

## **Fixin' Ain't Broke Things: Don't Do It.**

**by Joe Walsh**

*US public schools are failing and something must be done.* So begins the tale of woe told by US school reformers, and if you should continue to listen, you will soon hear the familiar high points of this well-worn story. First, the purpose of US schools is, for the most part, to further critical national economic goals. Second, failures to achieve these goals are substantially caused by the nation's problematic schools. Third, meaningful proxies, such as literacy rates or SAT scores, can tell us, with certainty, whether or not a school or schools are failing, and relatedly, that this failure is strong evidence that a school or some schools are not fulfilling their duties to the nation. Fourth, because certainty is possible, and because we are reasonably certain of the propriety of our views on educational purposes, cause and effect, failure, and need for reform, responsible reform can proceed with confidence that any harm to schools, students, polities, etc. attributable to the reform itself is more likely than not offset by the benefits. Finally, reform should focus on schools themselves and not on larger social policies or economic reform.

This paper sets forth two modest claims about the above discourse. First, at least some evidence supports the idea the school reformers' certainty, on many counts, is not fully justified. This claim could take many forms. It could be contended, for example, that the purposes attributed to schools are the wrong purposes, or that schools are not the proper instrument for achieving these, often vague and lofty, purposes, or that the concrete metrics for evaluating schools bear little relation to the efficacy of schools in pursuit of the stated goals, or that the metrics are, indeed, valuable but show that schools are working just fine. This paper focuses on a tiny corner of the case against the consensus reform view, and drawing on the work of Charles Karelis, contends that the prevailing view that education problems lead to and cause individual,

regional, and national economic problems is less certain than the discourse portrays. Second, this paper claims that if intrusive and expensive school reform is not as well justified as believed, then the harm caused by the reforms themselves are no longer justified. To do this, the paper surveys some of the harm or potential for harm caused by the various methods of reform as it is promulgated or practiced.

Merely because a patient is misdiagnosed as to some illness does mean that he is in fine fettle. Thus, at the outset, it should be disclaimed that this paper is not glibly suggesting that US schools are free from serious problems or that meaningful reform is impossible or unjustifiable. Rather the aim is to, in the words of Bruno LaTour, in a small way emancipate the reader from the “prematurely naturalized objectified fact” of US school decline readily provided by the narrators of the reform discourse and to provide some grounds for reasoned doubt.<sup>1</sup>

### **Purposes and Causes**

As part of his recent State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama made a broad and rousing appeal for US education reform.<sup>2</sup> The Address is relevant in two respects. First, the content of his speech is a succinct articulation, by the most powerful federal policy actor, of the essential features of a specific brand of school reform and its key contentions about educational purposes, causes, failures, and the need for reform. Second, the President’s interweaving of this particular brand of reform into a larger appeal for national unity indicates, to some degree, the popularity of the reform discourse and its appeal to a variety of political actors.

In the Address, Obama memorably invoked the Cold War image of *Sputnik* to assert the urgent, doom-preventing role that excellence in education, particularly math and science

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<sup>1</sup>Bruno LaTour, Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?, 30 Critical Inquiry (2003), available at <http://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu/issues/v30/30n2.Latour.html>.

<sup>2</sup> President Barack Obama, State of the Union Address, (Jan. 25, 2011).

education, needed to stave off US economic vulnerability.<sup>3</sup> US supremacy, not mere competence, in the global market was both necessary for security and dependent on US schools to generate a class of workers capable of handling the technical demands of Information Age industry.<sup>4</sup> The creation of a skilled workforce required a patriotic investment in technical education because, in the President's oddly zero-sum formulation of global trade, the US must parry similar investments by foreign powers rising on the strength of their educational commitment.<sup>5</sup>

In linking education to national security, Obama cribbed an unlikely source, *A Nation at Risk*, a Reagan-era jeremiad lamenting the decay of US education and the "rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people."<sup>6</sup> The report attributed the crisis to the "multitude of conflicting demands" placed on US schools to address "personal, social, and political problems that the home and other institutions either will not or cannot resolve."<sup>7</sup> In this Spartan view, the nation's schools were training grounds for the next generation of economic Cold Warriors. Although the report was likely never meant to be read so narrowly, its legacy as a foundational text of school reform arose from the headlines it generated characterizing declining student achievement (and thus weakened national security) as a function of declining average SAT scores.<sup>8</sup>

Thus although Obama comfortably re-iterated the security theme of *A Nation at Risk*, he

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3 *Id.*

4 *Id.*

5 *Id.*

6 National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform* 1, (1983).

7 *Id.*

8 Richard Rothstein, "A Nation at Risk" Twenty-five Years Later, *Cato Unbound* (April 7, 2008), <http://www.cato-unbound.org/2008/04/07/richard-rothstein/a-nation-at-risk-twenty-five-years-later>. Rothstein examines in some detail the average declining SAT claim and concludes that the declines is plausibly attributable, not to failing schools, but to a larger and more diverse test-taking demographic at the end of the study, 1980, than at the beginning in 1963. *Id.*

did not hesitate to affirm US school's role in fulfilling "conflicting demands" beyond security.<sup>9</sup> Thus, US schools should function as a guarantor of a circumscribed, and politically palatable, concept of equity.<sup>10</sup> Even if US schools were to succeed in creating tomorrow's well-educated workforce, the effort would be in vain unless they also permitted every willing student a meaningful chance to obtain the skills needed for their own participation in this future workforce.<sup>11</sup> This interest in educational equity, though ecumenical, required merely "raising expectations" of students and not, at least in the President's words, systematic intervention to, for example, compensate for accidents of history or geography.<sup>12</sup>

Bound up with these educational goals of US competitiveness in global markets and regulating the meritocratic distribution of skill, an interest in efficiency provided, in Obama's view, both a goal for the practice of education and a goal for its reform.<sup>13</sup> Future US competitiveness required the productive deployment of capital obtainable only by the most technologically innovative workforce.<sup>14</sup> And this future workforce, in Obama's view, is best created by an efficient and innovative class of teachers and school administrators.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, during his Address, Obama trumpeted his Race to the Top program as "the most meaningful reform of our schools in a generation."<sup>16</sup> The Race, a competition by states for a slice of a \$4.3 billion dollar federal pot, rewarded the creation and implementation of comprehensive, statewide school reform.<sup>17</sup> In order to be eligible to win, a state's proposal needed to comply with certain features desired by the Race administrators such as linking teacher

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9 President Barack Obama, State of the Union Address, (Jan. 25, 2011).

10 *Id.*

11 *Id.*

12 *Id.*

13 *Id.*

14 *Id.*

15 *Id.*

16 *Id.*

17 Joanne Barkan, *Got Dough? How Billionaire's Rule Our Schools*, *Dissent* (Winter 2011).

pay with student performance and implementing quantitative studies of schools and teacher performance.<sup>18</sup>

To summarize the President's view, US prosperity and security required innovative workers; creating innovative workers while providing every student a fair shake required school reform focused on efficiency and the fostering of high expectations; the White House, in part through Race to the Top, was leading the transformation of education by instituting market and standards based reform. If it was not directly stated by the President, the implication was that status quo in US education did not suffice.

### **Measurements**

But even accepting the consensus reform view, expressed in Obama's speech, of the purposes of schools, how can we tell whether our schools are achieving them? The consensus reform view holds that systematic collection of education data gives decision makers, at all levels of education, objective grounds for preferring certain allocations or judgments. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to survey the numerous problems and paradoxes inherent in measuring social behavior,<sup>19</sup> a few broad observations are particularly relevant. First, one general objection to measurement is that the metrics chosen may not be a reliable proxy for our chosen educational goals. Thus, education policy analyst Richard Rothstein, questioning the link between education and competitiveness, wonders why domestic automakers relocated their operation from the relatively-more educated American Midwest to Mexico or why Japanese car makers build factories in relatively-less educated regions of the US like Alabama and

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<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

<sup>19</sup> Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox 172-73* (Revised Edition 2002). This is an excellent survey of the persistent problems of social measurement. *Id.* Such problems include reactivity, the tendency of measured people to change behavior to conform, or "look good" per the measured variable, measurement bias, the tendency for a measured variable to seem more important and more controllable than unmeasured or immeasurable features, and, of course, improper or sloppy methodology. *Id.* Further, since numbers don't interpret themselves, data is never neutral or objective but a product of political decisions about what to measure and what those numbers mean. *Id.*

Kentucky.<sup>20</sup> Second, even if we can agree that certain metrics provide reliable proxies for appropriate goals of US education, the abundant data does not entirely support the view of a general and grave decline.<sup>21</sup> Even if we accept, for instance, that US supremacy in literacy and math is a vital national purpose of education, the data on literacy and math achievement does not conclusively support the idea that US schools are falling behind.<sup>22</sup>

### **Need for Reform**

Even granting that measurement of education performance validly and conclusively supports the view that US schools are failing, what is to be done? In response to this perceived crisis, two broad families of reform have emerged distinguished by their differing view on the cause of school failure. One theory is *market-based reform* which locates the cause of school problems in wasteful bureaucracy, lazy teachers, and a lack of standards that hides mediocrity behind opacity.<sup>23</sup> This theory aims to make schools more like businesses and education more like a product.<sup>24</sup> A second variant of reform seeks *to exert more influence over a child's life* during their school years and remove as many impediments to achievement as possible.<sup>25</sup>

The market-based strand of school reform places efficiency at the center of its reform strategy and promotes competition between schools, data-driven measurement, informed choice by the consumer-parent, accountability for teachers and staff, and the elimination of inefficient

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<sup>20</sup> Rothstein, *supra* note 8.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g. National Center for Education Statistics, Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (2006) (finding that US fourth graders on average outperformed their peer worldwide in reading ability); National Center for Education Statistics, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (showing modest success of US fourth graders against international average in math and science).

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<sup>23</sup> Diane Ravitch, *The Life and Death of the Great American School System* 30 (2010) (detailing various efforts of New York City under Joel Klein and Washington D.C. under Michelle Rhee to institute business-like reforms)

<sup>24</sup> See Ravitch, *supra* note 23.

<sup>25</sup> See Paul Tough, *24/7 School Reform*, N.Y. Times, Sept. 8, 2008, at MM17 (examining the work and purposes of Geoffrey Canada and the Harlem Children's Zone).

state oversight, administration, laws, and so forth.<sup>26</sup> The vehicles of this reform are the charter school, the standardized test, merit pay for teachers, closing failing schools, and data-based decision making.<sup>27</sup> Market-based reforms have garnered powerful private and public institutional advocates.<sup>28</sup> *The Turnaround Challenge*, a multi-million dollar creation of the Gates Foundation pushing standards, merit pay, and data-collection reforms served as the template for President Obama's Race to the Top competition.<sup>29</sup>

The second theory attacks the roots of disparate achievement early and aggressively. The paragon of this type of reform is Geoffrey Canada's Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ). The key idea is that the conditions of inequality cause initial and ongoing disparities in a student's cognition, behavior, and ability that can only be overcome with massive and aggressive early childhood intervention and the sustained provision of social services throughout a child's education.<sup>30</sup> This type of reform, premised on charter schools, has also garnered the support of the President and powerful private institutions.<sup>31</sup>

### **Basis for Doubt**

Before continuing, a brief summary of the foregoing characterization of school reform is needed. Schools are vital to US interests. Schools are failing in some way related to the achievement of those interests. Something must be done or *bad things will happen*. Thus, we must reform school systems by eliminating waste or by intervening in a child's life before the disabling forces of economic disparity permanently disadvantage them. To do so, we can and should dismantle existing education infrastructure and spend at least as much money as

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<sup>26</sup> See Ravitch, *supra* note 23.

<sup>27</sup> See Ravitch, *supra* note 23..

<sup>28</sup> Joanne Barkan, *Got Dough? How Billionaire's Rule Our Schools*, Dissent (Winter 2011).

<sup>29</sup> See Tough, *supra* note 25.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> Sharon Otterman, *Lauded Schools Have Their Own Problems*, N.Y. Times, Oct. 12, 2010, at A20 (describing federal pilot program granting \$10 million to various communities to create similar programs to Canada's and

necessary. The following part analyzes a key implication of this particular and prevailing narrative; the often unexamined statement that if schools are failing then it is something about the school or the school system itself that requires amelioration, reform, and monitoring.

### **Is It Ever Rational To Drop Out?**

Even if it is conceded that the consensus reform view of the purposes of US education is appropriate, that the chosen proxies, in fact, relate to the achievement of these goals, that too many US schools fail to meet these standards, that early child inequalities perpetuate inequitably, and that some US school systems, teachers, and staff are wasteful, it does not necessarily follow that schools are the appropriate starting point for reforming US education.

This paper advances the claim that factors outside the control of teachers, students, administrators, and parents may be the cause of failing schools and unmet expectations. To this purpose, numerous researchers have put forth various claims about how economic circumstances external to the school may in one way or another disrupt incentives to learn, diminish performance, and cause school dysfunction.<sup>32</sup> One prevailing view of how these external circumstances influence schools and student performance is provided by economist Gary Becker in his work on rational expectations and human capital.<sup>33</sup> On this view, the student, a rational actor, perceives school work and attendance as an investment to be undertaken only if expected future benefits from further education exceed the present cost of time, textbooks, foregone earnings, and so forth.<sup>34</sup> This theory has been taken up by education scholars to show how the increasing mobility of capital, high income and wealth inequality, the increase of unskilled low-

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noting the involvement of Wall Street-based charities, including the Goldman Sachs Foundation).

32 See, e.g. Rothstein, *supra* note 8; Elena Meschi, *The Relative Importance Of Local Labour Market Conditions And Pupil Attainment On Post-Compulsory Schooling Decisions* 4 European Assoc. Lab. Economists, Conference Paper, Poster II (Oct. 2010).

33 Gary Becker, *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education* 234-38 (2nd eds. 1975).

34 *Id.*

wage service jobs, and so forth decreases the expected return on education and may lead rational maximizing actors to leave school.<sup>35</sup>

By attributing student achievement to external economic facts, the rational actor view makes a persuasive case for the limited agency of teachers and administrators in controlling educational outcomes. Since the drive to incentivize teachers presumes their agency, reforms such as merit pay may if expectations are low amount to pushing on a wet noodle.<sup>36</sup> Further, since expectations of future return on education, however rational, turn on subjective perceptions of probabilistic and future occurrences in the real economy made, as it were, by school-aged children, variation in expectation, even at a single time slice, is likely.<sup>37</sup> This variation, as the theory predicts, creates an arbitrary distribution in student attendance, persistence, and interest that, under typical standards-based evaluation, creates an arbitrary distribution of teacher performance unrelated to their professionalism, behavior, or skill.

While the rational actor view sets reasonable limits on school reform, it fails to account for a critical case, a case central to the maddening failure of US schools to fulfill their egalitarian function.<sup>38</sup> The case is that, on either economic or common sense views of rational behavior, extremely poor students, by the condition of their deprivation, should value even modest gains to future income from marginal educational persistence *higher* than their modestly poor counterparts and *much higher* than their middle class counterparts.<sup>39</sup> Thus the model predicts that the more deprived a student is the more they stand to gain from education. But observed patterns in attendance and graduation rates do not fulfill this prediction; poor students' drop-out

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<sup>35</sup> Rothstein, *supra* note 8.

<sup>36</sup> Rothstein, *supra* note 8.

<sup>37</sup> Becker, *supra* note 33, at 233.

<sup>38</sup> See Charles Karelis, The Persistence of Poverty 88 (2002).

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

rates and performance in reading and math surpasses only those of extremely poor students.<sup>40</sup>

The rational actor model presumes the decreasing marginal utility of consumption. The illustration of this concept is a staple of Econ 101, usually with the professor offering a series of hypothetical hot dogs to some student. The first hot dog is great, the second is good, but as additional hot dogs are offered, the eagerness for another diminishes, and it is this decreasing enjoyment of each additional unit of consumption of hot dogs that is conceptualized as the decreasing marginal return to consumption.

Thus, when a poor student drops out of high school and foregoes the increase in wages that, albeit modest, would be a significant percentage increase in lifetime earnings and standard of living, the behavior frustrates formal economic models and common sense.<sup>41</sup> The poorer a student is, decreasing utility predicts, the more valuable is even the tiniest bit of additional income from additional education.<sup>42</sup>

The philosopher Charles Karelis has proposed an elegant alternative to the decreasing marginal utility paradox. This alternative accounts for the observed behavior of poor people without imputations of personal or cultural dysfunction.<sup>43</sup> To sketch his idea, a mild addition to the utility lesson of Econ 101 is in order. Instead of the hot dog scenario, imagine you have just purchased a brand new car and as you drive to your friend's house to gloat aloud on the wisdom of your purchase, hail from a sudden storm dents your car in a hundred places. As you arrive at your friend's house, cursing Fortuna, this smug and smiling friend, a mechanic, approaches and offers to repair only one of the dents. You think, "What good will that do me?"

Unlike hot dog consumption where each additional hot dog brings less and less pleasure

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<sup>40</sup> Joanne Barkan, *Got Dough? How Billionaire's Rule Our Schools*, Dissent (Winter 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Karelis, *supra* note 38, at 88.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

and the first hot dog is the best, each additional dent repaired, in Karelis' model, brings ever greater relief as your car increasingly approaches its original appearance and it is the last dent repaired that brings the greatest marginal benefit. This is the concept of increasing marginal utility of consumption.

Karelis then divides goods into three classes. Relievers are goods that following an increasing marginal utility function.<sup>44</sup> Thus, imagine a thousand people yelling at you, a thousand bills remain unpaid on your desk, or if all the bones in your body were broken. In such extreme cases of suffering, the fact that one person stops yelling at you, that you pay a couple bills, or that your fibula heals does little to lessen your misery. It is only when aggregate improvements approach the complete reduction of suffering that the individual begins to appreciate the marginal benefit of any single additional improvement.<sup>45</sup>

Pleasers, goods that generally conform to decreasing utility curves, include the familiar Econ 101 examples of movies, vacations, and desserts.<sup>46</sup> As consumption of pleasers increases, the benefit of any additional unit of pleasers becomes more difficult to appreciate and thus less valuable.<sup>47</sup>

The third class of goods is relievers in conditions of insufficiency and pleasers in conditions of plenty.<sup>48</sup> Karelis includes in this class most typical basic goods and familiar items of consumption such as transportation, food, housing, clothing, and shelter.<sup>49</sup> Further, the experience of utility that these goods bring the consumer depends on the consumers' overall

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<sup>43</sup> *Id.* at 36-38.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.* at 67.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.* at 70.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* at 71.

<sup>47</sup> *Id.* at 72.

<sup>48</sup> *Id.* at 73.

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

material situation.<sup>50</sup> Insufficiency is the condition in which the lack of a necessary amount of a basic good causes misery and each marginal unit of consumption brings ever increasing marginal relief.<sup>51</sup> Sufficiency is the material condition in which the current level of consumption of a good brings neither pleasure nor misery.<sup>52</sup> Finally, in the condition of plenty, or more-than-enough, increasing amounts of consumption of many basic goods brings ever lesser marginal pleasure.<sup>53</sup>

As applied to US school reform, the concept of the increasing marginal utility of basic goods in the insufficiency range has profound implications. First, in the insufficiency range, the present value of an investment in education will not justify the present cost to a student of homework and attendance unless the present value is large enough to alleviate or approach alleviating the misery of the student.<sup>54</sup> To parallel this, a student will pay little for the removal of a couple of dents in the hypothetical new car (modest future wage increases), but may be willing to pay quite a bit for a complete restoration (present benefits, large, guaranteed future wage increases/middle class life). Second, the concept of increasing marginal utility also locates the cause of many familiar school problems outside of the scope of school control and places it instead in material impoverishment of its students. Third, the concept of increasing marginal utility in conditions of insufficiency explains that the behavior of poor students in failing to persist in education is not caused by apathy, weakness of will, discounting the future self, cognitive impediments, or cultural preferences.<sup>55</sup> The behavior is not dysfunctional; it is the

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50 *Id.*

51 *Id.*

52 *Id.* at 74.

53 *Id.*

54 *Id.* at 88.

55 *Id.* at 33-40.

appropriate satisfaction-efficient response to the problem of chronic misery.<sup>56</sup>

### **Harms**

If a compelling justification for a certain type of school reform cannot be found, then the harm caused by the reform effort itself cannot be balanced against a benefit. And if education problems are caused by circumstances outside of the school and outside of the scope of school power, then any beneficial consequences of remedying school failures by changing the way schools work will be accidental.

The legion of harms cited by objectors to market-based reforms are too numerous to properly survey in the scope of this paper. These harms include the intrusion upon democratic processes by powerful philanthropic actors; the weakening of tenure, teacher unions, benefits, and pay; merit pay; extensive monitoring and measurement; the shuttering of “failing” public schools; the centralization of school district control in a mayor or similarly empowered figure; the proliferation of charter schools; rigid, high-stakes standards; and the narrowing of curricula to reserve more time for test preparation.<sup>57</sup> These reforms locate the responsibility for perceived school failures in the schools, the school district and administration, state education laws, and teachers and their unions. If, as this paper claims, the substantial causes of high drop-out rates and underperformance are plausibly attributed to factors outside of these actors control, the disruption and cost of market-based education “innovation” is a waste and a distraction.

As discussed above, the inexplicable gap between the prediction that poor people should pursue even a small increase in future wages through school persistence and the observed high drop-out rate and low-achievement of the same group would seem to locate the problem in something about the student or the students’ family or environment. The failure of poor students

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<sup>56</sup> *Id.*

<sup>57</sup> Joanne Barkan, *Got Dough? How Billionaire’s Rule Our Schools*, *Dissent* (Winter 2011).

to respond to a variety of institutional inducements and strategies has convinced many that the dysfunction existed outside of the school, in the student, the family, or the student's culture.<sup>58</sup>

Responding to some of these conclusions, Geoffrey Canada created an ambitious and expensive charter school in Harlem to simulate for its poor students certain aspects of middle-class life like physical safety, educated and talkative parents, freedom from domestic violence, and decent nutrition deemed crucial for sustained persistence and achievement.<sup>59</sup>

Part of the novelty and political appeal of Canada's school lies in aggressive outreach effort it undertakes to teach Harlem parents and expectant parents the proper way to raise a child.<sup>60</sup> The implication of this effort, however, is that Harlem parents are doing something wrong and that this dysfunction, unchecked, causes cognitive, social, and behavioral shortcomings in their children that limit future prospects for education and workforce participation.<sup>61</sup> Thus, HCZ's key insight is that if the empirical link between the performance of poor students, on one side, and dysfunctional parenting, unstable neighborhoods, and the prevalence of violence, on the other, is made strong enough, then schools could claim that remedial intrusion into the domestic sphere and the related displacement of parental functions was the school's affirmative duty and in the best interests of the child.

But if Karelis' view of maximization amidst misery holds some truth, the success of the HCZ cannot be fully attributed to its mimicry of middle class parenting nor the beneficial development patterns its outreach efforts foster. First, the apparent success of middle class parenting practices is boosted by a strong tail wind from the environment of material sufficiency in which it is conducted. That is, since the middle class students' basic needs are met the

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<sup>58</sup> See Paul Tough, *24/7 School Reform*, N.Y. Times, Sept. 8, 2008, at MM17 (noting critics of HCZ and claim that Baby College and outreach programs interfered with parental autonomy).

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> See *id.*

marginal expected present value of each additional marginal investment of time or money in school work translates into a little bonus on the students' future paycheck. Second, as described above, on Karelis' view the lack of achievement and persistence observed in poor students is not a function of poor parenting, cognitive developmental deficiencies, or the inability to regulate conduct but of the rational conclusion as to the uselessness of the uncertain, future, small returns to education in relieving present misery.<sup>62</sup> Thus while the divergent parenting practices of middle class and poor families does not account for their respective child's educational achievement, another cleavage between the middle and lower class, the relative disparate abundance of basic goods and physical tranquility, does. It is not the habits and practices of middle class life that ensure middle class achievement, but the stuff of middle class life.

In this respect, Karelis' theory and Canada's practice may unintentionally harmonize. Because in intervening in a child's life and ensuring the availability of nutrition, social services, and physical security, the HCZ provides poor students with many of the misery-reducing things readily available to middle class children. In such an environment, a student's investment in education is not a dubious method of reducing misery, but part of a series of positive and cumulative steps to improve their futures.

### **Conclusion**

In reflecting on his experience with HCZ, Canada has noted the conflicting emotions that many Harlem parents face as their child gradually surpasses their educational achievements.<sup>63</sup>

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61 *See id.*

62 Karelis, *supra* note 38, at 32-40.

63 *See This American Life: Going Big* (WBEZ audio broadcast, Sept. 26, 2008).

Of course, they are proud of their child.<sup>64</sup> But their child's success in escaping poverty also serves to bring home the fact that they, in all likelihood, never will.<sup>65</sup>

Although part of HCZ is hortatory: teaching parents and compensating for cognitive developmental disparities, the range of services provided by HCZ extends far beyond traditional school services to counseling, free health and dental care, tax preparation, after school programs, and a chef who prepares healthy meals.<sup>66</sup> It would not be unfair to characterize it as a mini-welfare state for Harlem school children. And given Karelis' view of misery-reducing rationality, it seems that the success of HCZ may have less to do with changing behavior thought to cause poverty and more to do with *eliminating poverty*.

Though a school may be an appropriate method of reducing the misery of poverty on children through programs like HCZ, the elimination of poverty sustaining consumption patterns at any age, that on Karelis' view stems from material insufficiency, has little to do with apathy, changing behaviors, future prospects, intelligence, high expectations, institutional design and very much to do with fulfillment of basic needs. If such is the case, the consensus view of reforming US schools is a misdiagnosis of the causes of failing schools and disparate achievement.

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<sup>64</sup> Sharon Otterman, *Lauded Schools Have Their Own Problems*, N.Y. Times, Oct. 12, 2010, at A20.

<sup>65</sup> *See id.*

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*