ESEA Should Address the Impact of Child Poverty on STEM Performance | Commentary

By Special to Roll Call
Posted at 5 a.m. Aug. 21

By Michael S. Lubell

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As Congress prepares to complete reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, members should reflect on Einstein’s judgment, especially when they shine the spotlight on science. Striking the right balance between quantifying outcomes through standardized tests and evaluating creative performance through relatively subjective appraisals is not an easy task. But if we care about the science, technology, engineering and mathematics workforce of the future, we must get the balance right. And we must understand the extraordinary impact childhood poverty has on science performance.

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But NCLB put the ESEA on a new footing by mandating statewide standardized testing for all students. To qualify for Title I federal funding under NCLB, schools had to demonstrate “adequate yearly progress” — but only in mathematics and reading. A number of STEM advocates warned at the time that teachers would teach to the test and in the process simply snub science.

And that’s exactly what happened. During the late 1980s and through the mid-1990s, the time elementary school teachers spent on math and science instruction in grades one through four had been increasing modestly. But during the late 1990s, science hours began to slip, and by 2008, seven years into NCLB, they had plunged by almost 25 percent from their 1994 high, declining to their lowest level since 1988, according to the National Center for Education...
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And that's exactly what happened. During the late 1980s and through the mid-1990s, the time elementary school teachers spent on math and science instruction in grades one through four had been increasing modestly. But during the late 1990s, science hours began to slip, and by 2008, seven years into NCLB, they had plunged by almost 25 percent from their 1994 high, declining to their lowest level since 1988, according to the National Center for Education Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey. Not surprisingly, reading and math hours suffered no reductions: reading actually rose by almost 10 percent.

By 2008, the ESEA had been modified to include science testing. But in the latest reauthorization bills (HR 5 and S 1177), all of STEM education seems to be a child left behind. While the bills, eliminate testing as a requirement for Title I funding — a positive step, Einstein would say — the initial drafts omitted any significant reference to STEM. And although the Senate Education Committee eventually passed an amendment including reauthorization of the Math Science Partnership program, the vote was a narrow 12 to 10. In the House bill, STEM has remained an orphan.

There is little dispute that 21st century jobs demand increased proficiency in STEM, and that as a nation, we are falling behind our global competitors in those critical areas. That makes the resistance on Capitol Hill all the more puzzling.
But even if lawmakers wake up, the ESEA may still be far off the mark when it comes to science. Programs such as the Math Science Partnerships, for example, focus on secondary school education, but there is strong evidence that by the time children reach high school age much of their life’s die has already been cast. It is particularly true for science, which by its nature is linear and sequential.

Still, early engagement is only a partial answer, as a 2010 Department of Health and Human Services study of the Head Start program showed. Head Start, begun as part of the War on Poverty, attempts to improve the school readiness of low-income children. But the 2010 study found that by the end of first grade, the benefits of Head Start are largely absent.

Robert Putnam’s recent book, “Our Kids: The American Dream In Crisis,” provides an insight into why that might be. Putnam, a renowned Harvard political scientist, makes a compelling case that de facto segregation by socioeconomic status in housing and schools is a major contributor to an increasing opportunity gap. Put simply, rich kids succeed, and poor kids get left behind.

There is little argument today that the jobs of tomorrow will demand scientific and technical skills. And as Linda Darling-Hammond, emeritus professor at Stanford University’s Graduate School of Education, has noted, childhood poverty is one of the most important predictors of performance on the Programme for International Student Assessment that includes science and math. On the 2012 PISA test, U.S. students ranked 36th in math and 27th in science, but corrected for poverty, they ranked near the top.

Childhood poverty is more pervasive in the U.S. than in any other advanced nation. By some estimates, 30 percent of American children live below the poverty line. And among African- and Hispanic-Americans, the percentage is even greater. If we want to compete in a technologically advanced world with a diverse STEM workforce, we must provide social structures that give our poorer kids the support they need to succeed.

Head Start is a good start, but as Putnam has shown and the HHS 2010 study demonstrated, the support must continue as children progress throughout their school years. The ESEA Reauthorization Act should call on the National Academy of Sciences to provide a roadmap for solving our growing poverty-driven STEM workforce deficiencies.

Michael S. Lubell is the Mark W. Zamansky Professor of Physics at the City College of the City University of New York and director of public affairs of the American Physical Society.

Related:
City lauds ‘unprecedented’ STEM education effort from businesses

Officials in Mayor Bill de Blasio’s administration are heralding what they call an unprecedented effort by the city and major corporations to provide science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education to city schoolchildren this summer.

AT&T is funding STEM programs with a $1.6 million grant to the Department of Education, the NYU Polytechnic School of Engineering is training 1,100 students with a $2 million boost from Microsoft and public funds and Cornell Tech, Google and the DOE will co-host a coding conference later this year.

Signs of STEM programming have been particularly abundant this summer.

Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams recently attended a graduation ceremony for summer STEM students, young black city students held a demo day at Google's headquarters in Manhattan and CUNY and York College hosted an aerospace academy sponsored by NASA and Con Edison in July.

“FOR THE FIRST TIME, WE'RE SEEING ACROSS-THE-BOARD INVESTMENTS IN PROGRAMS FROM THE DOE ALL THE WAY UP TO THE WORK FORCE,” said Kristen Titus, director of the city's Tech Talent Pipeline, a $10 million public-private partnership created in May 2014. “THIS IS A NEW MOVEMENT EVERYONE IS GETTING BEHIND, AND EVERYONE UNDERSTANDS IT'S GOOD FOR BUSINESS.”
Titus said the level of commitment from corporations would not have been possible five years ago, even during the Bloomberg administration.

"It was difficult and unprecedented to get companies big and small to really commit to something of substance on STEM," she said.

Still, former mayor Michael Bloomberg ushered in many public-private partnerships to boost STEM offerings. Perhaps most prominently, Bloomberg helped create P-TECH, a career and technical education high school in Brooklyn that President Barack Obama has hailed as a national model.

City schools chancellor Carmen Farinà has said that boosting STEM opportunities is one of her top priorities and praised this summer's STEM offerings.

"I was particularly delighted to see students — especially in the critical 2nd, 7th, and 10th grades — participating in STEM enrichment this summer and developing new passions and skills," she said in a statement.

The new STEM offerings also focus on training teachers and administrators. The DOE created a three-year STEM professional development session for 450 teachers this summer and released the department's new STEM Framework, intended to guide instructors on teaching technology. And the Tech Talent Pipeline advisory board, created in February, consists of 25 high-level tech executives — including Fred Wilson of Union Square Ventures and Chris Hughes of Facebook and the New Republic — who help advise the DOE on its STEM offerings.

One of the board's members, AT&T New York president Marissa Shorenstein, said it's clear that the city needs to train more students in computer science and technology.

"We see a greater need moving forward in computer science and software engineering skills," Shorenstein said in an interview. "We believe it takes a public-private partnership to prepare city schoolchildren for those jobs, she added.

Titus said the city is planning to partner with corporations on all its STEM-related initiatives.

"We're not going to do a training or education program unless companies are helping us to do it," she said.
Woman, soon to be 100, to throw out first pitch

By Fallan Patterson
Forum Publishing Group

AUGUST 20, 2015, 10:15 AM

Claire Mollie Gross is hardly slowing down with age.

She had her bat mitzvah at age 97, took her confirmation at age 98 and will celebrate her 100th birthday by throwing out the ceremonial first pitch at Sunday's Miami Marlins game against the Philadelphia Phillies.

"I think it's exciting and fun," said Gross, who lives in Century Village in Pembroke Pines. "How many times do you get to be 100?"

Great-nephew Noah Greene contacted the team asking if there was a way to honor Gross' birthday. She's taken the honor seriously, practicing her pitching skills three times a week at the gym.

"I have a big cheering section," she said. "My dentist bought 35 tickets."

Born in Manhattan on Aug. 27, 1915, Gross grew up between Harlem and Yorkville, N.Y. A dual mathematics and physics major, she graduated from Hunter College in 1936.

She married Alfred Gross, a professor at New York University who traveled all over the country giving lectures. She was later hired as a permanent substitute at Martin Van Buren High School in Queens, where she taught from 1955 to 1999. This allowed Gross to accompany her husband on his travels, which she did often.

"You could take time off without missing something," Gross said.

The couple visited all 50 states — even once driving to Alaska — and traveled to Europe, Asia and South America.

"We had a lot of vacations. We used elder hostels and went on the tours and learned about the different sciences," she said, adding she and her husband were married for 66 years before he died at age 92 in 2007.

Gross keeps up her active lifestyle thanks to her companion, Dulett Sands, whom Gross refers to as her "adopted daughter."

"She tries to keep everybody happy," Sands said.

Gross goes to the gym, attends Hebrew lessons on Thursdays, cuts jokes out of the newspaper to send to a running list of 12 people around the world, and shops for the Sabbath dinner party she's hosted every Friday evening for eight years.

"We do a lot here, every show, every movie," Gross said.

Gross jokingly credits her longevity to not having children and avoiding the worrying that comes with them. She enjoys keeping a busy social schedule and finding the humor in life.

"Everything is funny," Gross said. "That's what is amazing. ... I'm 100 and happy to be there."
The city's very white tech sector

Minorities constitute only 20% of the workforce; by some measures that's good.

Greg David

Published: August 20, 2015 - 12:12 pm

New York's burgeoning tech sector is overwhelmingly white and Asian, with African-Americans and Hispanics accounting for only a fifth of the workforce.

By the standards of some companies in Silicon Valley that is exemplary.

The statistics come from a report released Thursday by the Center for an Urban Future that analyzes in depth the growth of tech.

(The center actually redid its previous work using the definition of technology developed earlier this year by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. I wrote about that study extensively at the time, and a summary of the key findings of the Fed analysis can be found in Monday's Stats and the City section of Crain's print edition and website.)

Twenty-percent minority representation may seem absurdly low, especially compared with the overall composition of the New York City workforce. But the consensus number for minority employment in the Valley is 5%. Earlier this month, Twitter admitted it employed 49 African-Americans out of 2,910 workers, representing a mere 1.7% of its staff. The latest figures on Google are 1% black and 2% Hispanic. Since Google is the largest tech employer in New York, the company must be well below the averages here.
Could Hillary Clinton Face Criminal Charges Over Emailgate?

By Margaret Hartmann

Hillary Clinton speaks to members of the media on July 14, 2015 on Capitol Hill. Photo: Alex Wong/Getty Images

Since the news that she used a private email server as secretary of State broke in March, Hillary Clinton has repeatedly insisted that everything she did was "legally permitted." Yet, the so-called Emailgate scandal has only intensified in recent weeks, with the New York Times publishing an erroneous report (http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2015/07/hillary-clinton-new-york-times.html) that Clinton was the subject of a potential criminal probe, intelligence agencies flagging 305 Clinton emails that may contain classified information, and questions swirling about why she wiped her email server (http://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/08/18/for-hillary-clinton-another-grilling-about-emails/?_r=0) before turning it over to the FBI.

Clinton has dismissed (http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/hillary-clinton/fbi-optimistic-it-can-recover-some-data-clinton-server-n411976) the controversy as a "partisan attack," and clearly the issue is mired in the political hysteria that's surrounded the Clintons for decades. But is the worst-case scenario merely a drawn-out controversy that distracts from her presidential campaign, or could the scandal end with
Clinton facing criminal charges? Most legal experts say it's unlikely that we'll see Clinton hauled away in an orange jumpsuit over her strange email setup. However, there's disagreement over what laws she may have violated, and whether Clinton or her staffers should be worried about legal consequences.

Clinton's decision to use a private email rather than a .gov email address to conduct official business was certainly inadvisable, and possibly illegal. However, Douglas Cox, a professor at the City University of New York School of Law who studies records preservation laws, tells Daily Intelligencer that we shouldn't expect to see Clinton charged with violating federal records laws. "The problem is that those laws do not have sharp teeth, and it is only in severe cases that relevant criminal provisions are implicated," he said.

Since 1950, the Federal Records Act has required federal employees to keep any records related to their official duties, including their communications. President Obama amended the law in 2014 to require that emails on personal accounts be transferred to government servers within 20 days, but at that point Clinton had left the State Department.

When Clinton became secretary of State in 2009, Section 1236.22 of the 2009 National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) requirements did say that if agencies allow employees to use outside email, they "must ensure that Federal records sent or received on such systems are preserved in the appropriate agency record-keeping system." But there was no timeline for compliance, and when the State Department asked for her records in 2014, Clinton turned over her work-related emails (as determined by her staff). The campaign has also argued that the State Department always had access to some of her emails, since she contacted staffers at their .gov email addresses.

The Clinton team says that's proof that the secretary wasn't trying to keep anything out of the public record, contrary to what Lawrence O'Donnell alleged in March. "This email system was set up obviously to defy the Freedom of Information Act," the MSNBC host said. "Emails were completely immune from every single Freedom of Information Act request. Regardless of Clinton's motive (she says she used one email address for "convenience"), her use of a private account did mean that multiple FOIA and congressional requests sent to the State Department came back empty or incomplete, since Clinton did not turn over her emails until December 2014.

As of May, the State Department was facing 79 FOIA lawsuits, many of which involve Clinton's email. In response to one of the suits filed by Judicial Watch, the State Department argued this month that under FOIA it is not required to conduct its own search of Clinton's server, or track down other devices that may contain her emails. They noted that Clinton recently signed a statement to the State Department.
required-e-mails/2015/08/10/36084f6a-3f3c-11e5-bf63-ff1d8549b1d2_story.html) declaring "under penalty of perjury" that she turned over all of her clintonemail.com messages that were potentially federal records. Nevertheless, on Thursday a federal judge ordered (http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/21/us/judge-says-hillary-clinton-didnt-follow-government-email-policies.html?src=twr) the State Department to ask the FBI for any additional emails recovered from Clinton's server, and lamented, "We wouldn't be here today if the employee had followed government policy."

Aside from the new possibility that Clinton perjured herself, recent reports that classified information may have passed through clintonemail.com present the biggest legal threat to the candidate. Under 18 U.S.C. § 2071 (https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/2071), anyone who "willfully and unlawfully conceals, removes, mutilates, obliterate or destroys," public records, or attempts to do so, has committed a felony. Those found guilty can be fined, imprisoned for three years, and "disqualified from holding any office under the United States."

According to 18 U.S.C. § 1924 (https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/1924), it is a misdemeanor for government employees to "knowingly" remove classified information "without authority and with the intent to retain such documents or materials at an unauthorized location." Former CIA director and retired general David Petraeus pleaded guilty (http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/03/03/390443553/petraeus-enters-into-plea-agreement-on-criminal-charge) to this crime after providing notebooks containing classified information to his biographer and mistress, Paula Broadwell. Petraeus was sentenced to just two years of probation and a $40,000 fine, but the maximum sentence is one year in prison and a $100,000 fine.

The frequent use of the words willfully and knowingly may help explain why the Clinton campaign keeps emphasizing that she never intentionally sent or received classified information via email. "Courts have required prosecutors to show that a defendant knew they were violating the law," said Cox. "Given that it is unclear whether the State Department may have approved of, or at least acquiesced in, Clinton's email arrangement; given that there is thus far no evidence that Clinton destroyed, or intended to conceal, emails that were properly government documents; and given that she willingly handed over the emails when requested, pursuing this charge would seem highly unlikely."

There are also several provisions (https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/793) in the Espionage Act that could apply to Clinton. The law states that anyone in possession of materials "relating to the national defense" who "willfully retains" the information or "fails to deliver it on demand to the officer or employee of the United States entitled to receive it" has violated the law. It's also a crime to allow such materials to be removed from their "proper place of custody or delivered to anyone in violation of his trust, or to be lost, stolen, abstracted, or destroyed," through "gross negligence." The maximum penalty for these crimes is a $250,000 fine and up to ten years in prison.

Clinton claimed this week that there would be a dispute over whether some of her emails should have been marked classified even if she had used a government email account. "This is part of the ordinary process," Clinton said (http://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2015/08/15/for-hillary-clinton-another-grilling-about-emails/). "Everybody is acting like it's the first time it's ever happened. It happens all the
time." Thomas S. Blanton, director of the National Security Archive at George Washington University, agrees to some extent. "This is primarily a bureaucratic turf grab by the intelligence community to assert control over State Department records," he told Daily Intelligencer. "None of the email Mrs. Clinton sent or received was classified at the time — even the intelligence inspector general admits that. What's happening now is that some officials (but not others) are retrospectively classifying information in some of the Clinton emails. This is self-defeating because this only puts red flags on material somebody thinks might still be sensitive."

But Nathan A. Sales, a law professor at Syracuse University who teaches national security law and served in the Department of Homeland Security and the Justice Department from 2001 to 2008, does not find Clinton’s explanations persuasive. Last month I. Charles McCullough III, the inspector general of the intelligence agencies, said that four Clinton emails from a sample of 40 should have been marked classified and never should have passed through an "unclassified personal system" — though they "did not contain classification markings and/or dissemination controls." Rather than exonerating Clinton's staff, "the lack of markings may actually make things worse," Sales said. "It means that someone (perhaps a State Department side) may have affirmatively removed the markings before emailing the materials."

"It's looking increasingly likely that someone at the State Department broke the law, but it's too soon to say whether Hillary herself could be successfully prosecuted," Sales concluded. Steven Aftergood, who directs the Federation of American Scientists' project on government secrecy, thinks based on what we've learned so far, "there are no laws that Clinton could reasonably be charged with violating." However, he agrees that the lack of classification markings could be a problem. "If it turned out that when the information was transferred from the intelligence community to the State Department someone deliberately removed the classification markings, the person who did that would be in trouble."

As the various investigations progress, the Clinton campaign is sticking by its claim that no one knowingly emailed classified information, and making a more aggressive effort to paint the scandal as part of a larger (and legitimate) debate about overclassification. Clinton spokesperson Brian Fallon told Politico on Wednesday that Clinton "was, at worst, the passive recipient of classified information." He added, "When it comes to classified information, the standards are not at all black and white." So far, the same could be said of the legal case against Clinton.
Study: NYPD's stop-and-frisk cuts crime in hot spots, but so do other policing efforts

August 20, 2015 by ANTHONY M. DESTEFANO / anthony.destefano@newsday.com

Stop-and-frisks by the NYPD likely reduce criminal activity in high-crime hot spots but other policing strategies may have the same or stronger impact, according to a new statistical study by a prominent criminologist.

A team led by Professor David Weisburd of George Mason University in Virginia analyzed NYPD stop-and-frisk data from 2006 to 2011 and concluded that in high-crime areas like the Bronx, the controversial tactic had a "significant though modest deterrent effect on crime."

The study will be published in an upcoming edition of "Criminology and Public Policy," a journal of the American Society of Criminology.

The impact of the NYPD's stop-and-frisk program was one of "immediate crime prevention across short [geographic] distances and with a limited time frame," the study concluded, noting there was little evidence that crimes moved to other areas.

But while some proponents of stop and frisk might look to the study to support using stop and frisk more widely at a time of increased killings and shootings, Weisburd and his team said use of the tactic, as seen in recent years, was not justified.

When the city saw nearly 700,000 stop-and-frisks in 2011, the study estimated that the tactic led to just a 2 percent drop in crime citywide. An NYPD spokesman didn't return
calls for comment Thursday.

"Even if we assumed that the approach as practiced in NYC was constitutional, this seems like a very large police investment for a relatively small prevention gain," the study said.

The report noted a Manhattan federal judge's 2013 finding that police used stop-and-frisk unconstitutionally against minorities and an order for a federal monitor to supervise future police activity. Peter Zimroth, the court monitor, declined to comment Thursday.

Weisburd's study follows up one he did in 2014 that came to similar conclusions. His studies used geographic data provided by the NYPD not normally available on the locations of crimes and police stops.

The study was financed by the Open Society Foundations through a grant to John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Weisburd said. Open Society Foundations is an international nonprofit group focusing on human rights issues.

NYPD Commissioner William Bratton has looked askance at criminologist studies of stop and frisk. In June, when asked if looking at street segments instead of precincts was better at measuring the tactic's effectiveness, Bratton said no. He characterized criminologists as "sitting in their office, typing away, they're not out in the street like we are."

However, Weisburd's study acknowledged stop-and-frisk has a place in crime prevention and it is "time for scholars to recognize that . . . [stop question and frisk] focused on micro-geographic hot spots are likely to reduce crime."

Bratton has said there is no right level for stop-and-frisk but that he wants it done constitutionally and respectfully.
Q&A: Ex-college pres' guidelines for freshman year

The transition to college can be a difficult one for students, but far more so for some parents. So one local academic, knowing better than most how difficult that transition can be, has put together a manual intended to help parents navigate their child's first year post-high school.

Roger H. Martin, a Mamaroneck school board trustee and former college president, spent a year visiting five colleges and universities across the United States — Tufts University, Vassar College, Morningside College in Iowa, Washington College in Maryland and Queens College of the City University — to get insight into students’ and parents’ concerns during the transitional freshman year.

The result is his new book, "Off to College: A Guide for Parents," which advises parents on how to strike the right balance between providing support and fostering independence.

Martin has served as president of two colleges, Moravian and Randolph-Macon, and as associate dean of Harvard Divinity School. He is a graduate of Mamaroneck High School, where he currently volunteers with seniors as they prepare for the college admissions process.

Q: What was your college freshman year like?

A: I went to Denison University for a year. I didn't know it at the time, but I'm a dyslexic and very, very slow reader. And in college, I struggled. I have a whole chapter in the book about kids with either a learning or physical disability. I then transferred to Drew University. In my sophomore year, a sociology professor there saw that I wasn't that bright but that I was struggling with reading. And he just took me under his wing and he helped me with my reading and writing skills and then I started doing better. When I graduated in 1965, I was doing so well that I went to Yale for graduate school. And eventually to Oxford, where I did my doctorate in British history.

Q: What motivated you to write the book?

A: I knew I wanted to write. Because of my own difficult freshman year and throughout my college presidency, I'd become interested in what happens to first year students. And I became a sort of a student of the first year, and then in my next to last year at Randolph-Macon, instead of writing another book in my field of British history, I decided to enroll as a freshman at St. John's College and wrote a very funny book called "Racing Odysseus: A College President Becomes a Freshman Again." For a semester, I was a first-year student with a bunch of teenagers and the book is about a 62-year-old trying to connect with teenagers. This book isn't so much a sequel to "Racing Odysseus" but a more serious book about the first year.

Q: Why is the book focused on parents?

A: I wrote this for parents because when I came back, I started volunteering here (Mamaroneck High School) at the counseling office. I still do that. I do mock interviews for rising juniors and seniors and pretend that I am the admissions director and I grill them. But I also met parents, and what became very clear to me was that parents don't really understand this very important transition from home to college. The book is written from the perspective of deans, coaches, residence hall directors, and my own insight about what happens in the first year. It's from the perspective of the people who are teaching, and administrators who are responsible for freshman students.

Q: What are parents concerned about the most?

A: The number one concern for parents is of course safety. I wrote a chapter about what colleges do to ensure safety of the students and they're also concerned about health issues, and I wrote about that.

Q: So are parents or students more nervous about going to college?

A: I think parents more than students. I am sure you've heard about the helicopter parents, the Veltro parents or the new one now is the lawn mower parents.

Q: Never heard of that. What are lawn mower parents?

A: They just mow and make the way for their kids. College is just more than getting academic preparation. College also is the place where a lot of the kids begin the process of growing up. One of my thesis is: Love and support your kids, but you've got to let them grow. You can't be calling them up 14
times a day. You can’t be taking care of their business. They’ve got to be doing it for themselves. Part of college is also making mistakes and learning from the mistakes.

Q: What’s your advice for students?

A: Get involved. I’ve collected a lot of data from various sources that shows that students who write for the student newspaper or who play a sport do better academically than students who don’t. Students who work 20 hours or less a week do better academically than students who don’t work at all.

Q: Going back to your own experience, what do you do if your child has a disability?

A: It is very important that parents who have a child with a learning or physical disability, if they have been documented here (in school), they’ve got to get documented again. That means getting a healthcare professional to say what the disability is. Then you work out with the college what accommodation you are going to get. What often happens is both students and their parents don’t want the college to know that they’re dyslexic or that they have ADHD. As you are applying to college, first of all, don’t be ashamed of your disability. Look, I was dyslexic, I had a hard time reading. I was able to be successful in college and you can too.

This interview was condensed and edited.

Twitter: @SwaggaVenugoopal (https://twitter.com/SwaggaVenugoopal)
9 P.M. (13) NATIONAL GALLERY (2014) In his 39th documentary, Frederick Wiseman tours the National Gallery in London (above). Docents decode the work of Leonardo, Rembrandt and Turner; restorers use magnifying glasses, eyedroppers, scalpels and cotton swabs to repair a tiny chip in a painting; senior executives politely battle younger ones, who believe the museum is too stodgy; and connoisseurs discuss the underpinnings of masterpieces by Vermeer, Caravaggio, Titian, Velázquez, Pissarro and Rubens. Mr. Wiseman also makes the point that art is the story of human relationships — in labor, commerce, patronage and even the exploitation of bodies. “Mr. Wiseman’s touch is deft but light here, and the experience of watching ‘National Gallery’ is pleasurable and immersive because he’s a wonderful storyteller,” Manohla Dargis wrote in The New York Times about this three-hour movie. “It is also unexpectedly moving. Because his other great theme is how art speaks to us, one he brilliantly expresses in the relay of gazes that finds us looking at museumgoers looking at portraits that look right back — at artists, art lovers and moviegoers — even as Mr. Wiseman, that sly old master, looks at all of us in turn.”

4:15 P.M. (Starz Cinema) OSCAR AND LUCINDA (1997) Gillian Armstrong directed this adaptation of a novel by Peter Carey about two inveterate gamblers — Oscar (Ralph Fiennes), a clergyman, and Lucinda (Cate Blanchett, right), an heiress — who bet on whether a church made of glass will survive a trip from Sydney to a remote Australian town. “Making rhapsodic use of natural light and of carefully chosen objects, this is a film that can find something gorgeous even in a boatload of cauliflower,” Janet Maslin wrote in The Times.
7:30 P.M. (CUNY) SCIENCE GOES TO THE MOVIES Helen Fisher, a biological anthropologist, senior research fellow at the Kinsey Institute and chief scientific adviser for Match.com, discusses brain activation during sex, the neurological similarities between addiction and love, and the biological imperative of pairing off as they relate to “Fifty Shades of Grey,” “Last Tango in Paris” and “Fatal Attraction.”

8 P.M. (ABC) WE DAY Selena Gomez, Jennifer Hudson, Common, Nick Jonas, Demi Lovato, Jennifer Aniston, Magic Johnson, Paul Rudd and Colbie Caillat are among the celebrities encouraging young Americans to be active citizens and to create change locally and globally in response to issues including bullying, mental illness, literacy, violence, the environment and equality. Michelle Obama also delivers a message.

10 P.M. (TV One) HELLOBEAUTIFUL INTERLUDES LIVE: JILL SCOTT Ms. Scott performs “Closure” and “Fool’s Gold” from her latest album, “Woman,” as well as past hits. She also talks about her life and the music business.

A Summer of Pain for NJ Commuters Who Rely on Rails to NYC

A painful summer, and hope of a $20 billion fix, for NJ commuters who rely on rails to NYC

By DAVID B. CARUSO and DEEPTI HAJEJA Associated Press

The Associated Press

NEW YORK

The Hudson River is 1,500 yards wide where it flows between Manhattan and Weehawken, New Jersey, but it can feel like 150 miles for the hordes of commuters who make the crossing via a pair of century-old rail tunnels that constitute one of the worst transportation bottlenecks in America.

This year, people aboard the 472 trains that squeeze through the crumbling, single-track tunnels each weekday have been subjected to one maddening delay after another.

Trains have broken down. Electrical cables have failed. There have been signal problems and closings because of ice.

Travelers are fed up.

Victoria Perrin, who commutes to a human resources job from Montclair, New Jersey, had to shell out $45 one day to take cabs when the trains stopped running. Michael Morrison, a Morgan Stanley financial adviser from Locust, New Jersey, said he doesn't schedule meetings before 10 a.m. anymore because there's no guarantee he will arrive at work on time.

"Even in the best-case scenario, you're sitting out in the Meadowlands somewhere, just sitting there waiting for your turn to get into the tunnel," said Marci McLarty, who works for a publishing company and comes in from West Orange, New Jersey.

The delays have been so bad lately that federal, state and city officials have begun talking with new urgency about long-stalled plans to build a second set of tunnels across the river.

The plan of the moment, a project Amtrak calls Gateway, is the type of megaproject that civil engineers dream of. In addition to two new rail tubes, it would involve replacing a major rail bridge, building 10 miles of new track, and taking over an entire Manhattan block, now filled with skyscrapers, to make way for a new rail hub.

But with a price tag that could hit $20 billion, nobody wants to pay for it.

Top elected officials in New York and New Jersey say they want the federal government to pick up the
tab. Congress has offered only loans. Amtrak, which owns the existing tunnels, has tens of billions of dollars in deferred maintenance to take care of elsewhere in the Northeast and will probably never have the money to pay for the project on its own.

Even if the politicians managed the scrape up the money, it could take at least a decade to complete the new tunnels.

Caught in the middle are 87,000 New Jersey Transit rail passengers who use the tunnels on a typical weekday.

"It's been horrendous. I'm not usually a crying person, but New Jersey Transit has brought me to tears on a number of occasions," said Trevar Riley-Reid, who commutes from Linden, New Jersey, to her job as a librarian at the City College of New York.

Her trip home from work is supposed to take about an hour and 10 minutes, but it often exceeds two hours, leaving her with little time for her 9-year-old daughter.

On Monday, she couldn't get to work at all when a train stalled in the tunnel during the morning rush, just as a vehicle fire blocked one of the few routes for buses entering the city.

"We are going to have to move to New York. That means selling my house that I've lived in for 15 years. It means uprooting my daughter," Riley-Reid said. "I'm not ready to leave yet, but the situation is making me think seriously about it."

In fairness to New Jersey Transit, many of the delays are due to the deteriorating conditions on the Northeast Corridor, a rail line controlled mostly by Amtrak. Of the 1,252 New Jersey Transit trains that were delayed in the 90 days that ended Aug. 17, 1,085 were slowed by problems on the Northeast Corridor line. The most common problems were due to Amtrak's aging power system.

Mechanical problems happen elsewhere on the aging rail corridors that serve the Northeast, but at the Hudson crossing, every problem is magnified because there are so many passengers and so few alternative routes.

The twin tunnels hold just one track each, and when one has to be taken out of service, the number of trains that can use the tubes per hour drops from 24 to six.

You can get on a bus, but good luck with that. Even when the trains are running, the one bridge and two car tunnels connecting New York City with New Jersey are jammed.

A light-rail system, the PATH, also crosses the Hudson farther downriver, but it has limited capacity, and getting there involves a major detour for many New Jersey commuters.

Transportation planners have been saying for decades that what the region really needs is another set of rail tunnels.

Work had actually begun on a pair of new tubes when New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie killed that $8.7 billion project in 2010, saying it was poorly designed and too costly for New Jersey residents. At the time, the decision gave him credibility as a fiscal conservative, but lately it has made him a punching bag in his own state.
Christie has defended the decision, saying there was no way he was going to let New Jersey residents get "shafted by New York," which hadn't been contributing major funding to that project.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat, has taken a similar tone about the Gateway plan.

"It's not my tunnel! Why don't you pay for it?" he said at a news conference.

The existing tunnels may be operating on borrowed time. Three years ago, Hurricane Sandy pushed the salty Hudson up over its banks and into the tubes, causing corrosion that continues unchecked.

Amtrak has warned it will eventually have to shut down both tubes, one at a time, for a complete overhaul. Commuters got a taste of what that would look like in July, when an electrical failure dramatically reduced the tunnels' capacity for nearly a week, causing hours-long delays during the morning and evening rush.

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As charter students head to college, schools ask, how'd we do?

Achievement First, one of the charter networks serving more and more high schoolers, wanted to know how its education stacked up.

By Geoff Decker  
gdecker@chalkbeat.org

PUBLISHED: August 21, 2015 - 5:00 am EDT

After spending nearly half his life at an Achievement First charter school in Brooklyn, Marquis Wilson was prepared to write college essays and was diligent about showing up to class at SUNY Purchase.
But Wilson, now a theater major headed into his junior year, felt less prepared to make basic choices about how to spend his time once he got to college.

"I found myself at a Nerf club on Wednesday nights," said Wilson, one of 31 who graduated from Achievement First Brooklyn High School, in Crown Heights, in 2013 as part of its inaugural class. "I wanted to try everything because I didn’t get to be free in high school."

"My schedule was pre-determined," he added, "whereas in college it’s like you can do this, and this, and this, and this."

Wilson and two of his classmates reunited earlier this month at the request of the network's board. Its members, led by board chair and former Brooklyn College dean Deborah Shanley, had two essential questions: "Did we prepare you? Where did we fall short?"

Charter school network leaders in New York City and across the country are looking for answers to those questions as they increasingly serve older students. Charter high school graduates have tripled in New York state since 2010, from 600 to 1,800 last year. Most of those students are black or Hispanic and from low-income families, groups that obtain four-year college degrees at less than half the rate of the national average.

And as charter schools try to push more students toward college graduation, they’re confronting fundamental questions.

How do they tweak their models, which include longer school days, prescriptive teaching practices, and strict discipline, to work best for older students? Is their singular focus on graduating from college right for every student? And how can they learn from the first students who have gone through their high schools into college?

The candid discussion at Achievement First's board meeting was aimed at helping its schools answer the last question.

Wilson was joined by RoBrean Black, a forensic psychology major at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and Avril Gordon, who is studying public health at Franklin Marshall College. Their academic preparation was mostly solid, they agreed, though Gordon wished she'd had access to a more advanced science curriculum.

Other parts of the college transition, like choosing courses and navigating the glut of extracurriculars, felt like a shock after a high school governed by strict behavior rules and
class procedures, they said.

Black recalled being sent to a detention room instead of class for a school day because the soles of her shoes weren't the right color. Wilson said he racked up behavior demerits because he often wasn't seated as the class bell rang.

"Some of the rules of Achievement First were a little too extreme sometimes," Wilson said.

"There was a little too much handholding," Gordon said, recalling the frequency with which her teachers checked to make sure students were completing their work and understanding concepts.

Robert Schwartz, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, said questions about how charter schools adapt their models to work for high school students are emerging nationally. The tension, he said, is that their practices "seem to work very well at raising test scores in the early grades."

"But if you don't at some point in that progression really shift in that strategy to enable kids to take more responsibility for their own learning that's less teacher-directed," he said, "the transition to higher education can really be very bumpy."

Jeffrey Litt, the longtime superintendent of the high-performing Icahn Charter School network, said he didn't want to expand to high school because he didn't think he would be able to compete with the city's top schools and because he worried about pulling off that complicated transition.

"If we keep a kid in that environment through twelfth grade, the child now leaves us and heads to college and they don't know any other world," he said. "They're going to be shocked."

Achievement First's level of attention to student behavior is a hallmark of many charter school networks, as is the expectation that all students will go to college. Hallways decorated with college pennants and classrooms named after teachers' alma maters are the norm. Even in the earliest grades, classes of students are referred to by the year of their anticipated college graduation.

The high school's approach didn't work for all students. The state says its four-year graduation rate for 2013 was 84 percent, but that doesn't account for the students who transferred out of the school. Achievement First's first class saw high attrition over its
four years, shrinking from 62 to 38 students.

Spokeswoman Amanda Pinto said some students were held back, and Black said other classmates moved or left after having trouble following school rules. Pinto said attrition tends to be higher in a school's first years, and that the high school lost just 2 percent of its students last year. (Charter school students aren't bound by the city's restrictive high school transfer policies.)

Of the 31 who graduated, all but one were accepted into a four-year college, according to state data. Two-thirds were still enrolled 18 months after graduating, Pinto said.

The network is experimenting with new approaches. Two Achievement First schools in New Haven, Connecticut are trying a model dubbed "Greenfield," called that because the network's CEOs said they "wanted everyone to imagine an open field with no structure built on it yet."

Shanley, the board chair, said that the network's Brooklyn contingent is interested in the model, which calls for students to spend up to 20 percent of the school year working on projects designed to expose them to real-world experiences. She said she'd also like to see Achievement First find ways to offer high school students college-level courses and internships through partnerships with colleges and companies.

For all of their criticism, the former Achievement First students spoke fondly of their high school experience. Wilson said if he falls short as an actor, he wants to return to the network's schools to teach. Gordon attributed her interest in public health to a CPR training class she took at Yale University, which the high school sponsored.

And after bristling at the school's rigid structures, Black said they helped her "get my life together" as a senior and graduate on time.

"That's because I stopped trying to beat the system and started working with it," Black recalled. "But I did that at the last hour."
New York Assemblyman wants MTA to look into reactivating rail spur

New York Assemblyman Phil Goldfeder (D - Howard Beach) has called on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) to apply for funds from a recently-announced New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) infrastructure grant to fund a comprehensive feasibility study into reactivation of the abandoned Rockaway Beach rail spur.

"Families in southern Queens and Rockaway suffer from some of the longest commutes in the entire city. The state’s new passenger rail grant program has the potential to bring an end to our transportation desert. By funding a feasibility study into reactivating the Rockaway Beach Rail Line, we can work to create a true north-south rail corridor in Queens, improve transit access to our airports and take thousands of cars off the road," said Assemblyman Goldfeder.

In a letter written to MTA Chairman Thomas Prendergast, Goldfeder urged the agency to apply for the 2015 Passenger and Freight Rail Assistance Program grant to fund a comprehensive feasibility study into reactivating the Rockaway Beach Rail Line.

According to the program’s application guidelines, the state is looking for $10 million dollars in funding available for passenger rail projects. These grants, Goldfeder noted in his letter, may go towards the costs of preparing design and plan specifications for the rehabilitation of tracks, as well as fund cost estimates and environmental impact studies.

The assemblyman also wrote that his proposal to utilize the line’s existing track and right-of-way meets the program’s requirement to fund projects that achieve goals of the NYS Smart Growth Public Infrastructure Policy Act. According to the program, this act seeks to advance "projects for use, maintenance or improvement of existing infrastructure" and promote sustainable growth. Citing a 2014 study by Queens College estimating up to a half a million trips per day on the reactivated line, Goldfeder argued that reactivating the line could meet these goals by taking thousands of cars off the road and reducing traffic congestion and air pollution. Goldfeder also noted that in its 2014 Transportation Reinvention Commission report, the MTA had previously proposed utilizing unused rail rights-of-way to increase transit options in the region.

The 2015 Passenger and Freight Rail Assistance Program announced earlier this month commits $17 million to critical improvements at rail and port facilities across New York State. According to NYSDOT, projects will be selected based on the ability to address areas of economic development and sustainability, how well they support the broad initiatives of the State Rail Plan and the overall public benefit relative to project costs.

The Rockaway Beach Line was put into service in the late 19th century under the control of the Long Island Rail Road. It provided residents with access to other parts of the city and 40 minute commutes to midtown Manhattan from Rockaway. In the early 1960s, parts of the railroad service were condensed, sectioned off and eventually closed. In the following years, communities surrounding the line have seen dramatic increases in population, with the Rockaway Peninsula population nearly doubling.

"I urge the MTA to apply for these funds and take advantage of this valuable opportunity to improve our vital transportation infrastructure," said Goldfeder.
Survey shows some satisfaction, but also garbage problems

August 13, 2015 | Filed under: News | Posted by: admin
BY DUSICA SUE MALESEVIC | A yearlong survey conducted to figure out community needs in Lower Manhattan yielded some surprises, including that optimism resides in Battery Park City.

When asked what they would change about their neighborhood, the number one response was "not one thing: it's nice here!"

"From Battery City Park, we heard people saying that it's wonderful here, no changes at all, we love it the way it is," said Michael Levine, Community Board 1's planning consultant, in a phone interview.

The Seaport/Civic Center was the only other area to garner the same response, but it was only two percent there, compared to almost 11 in Battery Park City.

Levine, who also teaches urban planning at Pace University, enlisted his students to conduct the survey. One class with 90 students would tackle one of C.B. 1's four neighborhoods — Battery Park City, Tribeca, Seaport/Civic Center and the Financial District. Each student was required to do ten surveys, Levine said.

There were 1,187 people interviewed, which included businesspeople, tourists, students and residents. From Battery Park City, 366 people participated in the survey, 239 from the Financial District, 233 from Tribeca and 347 from the Seaport/Civic Center.

Levine said this was the first time a survey of this kind had been undertaken for C.B. 1. It was inspired by another professor who had done something similar for community boards in Brooklyn and Harlem, he said.

In addition to the 120 students, there were two volunteers from Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer's office, two students from the City College of New York and the board's urban fellow who also worked on the project.

"It was a massive effort," said Levine.

The students stood at 40 intersections, Levine explained, and asked those passing by if they would be interviewed. Catherine McVay Hughes, the board's chairperson, picked the intersections.

The locations were chosen so that they were spread out roughly evenly within C.B. 1. Hughes explained in an email last week. She looked for areas where residents live or frequent.

**Manhattan Community District 1**

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The results of the survey showed that the most serious problems in C.B. 1 are overcrowded streets and sidewalks, dirty subways, too much noise and a lack of affordable housing.

"These are things that we suspected we would find," Levine said when he presented the results to the full board at their monthly meeting on Tues., July 28.

Respondents said the top problem at both the Seaport/Civic Center and the Financial District was too much construction. Earlier this year, Hughes said there were 95 major construction projects going on in Lower Manhattan.

The Financial District was the only neighborhood that cited poor air quality as a problem.

**Battery Park City**

**Top Five:**

**Serious Problems**
Tribeca and Battery Park City, the top concern was the lack of affordable housing.

The survey’s last question asked about quality of life issues that need to be addressed. Overall, the number one issue was less garbage and pollution and to improve air quality.

"Living here in Lower Manhattan through all the years of reconstruction after 9/11 we knew very well we would get this answer," said Levine. "It’s good to know that 49 percent of those we spoke to gave the same answer — less garbage, garbage everywhere, pollution and of course, lack of proper air quality."

The second issue was the lack of affordable housing.

His community board has said this year after year after year at every committee meeting, and every board meeting, and those who live and work in our community are confirming exactly what we’ve been saying," he said.

People also said that they would like to see more parks and open spaces, less construction, garbage and air pollution, and better public transportation.

Those interviewed in Battery Park City and the Seaport/Civic Center also said they would like to see more shopping, restaurants, bars and nightlife.

**Financial District**

*Top Five: Serious Problems*
The top quality of life issue in the Financial District was less construction while in the Seaport/Civic Center, less garbage and pollution, and to improve air quality. In Tribeca, it was overcrowded sidewalks, streets and more parking.

Levine, in the phone interview, noted the similarities in the four districts concerning problems and quality of life issues.

"We really thought we would see big differences [between neighborhoods], we didn't," Levine said in a phone interview. "But the unanimity of opinion about crowded sidewalks, crowded streets, too much construction, too much garbage — what we didn't expect that it would be so unanimous."

In her email, Hughes wrote "one surprise was that the shortage of school seats for local children did not make the top of the list, but we all know that is a hot button issue for families with school age children."

The survey results will be incorporated into the board's district needs statement, which is done every year and precedes its budget requests, for fiscal year 2017.
Najmi cites passion, experience in 23rd CD

by Michael Gannon, Editor | Posted: Thursday, August 20, 2015 10:30 am

Glen Oaks native Ali Najmi isn’t worried about the number, status or name recognition of his five opponents in the Democratic primary for the 23rd City Council District.

“I’m excited,” he said in an interview last Friday. “I’ve been going around the district door-to-door, listening to people’s concerns. They’re concerned about jobs, senior issues, transportation and education ... And I’m the only candidate with experience in the Council and a plan.”

Najmi, 31, is an attorney, community activist and former legislative director for Mark Weprin, whose vacant seat he is looking to fill.

“I know how the Council works,” he said. “I’ve helped write bills. I’ve helped pass laws. I’ve worked on budgets.”

One of his first priorities upon election would be a parkland protection bill, which, if passed, would require a supermajority vote in the Council to sell or reuse existing city parkland in a manner that is not park-related.

Given his choice of committee assignments, he would pick the Committee on Aging, followed by Transportation, saying both come up repeatedly in his visits throughout the district.

He said the district needs more senior centers.

“And the [Department of Transportation] needs to fix Jamaica Avenue,” Najmi said of the thoroughfare that in many places long has resembled a moonscape hazardous to unwary pedestrians, cyclists and automobile tires and suspension systems. “There’s no reason it should be in that condition,” he said. “All those potholes — and sinkholes.”

And he is a staunch critic of the NYPD.

“As a criminal defense attorney, I see the damage done every day,” he said. “I have cases that should never be in court.”
He favors body cameras for all officers — “ones they can’t turn off” — saying that would protect police as well as people subjected to arrest. The NYPD has said the major problem with that would be cost and the logistics of creating the capacity to store all the data that would be collected from thousands of officers throughout the city per shift, three shifts a day, 365 days a year.

“Data storage should not be a problem,” Najmi said.

His ambitious agenda also includes accelerated school construction and an increase in the number of students who are educated in the latest computers and technology — the latter a key to creating more high-paying jobs in the city.

Given the fact that more than two-thirds of city high school graduates require some form of remedial courses when they enter CUNY colleges, he said the city must dedicate more resources to making them college ready.

His website also calls for seven-day-a-week service at all city libraries, improving Access-a-Ride services for the disabled and free job training in computers and technology.

All are programs that would cost money. He said he would favor a true “millionaires’ tax” to raise revenue, but could not identify a program, department or service where he would be willing to cut or eliminate spending.

Najmi also said he was not concerned about the city’s growing unfunded pension liabilities.

“Working for the city is hard,” he said. “City employees deserve the pensions they were promised.”
Defending the Opt-Out Movement

AUG. 21, 2015

To the Editor:

"Opting Out of Tests Isn’t the Answer" (editorial, Aug. 15) does not speak to the reasons our family opted out, or why the vast majority of the families at our school did. I am not opposed to testing, or difficult tests; for better or worse, being good at taking tests helped me at every point of my educational career. But these tests are being used inappropriately. Opting out allows the growing number of parents dissatisfied with the direction of so-called education reform to act directly against it, and, we hope, compel policy makers to forge new directions.

My primary concerns are the linking of teacher evaluations to test results and the high-stakes use of these exams for school ranking and funding. Studies have shown the weakness of these tests for evaluating teacher effectiveness. The state tests inevitably lead teachers and schools to teach to the test and spend inordinate time on test prep. This robs children of effective and creative pedagogy and rich curricular content. Majority poor and nonwhite schools that tend to have lower test results are even more likely to organize around test prep, at the expense of a broader curriculum.

I won’t let my children lend support to punitive, discriminatory and ineffective practices that are driving teachers from the field and corroding education. It is my hope that the opt-out movement grows and continues to highlight the real things our public schools need — adequate funding and constructive support for best practices.

PENNY LEWIS