

The Abell Report

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

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Abell Salutes: "Magic Me": The young learn from the old and the old learn from the young—and both have a wonderful time.

The Abell Foundation has awarded grants totaling \$82,500 to "Magic Me," a program designed to "train, educate, and excite pre-teen children about various aspects of human service to the elderly in community nursing homes."

The program, called by founder Kathy Levin, "imaginative community service," brings 11-to-14 year old children, many of them emotionally at risk, together one-on-one with senior citizens living in nursing homes. The visits are at least one hour a week during school time throughout the school year.

The Baltimore program, now replicated in 41 cities and in Europe, includes participation by nine public and three private schools. Roughly 70% of the inner city students are black; 40% are boys.

One teacher writes of her involvement, "The major goal as I understand it is to draw out students who have not had positive school experiences in the past, teach them to relate to the elderly, and to help them apply their success to the school program. I have personally seen this transfer of positive attitudes and growth in self-esteem work miracles." And a nurse, observing students interacting with her residents in a nursing home, is moved to remark, "I am seeing a total change of character in some of these people."

"Magic Me" is growing, garnering recognition and community support. All of it, in the view of The Abell Foundation, richly deserved.

"Success For All" at the Abbottston Elementary School: A Hopkins Program Designed to Insure That City "At Risk" Children Will Be Reading At Grade Level By Fourth Grade Is Showing Positive Results.

"There is no magic in the formula," Dr. Robert Slavin, creator of the program, insists, "but the implications of the program's success may be revolutionary — there's no question about it."

Throughout the winter and spring, teams of educators and elected officials were visiting Baltimore's Abbottston Elementary School at Loch Raven Boulevard and Gorsuch Avenue. Something extraordinary was reported to be going on in this mostly-black school on the fringes of the inner city, and they wanted to see for themselves.

What they saw in motion was a program, two years on the drawing board, with no less a goal than insuring that every student in Baltimore's Chapter 1 (qualifying as "low income") elementary schools will reach the fourth grade with reading skills sufficient to have him or her reading at grade level. The program, eventually taking in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, hopes to break the cycle of school failure for disadvantaged children. Because "Success For All" has such far-reaching consequences for the Baltimore community, The Abell Foundation feels it serves the community to bring the program into public view, in an effort to indicate what it is and what it is not, and what can and cannot be expected of it.

Called "Success For All," the program came into being as an academic response to the demand that the school system *do something* to improve the education of Baltimore City's low-income children. The president of the school board asked Kalman Hettleman, then professor at the University of Maryland School of Social Work and Com-

munity Planning, to present this challenge to the Johns Hopkins Center For Social Organization of Schools, represented by Dr. Robert Slavin, a researcher with the center.

"What we did," Hettleman says, "was to give Slavin a blank piece of

*"We asked Slavin . . .
what would it take? . . ."*

paper. We asked him to put down on it what it would take to get these children to the fourth grade, reading at grade level. We felt that education reforms to date had been too little, and, in the lives of the children, too late. As simple as it sounds, putting something down on paper which would *guarantee* success, at least up to the fourth grade, was a virtually unprecedented goal. We were asking Slavin for a lot of program."

Which—borrowing from the past and taking some risk with the future—Dr. Slavin and his associates at the center delivered. The elements of the program are the stuff of educators' and concerned parents' dreams: a studied mix of small classes, one-on-one tutoring, expanded reading, individual academic planning, resource support, frequent testing, and home school collaboration.

The proposal was submitted to School Superintendent Alice Pinderhughes, who endorsed it and moved quickly to put it into place,

and to find the money to fund it.

The price tag is \$375,000, which comes out of Chapter II monies. (Chapter II provides federal monies for the educationally disadvantaged.)

The additional cost per child per year for 329 children is, therefore, \$1,140—at least for the first year.

About the business of more money to fund education: there are two opposing points of view, and both of them need to be kept in mind when judging Abbottston. They are, a) that more money helps; and, b) that more money does not help. In an assessment of "Success For All" the money-helps

Is simply "more money" the answer? . . .

school concludes: when you come up with the money to fund a well-conceived program adequately, then poor children will learn significantly better. The more-money-does-not-help school argues that you can never improve an educational system by "throwing" money at it.

In addition to the "Success For All" program's requiring an increased expenditure per student, it calls, too, for decreased class size—which raises a second point of controversy: Does decreased class size make a difference? In particular, there is not much research support for the belief of PTA's across America that smaller class size is the answer: They insist, "Give us the money to reduce the sizes of our classes and our children will learn more." Maybe they will and maybe they won't, but studies are inconclusive.

Discussing "class size" in the abstract is not very helpful. One must take into account such factors as how dramatic the decrease in class size, the educational background of the students, the grade level in question and the curriculum being taught.

In their response to the challenge to "do something" to improve the education of Baltimore's disadvantaged elementary school children, Dr. Slavin and his associates at the center had to sift through and evaluate all of the programs for the disadvantaged then in existence: those where money helped and those where it did not; where class size figured in prominently, and where it

did not.

Dr. Slavin did indeed start out with a blank sheet of paper.

Out of this background in which there had been so many false starts and where experts so often disagreed, came "Success For All."

Here is what the visitors to Abbottston saw. And, too, what they did not see but need to be aware of, and come to grips with.

* * * *

"Welcome to Fantastic Abbottston!"

"Success For All" may be one part education and one part sociology, but it is also one part marketing. The sale of the program—to students, parents, teachers and the community—begins at the door: You have entered a school where every aspect of the educational process has been marshalled to create a sense of enthusiasm—teachers for students, students for teachers and what they are teaching, parents for the entire experience. "Success For All" ends up in the head, but it begins in the heart.

As a practical matter it begins, as does all institutional education, in the classroom—with students, teachers, materials and techniques. And so it is in the classroom where the observer who has gotten the marketing message of "Success For All" must look for its educational message.

The classrooms look like this:

There are two obvious differences between "Success For All" classes and those of the regular public elementary schools. The first is size: Elementary classes in the regular system average about 30; "Success For All" classes are held to about 25, but reading class size is reduced to about 15. The second difference is the program's use of cross-age grouping during reading time, which groups students by reading level.

Grade	Total No. Students	Homeroom Class Size	No. Homeroom Classes	Reading Class Size
PK	60	15	4	NA
K	75	25	3	NA
1	75	25	3	15*
2	75	25	3	15*
3	50	25	2	15*

*Made up of cross-age groupings by level

The tutors . . .

One of the most important elements of "Success For All" is the use of tutors, certified reading teachers who work one-on-one with students in grades one to three who are experiencing difficulties in reading. The tutors take students for 20 minutes from their social studies classes to help make certain they have learned the day's lesson. The idea of the tutors is to remedy learning problems right away *before* they become serious.

"Success For All" is one part marketing . . .

The teachers . . .

Teachers in "Success For All" are drawn from the regular school system. Although they have no special academic background, they have received training as part of the "Success For All" program, and there are more of them—six reading teachers for 329 students in addition to the usual number of classroom teachers. The usual program would provide one or two reading teachers for this number of students.

The teaching . . .

"Success For All" calls for an intense concentration on reading—an hour and a half each day in classes grouped by reading level. Additional reading teachers join the regular classroom teachers, bringing class size down to 15. Later these same teachers will do one-on-one tutoring for students needing help with the morning's work.

According to Debbie Wortham, facilitator of the "Success For All" at Abbottston, "The essential difference between our reading program and the regular reading program in the system is that ours provides instruction for the *entire group at the same time*; in classes in the regular system, there may be one group getting instruction, and two others waiting, doing something else to keep busy."

"In addition," Dr. Nancy Karweit, an associate of Dr. Slavin at the center, says, "our reading instruction emphasizes a phonetic approach in early grades, phonics and reading comprehension at all levels, and in a structured way that the regular system is rarely able to do as consistently and uniformly."

The family-school support . . .

Still another advantage "Success For All" offers its teachers, students and their parents over counterpart programming in the regular system is a more effective and responsive home-school collaboration. "When the classroom teacher spots a problem," Wortham says, "lateness, health, absenteeism, behavior—she can call on a family support committee of two social workers, a parent liaison and a school nurse—four people present at all times on the campus, to respond to the problem one-on-one and immediately. Most schools will have only the parent liaison."

Resources: Vision, hearing, dental . . .

"There is," according to Wortham, "the same commitment to the student's physical well-being. Students who have vision, hearing or dental problems are identified, and their needs are dealt with by the same four resource people who are in the school all day long—again, faster and more efficiently than can be managed in the regular system."

Costs . . .

Most of the program's funding, \$350,000 of the \$375,000, goes for staff salaries (including benefits): one facilitator, \$40,400; one classroom teacher, \$38,700; six supplementary teachers at \$38,700 each, for a total of \$232,200; one social worker, \$38,700.

The remainder, or \$25,000, goes for such non-personnel costs as telephones, business machines, supplies, textbooks and instructional supplies, office furniture and equipment.

But in determining the costs of "Success For All," it is important to make the evaluation in terms of the costs of replicating the program throughout the system's 123 elementary schools: Not all aspects of the program may need to be replicated, and not all of the elementary schools may need all aspects of the program.

For example, every student in Ab-

bottston's "Success For All" attends all-day kindergarten, at a cost of \$1,600 per student for the additional half day; This program was created at Abbottston before "Success For All" and is not included in this budget. Forty other elementary schools already have all-day kindergarten but 83 do not. Installing "Success For All" in any of these 83 schools would cost an additional \$1,600 multiplied by the number of students in addition to the Abbottston budget set forth above.

There are potential savings. In Abbottston's "Success For All" each student attends pre-kindergarten half day, at a cost of \$1,500 per child. "But," Karweit says, "it is conceivable that the program can be installed and prove effective without pre-kindergarten." Savings in replicating: \$1,500 multiplied by the number of students.

Still another saving: Because the "Success For All" program is able to meet the needs of children who would ordinarily be assigned to special education, one special education position was lost in the school. Savings: about \$40,000 a year, bringing the total additional funding down from \$415,000 to the working figure of \$375,000.

* * * *

What makes "Success For All" different? Why is it being viewed as so promising? Why is the city's leadership entertaining the possibility of replicating it in all of the 123 elementary schools in Baltimore City, and where will it find the additional money needed to support it?

Dr. Robert Slavin insists there is no magic to the formula. "There's nothing here that has never been seen before on the face of the earth. It is a matter of putting the elements together in a way that insures that if the children run into trouble they are going to be rescued, that they will get the help they need when they need it to succeed. What we're really trying to do is to open the question of what would happen if you just didn't accept failure, if you decided to allow resources to vary instead of allowing achievement to vary. Our usual strategy is to kind of do the best we can for the largest number of kids. 'Success For All' looks at the problem from a different perspective. It asks not what would

be required to do a little bit better for the greatest number, but what would be required to see that *every* child was going to succeed. There's no question about it, the implications of the program's success may be revolutionary."

The program has "hard-data" going for it

But there is still another reason why there is so much community interest in "Success For All"; *hard data*. The program is now beginning to deliver on its promise, holding out the possibility of opening the minds of the citizenry and the pocketbooks of the politicians.

Here, simplified, and after one year, is what the current data measures (at this writing, approximating final results), what it reveals and what it portends.

- In the 1986-'87 school year Abbottston had 30 students in grades kindergarten through third grade referred to Special Education; in the 1987-'88 school year (after approximately one year of "Success For All") Abbottston referred only six—and these six, Wortham points out, "were not referred because of a learning problem, but *only* for speech problems."
- In a series of tests of early language skills for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, it was found that "Success For All" students performed "significantly better" than the "control group" children ("control group" represents a city elementary school chosen for comparison purposes because its profile is similar to Abbottston's). "Significantly better," according to Dr. Karweit, translates arithmetically: "Success For All" students scored in the 63rd percentile meaning they scored better than 63% of the population taking the test nationally.
- "Control Group" students scored in the 25th percentile.
- At the kindergarten level students at Abbottston scored on a reading test at a level expected of students in the middle of first grade (1.5). Control students hardly measured on this test at all.

On individually administered reading tests, *first* graders at Abbottston achieved at grade level in the 50th percentile, in comparison to the control school whose average was at the 28th percentile. The bottom 25% of students at Abbottston scored better than the *average* students at the control school; they scored at the 32nd percentile, while their comparison group scored at the 8th percentile.

Abbottston's *second* graders scored at the 46th percentile; the control school's second graders scored in the 36th percentile.

Abbottston's *third* graders scored in the 47th percentile, outperforming the control group's third graders who scored at the 17th percentile.

The gains on the California Achievement Tests given statewide to all public school children were as follows.

Abbottston's *third* graders performed at the 38th percentile in comparison to the 25th at the control school.

In *second* grade the comparison was the 47th percentile at Abbottston, 42nd in the control school.

In *first* grade Abbottston students outscored control students in the C.A.T., performing at the 43rd in comparison to the 40th percentile in reading comprehension, a difference smaller than that seen on more reliable individual tests cited above.

(It should be remembered that the teachers in the Baltimore City public schools use the same C.A.T. tests each year and teach the younger children the exact words that appear on the test.) So the C.A.T. scores are not as significant as the individual tests described above.

Thus, we know the children are doing better. We do not yet know whether they all will be reading at grade level when they leave the third grade—the goal of the program.

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About the business of money to fund improved education, the "money helps" school should find support in the center's view of its success. ("Money helped.") But if "Success For All" is indeed promising, and the city decides to put it in every elementary school in the city—what then? Where will the money come from?

"The program," Hettleman answers, "may be more affordable than it first seems, for a couple of reasons. The \$375,000 represents about \$1,140 more per student, which is about 25% over the average amount now being spent on Chapter 1 (disadvantaged) students. It's not an astronomical figure, and if you spent that increased sum on each Chapter 1 child, the expenditure per pupil would still be below the comparable figure for Baltimore and Montgomery counties.

"If you provide the 'Success For All' program for half the city's elementary student body for children through the third grade, you are talking about funding an additional \$22,000,000, or about 5% of the school budget of \$429,000,000. There is no question in my mind that if 'Success For All' does in fact prove to be successful, then even the most staunch fiscal conservative will be willing to pay the bill."

*"The program may be
more affordable than
it first seems."*

Observers studying the program—its history, its operation, its costs and its implications for the future—are left with certain questions.

- How much of the success of the program is due to the hands-on intervention of the talented Hopkins staff and other interested parties—intervention that simply cannot be given to a large number of schools over a long period of time?
- Are there components of the program that have a greater impact than others and that might

be used at other schools at less additional cost per child? (The question is being answered in part by an evaluation of the reading program designed for "Success For All" currently being tested at three additional elementary schools.)

- Will the improvements in performance continue in future years? (Historically, many similar programs show substantial improvement after a year or so, and then the edge appears to be lost.)
- If Chapter 1 money is to be used to help fund the program, what programs presently funded with this money will be lost in the reallocation?
- How much money is being saved by reducing the number of special education children and the resulting additional expense per child associated with such children?
- Will the program work in larger schools with a poorer population? To answer this question the France-Merrick Foundation has generously awarded the funds needed to test "Success For All" at City Springs elementary school in the fall of 1988. Abbottston has 374 students, 79% of whom are eligible for Free Lunch; City Springs elementary has 664 students, 97% of whom are eligible for Free Lunch.
- Will the program, focusing as it does on pre-kindergarten through third grade, work when extended through grade five, as plans call for it to be for the coming year at Abbottston?

* * * *

The community has given Dr. Slavin a blank sheet of paper and has asked him to fill it out: "What will it take? . . ."

Three years later, he and the Hopkins Center For Social Organization of Schools have handed back the paper—filled out.

It is there now to be read, reviewed, debated.

And acted on.