evidence, on much of the progressive agenda. This is politically noteworthy because progressivism comprises core beliefs that are unpopular with parents, teachers, students, and the general public—hence the title of Public Agenda's report on the education school professoriate, "Different Drummers." Indeed, program officers appear to hold a world view that is similar to that of the education professorate, and, in many respects, one that is even more different from mainstream public opinion than that of the different drummers examined in the Public Agenda study.

Program officers agree with the public that teachers should have high expectations for all students. Both want clear standards established saying what kids should learn and teachers should teach. Program officers are leery, however, of consequences for students who fall short of standards. Program officers favor socially promoting failing students in grade school over holding them back, a position opposed by K-12 teachers and the general public. The public believes that there is not enough emphasis on basic skills and wants schools to stress such work habits as being on time, dependable, and disciplined. Program officers see neither student behavior nor basic skills as urgent problems. They do not want schools to focus more attention on the basics. They do not want to see tougher sanctions on students who break rules, do not

support permanently removing kids who are caught with weapons or drugs, and do not favor taking persistent trouble makers out of class.

In Different Drummers, the authors declare, “Ordinary Americans, along with teachers of students, have made their essential expectations of public education abundantly clear: safe orderly schools that graduate students who master basic skills, develop good work habits, and learn such values as honesty and respect.”[16] These are not the top priorities of program officers.

What should be made of the discrepancy? Foundations have the most to gain by examining the survey data here. They should be concerned because their legitimacy and status rests on advancing the public good. Unless foundations take it upon themselves to change the public's view of what constitutes good public schooling—a challenge that they are probably ill-suited to tackle--their future efforts at school reform are destined to be uphill battles. Education reforms that have parents, teachers, students, and the general public as allies have a chance of succeeding. Reforms that have them as enemies are doomed.

With that in mind, I offer four constructive suggestions on how foundations can use these findings. Admittedly, the recommendations are speculative, but they flow naturally from the foregoing data and analysis. I begin with the assumption that foundations will want to move their organizations closer to mainstream opinion on education. How can they do that?

First, when hiring program officers, give preference to those with teaching experience. Teaching has a way of softening even the most strident ideologue. The pragmatic demands of the classroom take precedence over abstract ideals as kids' and parents' needs and interests must be met. Having experienced teachers work with grant holders in the field also enhances foundations' credibility with practitioners. But this will not completely move foundations into the mainstream. The former teachers in the survey are five to eight points closer to the public in

answering questions on discipline and basic skills, but that only takes a small chunk out of the gap. More will need to be done.

Second, hire a staff with balanced views. Deborah Wadsworth, writing about the findings in *Different Drummer*, remarks that "the disconnect between what the professors want and what most parents, teachers, and students say they need is often staggering. It seems ironic that so many of those who profess to believe that 'the real endeavor' is about questioning and learning how to learn are seemingly entrapped in a mind-set that is unquestioning in its conviction of its own rightness."[17] Foundations, too, can become cloistered places that suffer from self-affirming group-think. Ideological diversity and intellectual openness can help prevent that from occurring.

Third, appoint an outside review committee comprised of parents, teachers, taxpayers, and the general public to annually give input on your grant portfolio. Bring in disinterested outsiders who will be willing to tell you when you have gone off the track.

Fourth, tie evaluations to outcomes that matter to the public. The public wants schools that are safe, orderly, and teach students good work habits and the basics--reading, math, history, and science. Foundations that fund projects demonstrating effectiveness in attaining these goals will move to the center of the national effort to improve American schooling. Those that do not will be relegated to the margins of that effort.

Notes

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[1] Farkas, Steve and Jean Johnson. 1997. *Different Drummers*. New York: Public Agenda, 8.

[2] Farkas, Steve and Jean Johnson. 1997. *Different Drummers*. New York: Public Agenda, 15

[3] Farkas, Steve and Jean Johnson. 1997. *Different Drummers*. New York: Public Agenda, 16

[4] Ford Foundation. 1972. A Foundation Goes to School: The Ford Foundation Comprehensive School improvement Program. Meade, Edward J. 1992. "Recalling and updating 'Philanthropy and Public Schools: One Foundation's Evolving Perspective," Teachers College Record, 93 (3): 436-462. Manno, Bruno and John Barry. 2001. "When Education Philanthropy Goes Awry," in Seven Studies in Education Philanthropy, Washington DC: Fordham Foundation.

[5] Finn Chester E. and Marci Kanstoroom, Can Philanthropy Fix Our Schools, Fordham Foundation, 52.

[6] Meg Sommerfeld, "Annenberg School Program Yields Millions, But Gets Mixed Results" June 27, 2002. website.

[7] Hess, Frederick M. 2004. "Re-Tooling K-12 Giving," *Philanthropy*, September/October, 27.

[8] Theodore E. Lobman, "Public Education Grant-making Styles: More Money, More Vision, More Demands," Teachers College Record, 93, 3, (Spring 1992), p. 382-402; Finn and Kanstoroom, Hess, Margaret Raymond, Manno and Barry.

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[15] Cui, ibid.
[16] Different Drummers, 15.
[17] Different drummers, 29.