



FORDHAM NEWS

The Jesuit University of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Michael Larkin
(212) 636-7175
mlarkin@fordham.edu

TASK FORCE CONVENES IN ANTICIPATION OF SUNSET ON NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS MANDATE

NEW YORK— Leading a movement to restructure the New York City public school system when state authorization of mayoral control sunsets in 2009, the Independent Commission on Public Education (iCOPE) and Fordham University's National Center for Schools and Communities (NCSC) announce the formation of Task Force 2009.

Comprised of some of New York City's most influential education advocates, Task Force 2009 will lead an exploration of human rights-based alternatives to the New York City public school system. Through a series of public discussions and forums, the task force will develop policy and legislative proposals for a school system that will meet the needs of every child and that places greater control in the hands of parents, students, teachers and school communities.

"The current New York City school system fails to meet any basic human rights standards. Children are systemically denied the skills and knowledge they need as a result of overcrowded and crumbling schools, the narrow focus of a test-based and Eurocentric curriculum, large classes, the criminalization of discipline, and inadequate support services," said Sam Anderson, a founding member of iCOPE and a task force member. "Huge disparities exist in the distribution of resources between students of color and white students, and a top-down bureaucracy keeps power out of the hands of parents and teachers."

-more-

Page 2/Education Task Force Announced

Task Force 2009 was born out of an education summit hosted by iCOPE in April 2005 that called for a new system of public education in New York City based on human rights. iCOPE will sponsor the ongoing public forums and community meetings to provide feedback to the task force. The NCSC will provide coordination, research and analytical support to the task force.

“We are currently organizing Independent Borough Education Commissions in all five boroughs,” said Cecelia Blewer, a member of iCOPE and the mother of public school student. “These groups will work to engage various communities about human rights and education, to give feedback to Task Force 2009 as its work unfolds, and to gather community support for the emerging vision of a new human rights education system here in New York in time for 2009. The job ahead of us is challenging -- even daunting -- and absolutely essential.”

Here are the members of Task Force 2009.

Catherine Albisa, executive director of the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, has worked with Center for Economic and Social Rights, Human Rights Institute, Columbia Law School Center for Economic and Social Rights, and the International Women’s Human Rights Law Clinic.

Sam Anderson, a founding member of iCOPE, has taught at Queens College, Sarah Lawrence College, Rutgers University and New School University. He is an activist in civil rights, black liberation, anti-apartheid, and African American cultural issues. Anderson is the author of *Black Holocaust for Beginners* (Writers and Readers Publishing, 1995).

Jean Anyon, professor of educational policy in the Doctoral Program in Urban Education at the City University of New York, is the author of the highly regarded *Ghetto Schooling: A Political Economy of Urban School Reform* (Teachers College Press, 1997) and *Radical Possibilities: Public Policy, Urban Education, and a New Social Movement* (Routledge, 2005).

Luis Barrios, professor of psychology and ethnic studies at John Jay College, is the founder and director of the Street Organizations Project. He also serves as associate priest at St. Mary’s Episcopal Church.

Stephanie Blanco, a junior at the High School for Leadership and Public Service, is active with Global Kids, a youth-led human rights organization; she also volunteers with Visions, a non-profit that helps the blind and visually impaired and Gay Men’s Health Crisis.

-more-

Page 3/Education Task Force Announced

Roscoe Brown, a past president of Bronx Community College, is a professor and director of Center for Urban Education Policy at the City University of New York.

Fred Frelow is the director of the Early College Initiative at the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation and the deputy superintendent of Nyack Public Schools. As a program officer with Rockefeller, he worked closely with the Campaign for Fiscal Equity.

Norm Fruchter, a former community school board member, is the director of the New York University Community Involvement Program, which provided technical support to coalition of groups that recently won a lead teacher program in the former South Bronx; former community school board member.

Luis Garden Acosta is the founder, president, and CEO of El Puente. He was the co-recipient of the Heinz Award in the Human Condition “for profoundly influencing the nature of community building and youth development.”

Diane Lowman, of Black New Yorkers for Educational Excellence, is a founding member of Sisters in Ujima, a parent, and long time community activist.

Prakash Nair, the president of Fielding Nair International, is an architect and innovator in the design of physical space for learning environments.

Pedro Noguera is a professor in the Steinhardt School of Education and executive director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education at New York University.

Luis O. Reyes, former member of the New York City Board of Education, is a coordinator for the Coalition for Educational Excellence for English Language Learners.

Esmeralda Simmons, a former member of the New York City Board of Education, is the executive director of the Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College. She also served as the first deputy commissioner for Human Rights for New York State, a civil rights attorney for the U.S. Department of Education, and an assistant attorney general in New York State.

Thomas Sobol, a former commissioner of education for the New York State Education Department, is the Distinguished Professor of Practice at Teachers College Columbia University.

“We are excited about this opportunity to work with a task force of men and women who have invested years in fighting for better public schools in New York City and who understand education as a fundamental human right,” said John M. Beam, executive director of the National Center for Schools and Communities.

-more-

Page 4/Education Task Force Announced

“One of the things that will make Task Force 2009 different will be iCOPE’s efforts to involve students, parents and others who are currently excluded from school policy in a far-reaching public dialogue about the sort of school system that is needed to ensure that our children have the sort of schools they need.”

The National Center for Schools and Communities (NCSC) at Fordham University provides data and policy analysis to support community-led school reform efforts and high-quality, evaluation services for school-based child and youth development programming. Established in 1992, the NCSC is a joint project of the Graduate School of Social Service and the Graduate School of Education.

In 2003, iCOPE was founded to provide a forum for parents, educators and others to explore the barriers to success in our New York City public schools and to develop solutions to improve the school system. The group has focused on problems such as institutional racism; bureaucratic inertia and dysfunction; equity issues in the treatment of students of color, students with special needs and those from low-income families; and the impact of health and nutrition on the educational success of our children and youth.

Founded in 1841, Fordham is the Jesuit University of New York, offering exceptional education distinguished by the Jesuit tradition to approximately 15,800 students in its five undergraduate colleges and its six graduate and professional schools. It has residential campuses in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Tarrytown, and the Louis Calder Center Biological Field Station in Armonk, N.Y.