

VANGUARD

Brown vs. Board of Education 50 Years Later

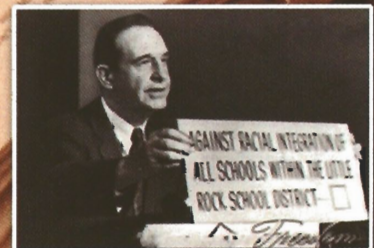
How Far Have We Really Come?

Big Things in Small Cities

Albion Central School District Finds Success with Character Education Initiatives

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Cutting Through the Techno-babble



Brown vs. Board of Education 50 Years Later –

How Far Have We Really Come?

Fiftieth anniversaries signify longevity and conjure feelings of loyalty, dedication and momentous proportion. Reaching a 50th birthday or wedding anniversary is often a turning point in one's lifetime — a time to reflect on one's past, present and future. And so, as a nation, as we approach the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* on May 17, 2004, educators are asking: How far have we come?

Lamar P. Miller, executive director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education at New York University's Steinhardt School of Education reflected.

"I think people forget," Miller said, "that *Brown* preceded Martin Luther King, preceded the Civil Rights Act and made it possible for all those kinds of things to happen because it became against the law for them to do so. This anniversary is about looking both back and forward at what *Brown* promised in



Little Rock Nine appears with Daisy Bates, president of Arkansas Chapter of NAACP.

the first place, which was equal access and equal opportunity for all students."

"People are stunned when they realize it's been 50 years," said National Service Learning Consultant Cathryn Berger Kaye. "I recently had a university faculty member ask: 'What is *Brown*?' and we

"When separate but equal became unlawful, it affected everything else."

taught her what it was with a collective definition as a group. What I'm finding is that educators want to know more. They want to remember what it did. And, many have stories about how that decision affected their lives."

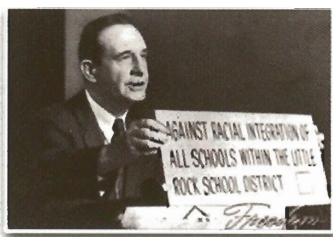
In addition to reversing the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision, which allowed separate but equal schools for black students, "*Brown* took the government out of the equation" contended Miller, "because, people had to follow the law."

"When separate but equal became unlawful, it affected everything else," Miller explained.

"The historical aspects are very interesting," he continued, "but what we [the Metro Center for Urban Education] have been doing is looking at all the aspects including the women's movement, the civil rights movement, even the segregation of school athletics and music. *Brown* didn't just affect education."

"Many people, I'm talking about minorities in particular, wouldn't be where they are today if not for *Brown*," Miller said. "Even the Hispanic population benefited from *Brown* as well."

Miller's own involvement with *Brown* began when he was a teacher. He graduated from college in 1954 with a lot of hope that things in schools across the country



Governor Orval Faubus of Arkansas appeals to Little Rock voters to back his stance against integration in the schools.

— not just in the south — would change. Miller, who has tracked the *Brown* decision for the last 50 years, will be honored as part of a special reception at the 50th Anniversary Conference sponsored by the New York University Metro Center for Urban Education, May 17–19, 2004. The conference, entitled *Brown Plus Fifty: A Renewed Agenda for Social Justice*, will address the 50-plus years from *Plessy* to *Brown*, and the 50 years from *Brown* to today, and the opportunity we have to send a message and make some gains that we haven't had for quite some time.

The Charge for Leaders Today

Kaye, author of *The Complete Guide to Service Learning: Proven, Practical Ways to Engage Students in Civic Responsibility, Academic Curriculum, & Social Action* (Free Spirit Publishing, 2004), feels now is the time to examine equity in education.

"There is so much discussion going on right now," Kaye explained, "and, the opportunity to engage our young is at an all time high. *Brown* was a landmark decision, and it brings us to a landmark time now to examine: where are we really failing our children and our communities? Service learning gives everyone a voice to participate and discuss the issues and be part of the solutions."

"What has been offered to us right now in this moment is the opportunity to widen and broaden our thinking, not only about what happened in the past, but about what we want to do now and what we want to create for the future," Kaye said.

Miller feels the two most important things school leaders have to do is "make sure that all of their kids have access to all of the things that schools have to offer, and to make sure that all of the kids reach the highest level of achievement that they can."

"I'm from Ann Arbor, Michigan, originally," Miller said, "and I graduated from the University of Michi-



gan. Early on, my colleagues and I worked with a few schools in Port Huron that were right at the bottom of achievement on a list of about 15 schools. One school was about 40 percent black and the other had about 40 percent migrant children. We discovered they had placed all the new, young, teachers in these schools which ordinarily wouldn't be a good thing. But, they were so motivated and eager to learn that in two years we had both of those schools at the top of the list in math and some other things we were working on. The interesting thing is at the end of the second year, when the superintendent looked at the list, he could not believe the things these kids were doing — that these kids had done so well. He wanted to go back and see the test scores,



A group of black students is escorted into Little Rock High School.

because he didn't expect them to do it in the first place.

"The issue of 'expectations' is subtle," Miller continued, "but leaders have to make sure that there are high expectations for all of their kids. Make sure that there's a climate of acceptance in the schools on the part of everybody who works in the school, and that all of the kids are treated in the same way. You must set a positive school climate to reach high achievement and expectations.

"Even in large, urban areas, the expectation issue is still a major concern," said Miller. "Districts typically will place their younger, inexperienced teachers in schools where kids need the most help. In most cases what you need in schools where kids need the most help are your very best teachers —

teachers who not only have high expectations, but have the ability to find ways to help these kids learn."

A recent ruling against the State of New York awarded \$325 million to help fund education in New York City school districts. According to Miller, the lawsuit, won by the Campaign for Fiscal Equity on behalf of New York City students, will still leave a large gap in the quality of teaching in New York City schools and other large, urban cities like Buffalo and Rochester.

"Half of the failing schools in the state in terms of academic progress are schools in New York City," said Miller. "When you look at how much money is available to spend on students in suburban areas as compared to students in some of the larger cities, there's a major discrepancy."

Re-segregating

Another problem Miller feels that school leaders must address is a tendency toward re-segregation or "grouping" within the schools. This is evidenced most clearly in advanced classes where placement is determined by achievement and with children with special needs.

"You get a set-up where you have advanced classes, but the number of kids per population is skewed," Miller said. "There's a more disproportionate number of minority kids in those classes than what you might expect. But some of the research has shown that no matter who you put in those advanced classes — even kids who scored higher than some other kids — all of the kids do better."

Miller feels there's an overrepresentation of minorities that get channeled into special education without having good ways of assessing both the performance and the needs of kids who do have some disabilities.

"We have kids channeled into special education who shouldn't be there. These are kids who should be treated by better teaching."

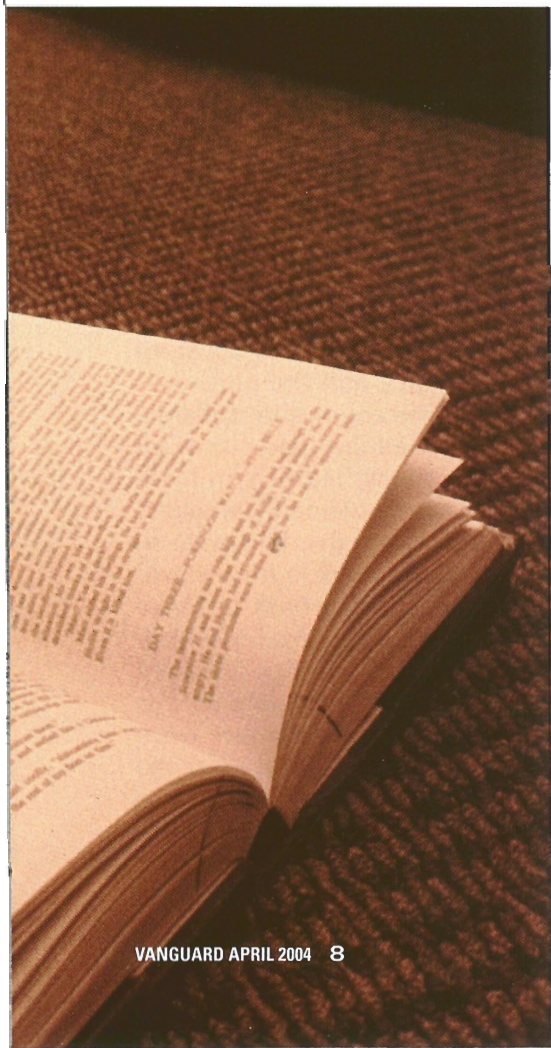
Though Miller admits the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) does a couple of things to help, without additional funding it will be tough for many districts to bring those children in need of additional help up to speed.

On the flip-side, Miller also feels we've raised the bar with respect to reflecting the diversity of our nation. The Supreme Court rulings last spring (2003) at the University of Michigan (Miller's alma matter), helped do that in his opinion.

In *Grutter v. Bollinger*, the University of Michigan Law School affirmative action policy was not deemed discriminatory because, even though they used race as a factor in determining admissions, they didn't assign a point value to it. In *Gratz v. Bollinger*, however, Jennifer Gratz challenged the University of Michigan undergraduate school and won when their undergraduate admissions policy — which had been in place for more than a decade — was found to violate the equal protections clause of the 14th Amendment.

"Looking at the situation with respect to *Brown* and race, and describing this in terms of diversity," said Miller, "we begin to ask the question: What's needed to make a good university?"

"People began to see [through the University of Michigan decision] that the most important thing is to reflect the diversity of our country in some real positive ways. Corporations, certainly, have learned that lesson. They try really hard to make sure that they have a staff that reflects the population. We are beginning to realize that across the whole spectrum of education I think."



What is the "Brown" of Today?

For Kaye, the issue of community safety is the primary concern for students today.

"I'm deeply saddened that kids cannot even come to the table to learn because of this fear element," she said. "This impacts how they treat the kid in the next chair, but has far-reaching impact to how they treat the country on another continent. And, how they think of other people who wear a different kind of clothes, or speak a different kind of language."

"We want kids to graduate high school, become democratic citizens and know how to act within a democratic society," said Kaye, "but we don't engage them in democratic learning."

Kaye has been working in conjunction with the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles and the New York Tolerance Center (NYTC) since January of 2003 presenting workshops surrounding "Tools for Tolerance" for school leaders.

"We found we had a perfect symmetry in terms of the work of the museum and the exhibits people go through," Kaye explained. "The workshops on service learning take it to the next level when people want to know what they can do with this new awareness of tolerance."

"We must address tolerance in ways that engage the minds and the hearts of young people, or we can lose a whole generation of young people. Service engages the heart and learning engages the mind, and when it comes together it can help create students who are "response-able," not just responsible, where they really can become fully, wise, participating citizens."

Miller views the challenge as more of a "process" issue.

"I think what I would consider the 'Brown of today,' are the efforts on

the part of schools and leaders to address any of these issues head on," he explained. "I think it's about schools who are attempting to develop programs that specifically address the needs of kids — whether they be limited English proficient kids, or other groups of minority kids — and try to address those issues directly with them."

"We've always known we've had kids in schools who weren't doing as well as other kids," Miller continued, "but we kept grouping them, treating them all in the same way without recognizing that these kids have special needs. I think we have to begin addressing our special needs population no matter who those kids are."

In addition, Miller spoke about how schools have become a political battleground for a number of different interests and questions whether, particularly in the larger cities, the interests are really in looking out for our kids.

"Education is big business," he stated, yet "We've not put enough money into developing smaller high schools, for example, where kids can get more attention."

The Next Fifty...

To their dismay, Miller and his colleagues have discovered that many high school and college students aren't familiar with *Brown* because it hadn't been covered in history or social studies. In response, they've developed a curriculum and timeline at the Metro Center for Urban Education which charts all of the major events leading up to *Brown*.

"One thing we don't want is for *Brown* to become just a dot on the historical map," Miller noted.

Kaye's getting the message out through literature, addressing both the literacy problem and inspiring kids to read.

A unique perspective — one of the Little Rock Nine speaks

On September 23, 1957, Terrence J. Roberts made history when he became one of nine black students to enter Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, as part of their initial attempt to desegregate their state's public schools. Now, a Ph.D. and professor of psychology at UCLA and Antioch College in Los Angeles, Roberts describes the state of education at his alma mater and our nation as being "in horrible shape."

"We're still trying to figure out if we want to believe what the Supreme Court said in the *Brown* decision in 1954," said Roberts. "It's unclear, especially when you see the state of education in this country."

"If we think about education, the biggest question is if we, as Americans, have any interest in educating children. I think if the answer was yes, we'd do a much better job. We know what it involves, and what kids need to learn. It's up to us to tell kids what's important, but we give them mixed messages. We tell kids things are important, but we don't give them any resources at their disposal."

"In this country," Roberts continued, "we've maintained our commitment to educating those kids from elite families — making it possible for them to get superior educations. But, for kids on the lower rung of the economic ladder, there is no commitment. None of those commitments speak to a 'commitment to educate.'"

"It's become a community problem. Little Rock was essentially an



all white high school for many years. Today, it's virtually an all black and Latino school. So, in response to the integration, white families moved to the suburbs leaving an inner city with a reduced tax base and school resources being redirected to the suburbs. We're left with a crumbling infrastructure, poorly trained teachers, kids who are ill-equipped for the experience of educating themselves, all combining to set up a deplorable situation.

"Our educational system isn't in the shape it's in because of, or in spite of the *Brown* decision," Roberts admonished, "that's just one of the other things we have to look at. If we are serious about educating children, then we're going to have to have a different approach to doing it, and the *Brown* decision should be part of the foundation."

"Kids find they're not alone when they read a book," explained Kaye. "Kids who are dealing with issues of poverty learn about kids who are working in rug factories in Nepal and it opens their eyes beyond their own situation."

A must-read from Kay's list is a book edited by Joyce Carol Thomas called *Linda Brown, You Are Not Alone: The Brown v. Board of Education Decision* (Jump Sun, 2003). It's a collection of stories, memoirs and poems by well-known children's authors who were young children themselves in 1954, writing on the decision and how it impacted their lives. It's become mandatory reading at all the schools and colleges where Kaye presents her service learning workshops. The University of Central Florida is also using the book for three to four

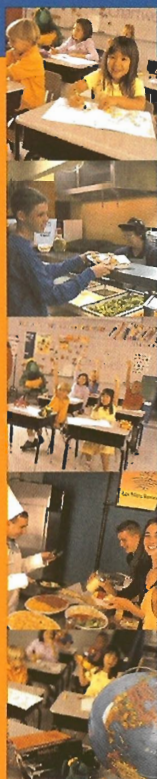
courses and the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision as the basis for a two-year, across the curriculum subject matter for their entire campus of 43,000 students.

While not every school will take that aggressive an approach in curriculum integration, Miller feels at a minimum each child should understand the statement: "separate, but equal" and what it means.

"We don't want us to get back to the place where we think "separate but equal" is okay... because it's not okay," said Miller. "That's what the law says."

"It can be interpreted in so many ways — not just with *Brown* — but with so many other issues. And, it affects people in very dramatic ways. That's what the *Brown* case showed. And, that can be as important today as it was 50 years ago." ■

Empowering America's Youth to Make Healthy Choices for Life

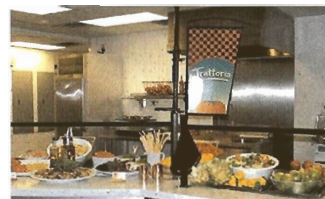


According to a General Accounting Office Report, the nation faces complex challenges in addressing recent trends in children's health such as promoting healthier eating habits and the increased incidence of childhood obesity.

- The number of overweight children has doubled since 1980.
- Healthy eating patterns play an integral role in promoting academic achievement and preventing chronic health problems.

The GAO Report also sites barriers that exist towards providing healthier meals and promoting healthier eating patterns in schools:

- Budget pressures affect the nutritional quality of food served in schools.
- Limited classroom time for nutrition education.
- Offering nutritious meals that actually appeal to students is also a major challenge.



Does your District face any of these barriers?

If so, please consider the following:

- What priority level does providing healthier and appealing meals hold in your district?
- How important is it to your students that the school community maintains a comprehensive nutrition education program?
- Does your school have the expertise, time and capital resources to affect change?

For more information please contact **Ozzie Orsillo**, Regional Sales Director.

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