

Questions for Discussion

1. How does Hirsch apply Bagley's research and Jefferson's ideas to support his argument for a core curriculum?
2. Why does Hirsch think that a common curriculum is necessary to the functioning of a unified democratic nation? What evidence from foreign schools does he present to support his point of view?
3. Although Hirsch argues for a unified core curriculum in elementary school, he feels that high schools should be freer to develop alternative courses and cultural perspectives. What is the basis for this belief? Do you agree with him?
4. How does Hirsch believe that a common core curriculum could be established? Do you think his plan is realistic enough to be implemented?

Ideas for Writing

1. Do some research into the efforts of state and local public school district efforts to develop uniform curricula. Have any of these been successful? What has caused many of these efforts to fail? Write an essay that discusses your findings and draws conclusions about the viability of Hirsch's ideas.
2. Argue for or against Hirsch's underlying belief in the importance of a shared public culture. Do you believe that is necessary for a country as large and diverse as the United States to have a shared public culture? Do you believe we already have one or that the public schools should be involved in creating one?

Educating a Democracy

DEBORAH MEIER

Born in 1931, Deborah Meier has worked for over 30 years in public education as a teacher, school principal, writer, and public advocate. She was the founder and teacher-director of a network of highly successful public elementary and secondary schools in East Harlem, New York. Serving primarily low-income black and

misguided Romanticism. It is said that common elements in the curriculum would destroy our American essence, which is diversity. There is no evidence whatever that this fear of uniformity, which is widespread and often expressed, has any real-world foundation, or that a moiety of commonality in the school curriculum will turn everyone into interchangeable automatons. To the extent that this antisameness sentiment has any concrete implication for the curriculum, it would seem to be the current *laissez-faire* idea that if all schools and teachers do their own thing, then the invisible hand of nature will cause our children to be educated effectively, and thus ensure their individuality and diversity. The foundation for this curricular confidence (which has in fact resulted in huge knowledge gaps, boring repetitions, and glaring inequalities) would seem to be a Romantic faith in the watchful beneficence of nature, which "never did betray the heart that loved her." It is an expression of the same optimistic naturalism which supposes that the pace and quality of each child's scholarly attainments are determined naturally, and will follow an innate course of development which should not be interfered with by external impositions of drills and hard work.

Improving the effectiveness and fairness of education through enhancing both its content and its commonality has a more than educational significance. The improvement would, as everyone knows, diminish the economic inequities within the nation. Nothing could be more important to our national well-being than overcoming those inequities, which have grown ever greater in recent decades. But something equally significant is at stake. Many observers have deplored the decline in civility in our public life, and with it the decline in our sense of community. The interethnic hostilities that have intensified among us recently, the development of an us-versus-them mentality in political life, the astonishing indifference to the condition of our children—all bespeak a decline in the communitarian spirit, which used to be a hallmark of what Patterson calls our "ecumenical national culture." Bringing our children closer to universal competence is important. But an equally important contribution of the truly common school would be the strengthening of universal communicability and a sense of community within the public sphere. In the long run, that could be the common school's most important contribution to preserving the fragile fabric of our democracy.

Latino students, these schools are considered exemplars of reform. Meier is currently vice-chair of the coalition of Essential Schools and Principal of Boston's Mission Hill Elementary School. She is the author of the books *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons from a Small School in Harlem* (1995) and *In School We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization* (2002). The selection that follows is from her book *Will Standards Save Public Education?* (2000).

The current standards-based reform movement took off in 1983 in response to the widely held view that America was at extreme economic risk, largely because of bad schools. The battle cry, called out first in *A Nation at Risk*, launched an attack on dumb teachers, uncaring mothers, social promotion, and general academic permissiveness. Teachers and a new group labeled "educationists" were declared the main enemy, which undermined their credibility, and set the stage for cutting them and their concerns out of the cure. According to critics, American education needed to be reimaged, made more rigorous, and, above all, brought under the control of experts who, unlike educators and parents, understood the new demands of our economy and culture. The cure might curtail the work of some star teachers and star schools, and it might lead, as the education chief of Massachusetts recently noted, to a lot of crying fourth graders. But the gravity of the long-range risks to the nation demanded strong medicine.

Two claims were thus made: that our once-great public system was no longer performing well, and that its weaknesses were undermining America's economy. . . .

THE REAL CRISIS

. . . The coalition of experts who produced *A Nation at Risk* were wrong when they announced the failure of American public education and its critical role in our economic decline. Constructive debate about reform should begin by acknowledging this misjudgment. It should then also acknowledge the even bigger crisis that schools have played a major part in deepening, if not actually creating, and could play a big part in curing. This crisis requires quite a different set of responses, often in direct conflict with standardization.

An understanding of this other crisis begins by noting that we have the lowest voter turnout by far of any modern industrial country; we are exceptional for the absence of responsible care for our most vulnerable citizens (we spend less on child welfare—baby care, medical care, family leave—than almost every foreign counterpart); we don't come close to other advanced industrial countries in income equity; and our high rate of (and investment in) incarceration places us in a class by ourselves. All of these, of course, affect some citizens far more than others; and the heaviest burdens fall on the poor, the young, and people of color.

These social and political indicators are suggestive of a crisis in human relationships. Virtually all discussions, right or left, about what's wrong in our otherwise successful society acknowledge the absence of any sense of responsibility for one's community and of decency in personal relationships. An important cause of this subtler crisis, I submit, is that the closer our youth come to adulthood the less they belong to communities that include responsible adults, and the more stuck they are in peer-only subcultures. We've created two parallel cultures, and it's no wonder the ones on the other side live and act: seemingly footloose and fancy-free but in truth often lost, confused, and knit together for temporary self-protection. The consequences are critical for all our youngsters, but obviously more severe—often disastrous—for those less identified with the larger culture of success.

Many changes in our society aided and abetted the shifts that have produced this alienation. But one important change has been in the nature of schooling. Our schools have grown too distant, too big, too standardized, too uniform, too divorced from their communities, too alienating of young from old and old from young. Few youngsters and few teachers have an opportunity to know each other by more than name (if that); and schools are organized such that "knowing each other" is nearly impossible. In these settings it's hard to teach young people how to be responsible to others, or to concern themselves with their community. At best they develop loyalties to the members of their immediate circle of friends (and perhaps their own nuclear family). Even when teens take jobs their fellow workers and their customers are likely to be peers. Apprenticeship as a way to learn to be an adult is disappearing. The public and its schools, the "real" world and the schoolhouse, young people and adults, have become disconnected, and until they are reconnected no list of particular bits of knowledge will be of much use.

In my youth there were over 200,000 school boards. Today there are fewer than 20,000 and the average school, which in my youth had only a few hundred students, now holds thousands. At this writing, Miami and Los Angeles are in the process of building the two largest high schools ever. The largest districts and the largest and most anonymous schools are again those that serve our least-advantaged children.

Because of the disconnection between the public and its schools, the power to protect or support them now lies increasingly in the hands of public or private bodies that have no immediate stake in the daily life of the students. CEOs, federal and state legislators, university experts, presidential think tanks, make more and more of the daily decisions about schools. For example, the details of the school day and year are determined by state legislators—often down to minutes per day for each subject taught, and whether Johnny gets promoted from third to fourth grade. The school's budget depends on it. Site-based school councils are increasingly the "in" thing, just as the scope of their responsibility narrows.

Public schools, after a romance with local power, beginning in the late 1960s and ending in the early 1990s, are increasingly organized as interchangeable units of a larger state organism, each expected to conform to the intelligence of some central agency or expert authority. The locus of authority in young people's lives has shifted away from the adults kids know well and who know the kids well—at a cost. Home schooling or private schooling seems more and more the natural next step for those with the means and the desire to remain in authority.

Our school troubles are not primarily the result of too easy course work or too much tolerance for violence. The big trouble lies instead in the company our children keep—or, more precisely, don't keep. They no longer keep company with us, the grown-ups they are about to become. And the grown-ups they do encounter seem less and less worthy of their respect. What kid, after all, wants to be seen emulating people he's been told are too dumb to exercise power, and are simply implementing the commands of the real experts?

Alternative Assumptions

Just as the conventional policy assumptions emerge naturally from a falsely diagnosed crisis, so does the crisis I have sketched suggest an alternative set of assumptions.

1. *Goals:* In a democracy, there are multiple, legitimate definitions of "a good education" and "well-educated," and it is desirable to acknowledge that plurality. Openly differing viewpoints constitute a healthy tension in a democratic, pluralistic society. Even where a mainstream view (consensus) exists, alternate views that challenge the consensus are critical to the society's health. Young people need to be exposed to competing views, and to adults debating choices about what's most important. As John Stuart Mill said, "It is not the mind of heretics that are deteriorated most, by the ban placed on all inquiry which does not end in the orthodox conclusions. The greatest harm is done to those who are not heretics, and whose whole mental development is cramped, and their reason cowed, by the fear of heresy."
2. *Authority:* In fundamental questions of education, experts should be subservient to citizens. Experts and laymen alike have an essential role in shaping both ends and means, the what and the how. While it is wise to involve experts from both business and the academy, they provide only one set of opinions, and are themselves rarely of a single mind. Moreover, it is educationally important for young people to be in the company of adults—teachers, family members, and other adults in their own communities—powerful enough to decide important things. They need to witness the exercise of judgment, the weighing of means and ends by people they can imagine becoming; and they need to see how responsible adults handle disagreement. If we think the adults in children's lives are, in Jefferson's words, "not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education."
3. *Assessment:* Standardized tests are too simple and simple-minded for high-stakes assessment of children and schools. Important decisions regarding kids and teachers should always be based on multiple sources of evidence that seem appropriate and credible to those most concerned. These are old testing truisms, backed even by the testing industry, which has never claimed the level of omniscience many standards advocates assume of it. The state should require only the forms of assessment be public, constitutionally sound, and subject to a variety of "second opinions" by experts representing other interested parties. Where states feel obliged to

set norms—for example, in granting state diplomas or access to state universities—these should be flexible, allowing schools maximum autonomy to demonstrate the ways they have reached such norms through other forms of assessment.

4. *Enforcement:* Sanctions should remain in the hands of the local community, to be determined by people who know the particulars of each child and each situation. The power of both business and the academy are already substantial; their access to the means of persuasion (television, the press, and so forth) and their power to determine access to jobs and higher education already impinge on the freedom of local communities. Families and their communities should not be required to make decisions about their own students and their own work based on such external measures. It is sufficient that they are obliged to take them into account in their deliberations about their children's future options.
5. *Equity:* A fairer distribution of resources is the principal means for achieving educational equity. The primary national responsibility is to narrow the resource gap between the most and least advantaged, both between 9 A.M. and 3 P.M. and during the other five sixths of their waking lives when rich and poor students are also learning—but very different things. To this end publicly accessible comparisons of educational achievement should always include information regarding the relative resources that the families of students, schools, and communities bring to the schooling enterprise.
6. *Effective Learning:* Improved learning is best achieved by improving teaching and learning relationships, by enlisting the energies of both teachers and learners. The kinds of learning required of citizens cannot be accomplished by standardized and centrally imposed systems of learning, even if we desired it for other reasons. Human learning, to be efficient, effective, and long-lasting, requires the engagement of learners on their own behalf, and rests on the relationships that develop between schools and their communities, between teachers and their students, and between the individual learner and what is to be learned.

No "scientific" argument can conclusively determine whether this set of assumptions or the set sketched earlier is true. Although some research suggests that human learning is less efficient when motivated by rewards and punishments, and

that fear is a poor motivator, I doubt that further research will settle the issue. But because of the crisis of human relationships, I urge that we consider the contrary claims rather more seriously than we have. We may even find that in the absence of strong human relationships rigorous intellectual training in the most fundamental academic subjects cannot flourish. In a world shaped by powerful centralized media, restoring a greater balance of power between local communities and central authorities, between institutions subject to democratic control and those beyond their control, may be vastly more important than educational reformers bent on increased centralization acknowledge.

AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL

Suppose, then, we think about school reform in light of these alternative assumptions. What practical model of schools and learning do they support? In brief, our hope lies in schools that are more personal, compelling, and attractive than the Internet or TV, where youngsters can keep company with interesting and powerful adults who are in turn in alliance with the students' families and local institutions. We need to surround kids with adults who know and care for our children, who have opinions and are accustomed to expressing them publicly, and who know how to reach reasonable collective decisions in the face of disagreement. That means increasing local decision making, and simultaneously decreasing the size and bureaucratic complexity of schools. Correspondingly, the worst thing we can do is to turn teachers and schools into the vehicles for implementing externally imposed standards.

Is such an alternative practical? Are the assumptions behind it mere sentiment?

At the Mission Hill in Boston, one of ten new Boston public schools initiated by the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers Union, we designed a school to support such alternative practices. The families who come to Mission Hill are chosen by lottery and represent a cross section of Boston's population. We intentionally keep the school small with fewer than two hundred students ages five to thirteen—so that the adults can meet regularly, take responsibility for each other's work, and confer and argue over how best to get things right. Parents join the staff not

only for formal governance meetings, but for monthly informal suppers, conversations, good times. Our oldest kids, the eighth graders, will graduate only when they can show us all that they meet our graduation standards, which are the result of lots of parent, staff, and community dialogue over several years.

All our students study—once when they are little, once when they are older—a schoolwide interdisciplinary curriculum. Last fall they all became experts on Boston and Mission Hill, learning its history (and their own), geography, architecture, distinct neighborhoods, and figures of importance. Last winter they all re-created ancient Egypt at 67 Allegheny Street. This coming winter they will re-create ancient China. Each spring they dig into a science-focused curriculum theme. The common curriculum allowed us, for example, to afford professional and amateur Egyptologists, who joined us from time to time as lively witnesses to a lifelong passion. We have a big central corridor that serves as our public mall, where kids paint murals and mix together to read and talk across ages. High school youngsters who share the building with us read with little ones, take them on trips, and generally model what it can mean to be a more responsible and well-educated person.

We invented our own standards, not out of whole cloth but with an eye to what the world out there expects and what we deem valuable and important. And we assess them through the work the kids do and the commentary of others about that work. Our standards are intended to deepen and broaden young people's habits of mind, their craftsmanship, and their work habits. Other schools may select quite a different way of describing and exhibiting their standards. But they too need to consciously construct their standards in ways that give schooling purpose and coherence, and then commit themselves to achieving them. And the kids need to understand the standards and their rationale. They must see school as not just a place to get a certificate, but a place that lives by the same standards it sets for them. Thus the Mission Hill school not only sets standards but has considerable freedom and flexibility with regard to how it spends its public funds and organizes its time to attain them. All ten pilot schools offer examples of different ways this might play out, ways that could be replicated in all Boston schools.

Standard setting and assessment are not once-and-for-all issues. We reexamine our school constantly to see that it remains a place that engages all of us in tough but interesting learning tasks,

nourishes and encourages the development of reasonable and judicious trust, and nurtures a passion for making sense of things and the skills needed to do so. We expect disagreements—sometimes painful ones. We know that even well-intentioned, reasonable people cross swords over deeply held beliefs. And we know, too, that these differences can be sources of valuable education when the school itself can negotiate the needed compromises.

What is impressive at Mission Hill, at the other pilot schools, at the Central Park East School in New York's east Harlem, where I worked for twenty-five years, and the thousands of other small schools like them, is that over time the kids buy in. These schools receive the same per capita public funding as other schools receive, are subject to city and state testing, and must obey the same basic health, safety, and civil rights regulations. But because these schools are small, the families and faculties are together by choice, and all concerned can exercise substantial power over staffing, scheduling, curriculum, and assessment, the schools' cultural norms and expectations are very different than those of most other public schools.

The evidence suggests that most youngsters have a sufficiently deep hunger for the relationships these schools offer them—among kids and between adults and kids—that they choose school over the alternative cultures on the Net, tube, and street. Over 90 percent of Central Park East's very typical students stuck it out, graduated, and went on to college. And most persevered through higher education. Did they ever rebel, get mad at us, reassert their contrary values and adolescent preferences? Of course. Did we fail with some? Yes. But it turns out that the hunger for grown-up connections is strong enough to make a difference if we give it a chance. Studies launched in New York between 1975 and 1995 conducted on the other similar schools show the same pattern of success.

Standards, yes. Absolutely. But as TheodoreSizer, who put the idea of standards on the school map in the early 1980s, also told us then: we need standards held by real people who matter in the lives of our young. School, family, and community must forge their own, in dialogue with and in response to the larger world of which they are a part. There will always be tensions; but if the decisive, authoritative voice always comes from anonymous outsiders, then kids cannot learn what it takes to develop their own voice.

I know this "can be" because I've been there. The flowering of so many new public schools of choice over the past two decades

proves that under widely different circumstances, very different kinds of leadership and different auspices, a powerful alternative to externally imposed standards is available.

And I also know the powerful reasons why it "can't be"—because I've witnessed firsthand the resistance even to allowing others to follow suit, much less encouraging or mandating them to do so. The resistance comes not simply from bad bureaucrats or fearful unions (the usual bogeymen), but from legislators and mayors and voters, from citizens who think that if an institution is public it has to be all things to all constituents (characterless and mediocre by definition), and from various elites who see teachers and private citizens as too dumb to engage in making important decisions. That's a heady list of resisters.

But small self-governing schools of choice, operating with considerable flexibility and freedom, also resonate with large numbers of people, including many of those who are gathering around charter schools, and even some supporters of privatization and home schooling. They too come from a wide political spectrum and could be mobilized.

ACCOUNTABILITY

And yet doubts about accountability will linger. In a world of smaller, more autonomous schools not responsible to centralized standardization, how will we know who is doing a good job and who isn't? How can we prevent schools from claiming they're doing just fine, and having those claims believed, when they may not be true? Are we simply forced to trust them, with no independent evidence?

What lies behind these worries? For those who buy into the conventional assumptions, anything but top-down standardization seems pointless. But for those whose concern is more practical there are some straightforward and practical answers to the issue of accountability that do not require standardization.

To begin with, I am not advocating the elimination of all systems for taking account of how schools and students are doing. In any case, that is hardly a danger.

Americans invented the modern, standardized, norm-referenced test. Our students have been taking more tests more often than any nation on the face of the earth, and schools and districts have been going public with test scores starting almost from the moment chil-

dren enter school. For the third-or fourth-grade level (long before any of our international counterparts bother to test children) we have test data for virtually all schools, by race, class, and gender. We know exactly how many kids did better or worse in every subcategory. We have test data for almost every grade thereafter in reading and math, and to some degree in all other subjects. This has been the case for nearly half a century. Large numbers of our eighteen-year-olds now take standardized college entry tests (SATs and ACTs). In addition, the national government now offers us its own tests—the NAEP—which are given to an uncontaminated sample of students from across the United States and now reported by grade and state. And all of the above is very public.

In addition, public schools have been required to produce statements attesting to their financial integrity—how they spend their money—at least as rigorously as any business enterprise. They are held accountable for regularly reporting who works for them and what their salaries are. In most systems there are tightly prescribed rules and regulations; schools are obliged to fill out innumerable forms regarding almost every aspect of their work: how many kids are receiving special education, how many incidents of violence, how many suspensions, how many graduates, what grades students have received, how many hours and minutes they study each and every subject, and the credentials of their faculties. This information, and much more, is public. And the hiring and firing of superintendents has become a very common phenomenon.

In a nation in which textbooks are the primary vehicle for distributing knowledge in schools, a few major textbook publishers, because of a few major state textbook laws, dominate the field, offering most teachers and schools (and students) very standardized accounts of what is to be learned, and when and how to deliver this knowledge. Moreover, most textbooks have always come armed with their own end-of-chapter tests, increasingly designed to look like the real thing; indeed, test makers also are the publishers of many of the major standardized tests.

In short, we have been awash in accountability and standardization for a very long time, but we are missing precisely the qualities that the last big wave of reform was intended to respond to: teachers, kids, and families who know each other or each other's work and take responsibility for it; we are missing communities built around their own articulated and public standards and ready to show them off to others.

The schools I have worked in and support have shown how much more powerful accountability becomes when one takes this latter path. The work produced by Central Park East students, for example, is collected regularly in portfolios, and it is examined (and in the case of high school students, judged) by tough internal and external reviewers, in a process that closely resembles a doctoral oral exam. The standards by which a student is evaluated are easily accessible to families, clear to kids, and capable of being judged by other parties. In addition schools such as this undergo schoolwide external assessments that take into account the quality of their curriculum, instruction, staff development, and culture as well as the impact of the school on students' future success (in college, work, and so forth).

Are the approaches designed by Central Park East or Mission Hill the best way? That's probably the wrong question. We never intended to suggest that everyone should follow our system. It would be nice if it were easier for others to adopt our approach; it would be even better if it were easier—in fact required—for others to adopt alternatives to it, including the use of standardized tests if they so choose. My argument is for more local control, not for one true way.

I opt for more local control not because I think the larger society has no common interests at stake in how we educate all children, or because local people are smarter or intrinsically more honorable. The interests of wider publics are important in my way of thinking. I know that pressure exists at Mission Hill to not accept or push out students who are difficult to educate, who will make us look worse on any test, or whose families are a nuisance. It's a good thing that others are watching us to prevent such exclusion.

But the United States is now hardly in danger of too much localized power. (The only local powers we seem to be interested in expanding are those that allow us to resegment our schools by race or gender.) What is missing is balance—some power in the hands of those whose agenda is first and foremost the feelings of particular kids, their particular families, their perceived local values and needs. (Without this balance, my knowledge that holding David over in third grade will not produce the desired effects is useless knowledge.) So is my knowledge of different ways to reach him through literature or history. This absence of local power is bad for David's education and bad for democracy. A backseat driver may be more expert than the actual driver, but there are limits to what can be accomplished from the rear seat.

In short, the argument is not about the need for standards or accountability, but what kind serves us best. I believe standardization will make it harder to hold people accountable and harder to develop sound and useful standards. The intellectual demands of the twenty-first century, as well as the demands of democratic life, are best met by preserving plural definitions of a good education, local decision making, and respect for ordinary human judgments.

Education and Democracy

If we are to make use of what we knew in Dewey's day (and know even better today) about how the human species best learns, we will have to start by throwing away the dystopia of the ant colony, the smoothly functioning (and quietly humming) factory where everything goes according to plan, and replace it with a messy, often ram-bunctious, community, with its multiple demands and complicated trade-offs. The new schools that might better serve democracy and the economy will have to be capable of constantly remaking themselves and still provide for sufficient stability, routine, ritual, and shared ethos. Impossible? Of course. So these schools will veer too far one way or the other at different times in their history, will learn from each other, shift focus, and find a new balance. There will always be a party of order and a party of messiness.

If schools are not all required to follow all the same fads, maybe they will learn something from their separate experiments. And that will help to nurture the two indispensable traits of a democratic society: a high degree of tolerance for others, indeed genuine empathy for them, as well as a high degree of tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity, and puzzlement, indeed enjoyment of them.

A vibrant and nurturing community, with clear and regular guideposts—its own set of understandings, its people with a commitment to one another that feels something rather like love and affection—can sustain such rapid change without losing its humanity. Such a community must relish its disagreements, its oddballs, its misfits. Not quite families, but closer to our definition of family than of factory, such schools will make high demands on their members and have a sustaining and relentless sense of purpose and coherence, but will be ready also to always (at least sometimes) even reconsider their own core beliefs. Their members will come home exhausted, but not burned out.

Everything that moves us toward these qualities will be good for the ideal of democracy. A democracy in which less than half

its members see themselves as "making enough difference" to bother to vote in any election is surely endangered—far more endangered, at risk, than our economy. It's for the loss of belief in the capacity to influence the world, not our economic ups and downs, that we educators should accept some responsibility. What I have learned from thirty years in small powerful schools is that it is here above all that schools can make a difference, can alter the odds.

We can't beat the statistical advantage on the next round of tests that being advantaged has over being disadvantaged; we can, however, substantially affect the gap between rich and poor where it will count, in the long haul of life. Even there it's hard to see how schools by themselves can eliminate the gap, but we can stop enlarging it. The factory-like schools we invented a century ago to handle the masses were bound to enlarge the gap. But trained mindlessness at least fit the world of work so many young people were destined for. We seem now to be reinventing a twenty-first-century version of the factory-like school—for the mind-workers of tomorrow.

It is a matter of choice; such a future does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability. We have the resources, the knowledge, and plenty of living examples of the many different kinds of schools that might serve our needs better. All we need is a little more patient confidence in the good sense of "the people"—in short, a little more commitment to democracy.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why does Meier believe the experts who produced the book *A Nation at Risk* were wrong? According to Meier, what is the real crisis confronting our schools and the larger society?
2. What assumptions about public school difficulties does Meier provide in the six problem areas that she identifies? How do these assumptions challenge the way most public schools today are run?
3. How does Meier's example of the Mission Hill School help to clarify her six stated principles of education?
4. Why does Meier believe that the absence of "local power" in schools has a negative impact on our democracy? Were you convinced by her arguments? Explain your point of view.

Ideas for Writing

1. Write an essay in which you argue whether or not it is valuable for schools to put as much emphasis on local control as Meier proposes. What are some possible disadvantages of local control?
2. Write up a proposal for a change to a school in your community that would make it more closely resemble the Mission Hill School. Use the six reforms Meier proposes as your guide. What difficulties would you find in making such a change, and how could the reforms be implemented?

Community Service

ROBERT COLES

Robert Coles (b. 1929) is a child psychiatrist and a professor of psychiatry and medical humanities at Harvard. He is best known for his work with the lives of children, where he explores their moral, political, and spiritual sensibilities. The author of more than fifty books, Robert Coles won the Pulitzer Prize for his *Children of Crisis* series. He is also known as an eloquent spokesman for voluntary and community service, which is the subject of his book, *The Call of Service: A Witness to Idealism* (1993). In the following selection excerpted from *The Call of Service*, Coles profiles the idealism of today's youth, who often choose to volunteer or do community service through their high schools or colleges.

Today's students are likely to express their lofty political and social impulses and practical desires to change the world through community service, even if in limited or modest ways. I have spent many years—since 1978—working with college students engaged in community service; they tutor the young, keep company with the elderly, visit the sick, run summer camps, design and implement educational programs in prisons, help the medically needy and indigent get hospital care, and argue in the