



 The MIT Press

A Community of Believers

Author(s): Alonzo A. Crim

Source: *Daedalus*, Vol. 110, No. 4, America's Schools: Portraits and Perspectives (Fall, 1981), pp. 145-162

Published by: The MIT Press on behalf of American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20024760>

Accessed: 03-04-2019 13:38 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

American Academy of Arts & Sciences, The MIT Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Daedalus*

ALONZO A. CRIM

A Community of Believers

A child is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He is going to sit where you are sitting, and when you are gone, attend to those things which you think are important. . . . The fate of humanity is in his hands.

—Abraham Lincoln

IN AUGUST 1980, with the approval of the Atlanta Board of Education, I was able to inform everyone in the city of Atlanta that our schoolchildren would achieve at the national norm level in literacy skills by 1985, and that 20 percent of that gain would be realized during the 1980-81 school year. Letters announcing this goal were sent to every student, parent, and staff member. They were told that the job could be done in Atlanta, but it would not be easy, and the school system had to have their help. We informed them that we would hold meetings throughout the city to discuss how we could become partners in bringing our first-year goal as well as our five-year goal to fruition.

When I was appointed superintendent in 1973, the Atlanta public schools had been engaged in desegregation litigation for twenty-five years. The 1973 settlement between the plaintiffs and the Board of Education called for parity by race in administrative positions, with the superintendent position to be filled by a black.

I eagerly accepted the Board of Education's offer to come to Atlanta for several reasons:

1. I was impressed by the sincerity of the Board of Education to move on desegregation as much as possible and to improve educational opportunities for students. It was easy for me to discern that the Board had great concern for children. I was looking for a caring Board I could work with for at least ten years. My previous four years in Compton, California, had indicated to me that not enough could be accomplished in one term as superintendent in a relatively large urban community.
2. My interviews with members of the community, representatives of government, and business personnel led me to believe that they had a deep interest in the school system. They were ready to help.

3. Staff members were open to direction despite the upset caused by the mass reassignments of staff for the purpose of desegregation.
4. Compared to Compton with its few business and cultural resources, Atlanta had abundant resources. Of *Fortune's* top 500 businesses, 499 had offices in Atlanta, and twenty-eight colleges and universities were located in Atlanta at that time.

Atlanta was the city where I wanted to give leadership to a school system that would move poor children—in particular, black children—to achievement levels equal or better than national averages. I was challenged very early on in 1973 by persons who were prominent in the civil rights movement as to how I would exercise that leadership.

Congressman Andrew Young invited me to a three-day meeting with their civil rights leaders and lawyers. After the first day I found that Atlanta was the desegregation case that had their attention. I was virtually on the witness stand, expected to answer questions on matters that took place before my arrival in Atlanta, and being pushed to predict my future actions in Atlanta. I disappointed them when I told them I saw little chance for a metropolitan school organization in Atlanta in the immediate future. Further, I was uncertain if a supersized school system could give poor and black children the quality programs they needed. My experience caused me to believe that anonymity was a major factor for the low achievement of poor and minority students. I was going to attempt to build a system where students would know that people cared about them and would help them to achieve. To say the least, my fellow conferees were cynical about my intentions.

In my search of more than twenty-five years for creating the conditions that best promote the achievement of poor and minority students, I have found that you must build commitment for learning in students. That commitment does not come easily to persons who see few persons around them succeeding. My strategy for building commitment in students has four parts:

Students must feel that people who are important to them must believe in the goal. This means that school staff must develop a community of believers that includes peers, parents, educators at all levels, business persons, members of the clergy, and citizens-at-large. The public perception must be one of seeing students as winners rather than losers. Business persons in Georgia were so elated in 1980 over Herschel Walker's performance on the University of Georgia's national championship team that they wanted to form an insurance agency for him. They did not wish to lose this outstanding freshman to the professional teams. Everyone likes a winner.

2. Students must be shown evidence that they are doing something worthwhile. Students must be helped to appreciate the rise in achievement. They must see themselves and others securing jobs and college placements. We cannot expect students who see little success about them to "hit the line everytime with power," like Herschel Walker, unless they receive some immediate gains as well as promises of future gains.

3. Students must be given opportunities to express their views on the goals we set for them. Students mature physically earlier, but adult job opportunities come later in their lives compared to students of the fifties and sixties. This condition requires students to talk with adults rather than turning only to their peers for understanding. Adults need to know how students feel about the world we give them and the rules we establish for running the world.
4. Students must be challenged to improve their own performances. There can be no one model of challenge for youth that will be imposed from the top, but thousands of conscious, decentralized experiments devised by caring adults that will attempt to drive students on.

Despite the fact that Atlanta's desegregation order was relatively modest in requirements, it took two years to fully implement. In 1975 the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals declared the Atlanta public schools a unitary school system. Everyone in the system felt a sense of relief. They assumed they could now turn their attention from the courts to the low student achievement.

Prior to 1975 test scores in the Atlanta public schools had never been publicly reported. Despite the absence of any reports on scores, the school system was perceived by many citizens as a low-achieving school system, primarily because of the dramatic racial change in the student population, from 60 percent white in the late 1950s to more than 80 percent black by 1973. The low standardized achievement scores reported confirmed the opinion of many black and white citizens that the public schools were bad.

During the 1974-75 school year, school staff conducted town meetings throughout Atlanta to hear the public views of the schools and to find out what the public felt should be priority school concerns. More than ten thousand citizens demonstrated that they cared by attending those meetings. They indicated that the Atlanta public schools should establish four priorities:

1. Improve significantly the reading, writing, speaking, listening, and computational skills of students
2. Assist students in handling their futures—that is, job placement
3. Allocate the system's resources to students equitably
4. Improve communications between school staff and the public, between school staff and students, and between school staff members

The 1975-76 school year was a start-up year. Each school staff developed a local plan of improvement. The plans were compiled in the four school areas and at the central office. Much hard work of staff resulted in no systemwide gains in achievement scores, but there was no systemwide loss. What the 1975-76 testing program in all grades did provide was data on all students. School system research staff used the data to report to students, parents, and staff on successes and failures of individual students, common errors of students by classrooms, and individual profiles.

A new feature was added to the planning activity in the 1976-77 school year. A review committee composed of the system's finest reading specialists, regardless of work assignment, was organized in each of the four areas. These

review committees advised local school staffs on their plans prior to submission to area superintendents for approval.

The Review Committees assisted local school staffs in examining their plans against test data and instructional skills given in the curriculum guides. Classroom plans were checked for appropriateness with classroom and school profiles. Review committees met with local school staffs every three months to review progress and suggest modifications to the plans if needed. Test scores improved systemwide by 10 percent in 1976-77. A similar improvement was obtained in 1977-78.

Parents and students were informed of test data through information sessions. In 1977-78, 68 percent of parents came to school for those sessions. Reports were mailed to other parents. Presentations on tests were made on several public broadcasting programs, particularly WETV-Channel 30. Paid newspaper advertisements were used to inform citizens on progress. Over the several years that the program has been in effect the news media have given the improvement greater coverage.

Present Status of Achievement

Although the academic achievement scores for Atlanta public school students are below the national norms in reading and math, system achievement scores have shown continuous improvement over the period 1976-79 for elementary students (Tables 1 and 2). A similar trend of improvement is also

Table 1. Grade Equivalent in Reading, 1976-79, ITBS*

	1976	1977	1978	1979
1	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.2
2	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.6
3	3.0	3.1	3.2	3.3
4	3.5	3.7	3.8	3.8
5	4.1	4.3	4.4	4.6
6	4.5	4.7	4.8	5.0
7	5.1	5.3	5.4	5.5

*Iowa Test of Basic Skills

Table 2. Grade Equivalent in Math, 1976-79, ITBS

	1976	1977	1978	1979
1	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9
2	2.4	2.6	2.7	2.7
3	3.0	3.2	3.2	3.3
4	3.6	3.8	3.8	3.9
5	4.2	4.4	4.5	4.6
6	4.6	4.8	5.0	5.1
7	5.2	5.4	5.6	5.7

evident at the high-school level (Tables 3 and 4). It is significant to note that these improvements parallel the emphasis placed on the school system's goals of reading and mathematics.

The implication here is that, to some extent, the various programs and strategies employed have been effective in improving the achievement levels of the Atlanta public schools students. But the rate of progress has been modest. The present rate of improvement by grade level has been about one month of achievement gain per year. At this rate, a total of four years would be required for Atlanta students to equal the national norm in reading at the third-grade level. Thus our timetable of reaching the national norm by 1985 is realistic.

Table 3. TAP Composition Scores, 1975-78

	1975		1976		1977		1978	
	SS ¹	GE ²	SS	GE	SS	GE	SS	GE
Atlanta public school system	38.9	7.6	40.1	8.0	40.2	8.0	40.5	8.1
National norm	50.0	11.1	50.0	11.1	50.0	11.1	50.0	11.1

¹Standard score

²Grade equivalent

Table 4. TAP Reading Scores, 1975-78

	1975		1976		1977		1978	
	SS	GE	SS	GE	SS	GE	SS	GE
Atlanta public school system	39.3	8.1	39.9	8.3	39.7	8.2	40.3	8.4
National norm	50.0	11.1	50.0	11.1	50.0	11.1	50.0	11.1

At the high-school level, Atlanta public schools students, on the average, scored below the national norms on the Tests of Academic Progress (TAP) in composition, reading, and mathematics. However, high-school students, as did students in grades one through seven, have shown continuous improvement over the period 1975-78 in these areas (Tables 3, 4, and 5).

Table 5. TAP Mathematics Scores, 1975-78

	1975		1976		1977		1978	
	SS	GE	SS	GE	SS	GE	SS	GE
Atlanta public school system	40.8	7.9	40.9	8.0	40.8	7.9	41.6	8.1
National norm	50.0	11.1	50.0	11.1	50.0	11.1	50.0	11.1

State Criterion-Referenced tests for tenth-grade students in communications and mathematics in part substantiate the longitudinal improvement of Atlanta students in basic reading as well as other subareas of communication skills (Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6. Georgia Criterion-Referenced Tests, Percent of Tenth-Grade Students Achieving Objectives in Communication Skills

	Reading and Listening Comprehension Skills	Basic Reading	Writing Skills
1978	52	69	63
1979	52	71	64

Table 7. Georgia Criterion-Referenced Tests, Percent of Tenth-Grade Students Achieving Objectives in Mathematics Skills

	Number System	Personal Finances	Measurement	Problem- Solving
1978	44	31	26	31
1979	43	31	26	42

My three decades of educational experiences have always been in urban communities. My students have usually been poor and predominantly black, and without exception have always achieved below national norms in literacy skills. Atlanta public schools' 90 percent black student population was second only to Washington among large cities. Of the 126 schools in the system, 123 qualified as Title I schools. Atlanta harbors the poor and the black.

Still, the Atlanta public schools and other systems like it have always produced students such as Dr. Martin L. King, Jr., Vernon Jordan, Mayor Maynard Jackson, and Julian Bond. What we have set out to do in the Atlanta public schools is to provide educational success for most students rather than a few.

In summary, while Atlanta public school students, in general, score below the national norms, K-12, in the basic skills of reading and math, TAP's and Criterion-Referenced tests show that our students have been making continuous academic progress over the past three years. The rate of progress has been small, however. In effect, the analysis of the test data relative to achievement suggests that the school system has made significant progress in the identification and utilization of programs, strategies, and resources necessary for the overall improvement of the academic achievement of students. What remained to be done in 1980 was to reexamine the degree to which various programs, strategies, and allocation of resources impact the achievement of Atlanta public schools students, the end result of this reexamination being the acceleration of the degree of academic progress of students in the areas of reading and math.

A staff committee composed of top staff was appointed to begin organizing a systemwide planning effort that would drive students on to the 1985 goal. The timetable for the plan included identifying major issues that should be taken to the public at the several town meetings planned for October, November, and December. The completion date for the plan was determined to be July 1981.

Little mention of the progress of the planning activity will be made in this paper except as it relates to achieving the 20 percent gain established for the 1980-81 school year. The focus will be on what transformations took place in several significant areas that prepare the school system for the bold goal of reaching the national norm by 1985.

School Administration

In my more than eighteen years of experience as an administrator, I have had seven administrative assignments, including three principalships and two superintendencies. With the exception of one principalship, when I opened a school and selected all staff members—and was thereby granted the leadership role from the first day—I can remember the occasion at each assignment when staff members fully accorded me the leadership role.

It took almost two years to earn the leadership role in the Atlanta public schools. Before that time I was “that new guy from that California School District.” I employed several strategies in my attempts to earn the leadership role. I held weekly meetings with the top executives. In the meetings I made certain that I would enunciate the instructional objectives over and over again. I made certain that our top staff were aware that my first concern was student achievement. It has been an awesome revelation to me that staff tend to give emphasis to those things I talk about most. I then had to assure that quality attention was given to the outcomes of instruction. To accomplish this I shifted much of the time of the research and evaluation from proposal development to working directly with local school staffs. Each research assistant is assigned to several schools. The research assistant’s job is to provide the most useful information possible on individual pupils, groups of pupils, and the entire school community. Test data are made understandable to staff and community members. The research assistant participates with the local school staff in developing an appropriate instructional plan for his or her school(s). Since all these materials are made available to executive staff, we enter into a continuing dialogue on the appropriateness of local school and area planning.

Over the years I have met with each department and work unit in the school system to talk to them about how they contribute to student outcomes. These meetings, however, are infrequent. I have regular meetings with principals. We have divided the elementary principals into four groups of about twenty each. We meet at a school at 1:00 P.M. and have lunch and converse together. I do not bring a structured agenda to these meetings; I am therefore able to hear their concerns and they listen to mine. These meetings have been most beneficial in that I am able to communicate directly and regularly my expectancies. They enjoy doing the same. I have a better understanding and appreciation of what they can and cannot do because of these meetings.

About twice a year we convene administrative congress meetings. All persons in promotional positions are members of the administrative congress. At congress meetings we usually talk about systemwide objectives and personnel matters such as health and welfare benefits. This organization was most useful during our one-day strike in 1975. It reviewed and reacted to all demands from the employee organizations. It helped the Board of Education, administration, and executive staff to realize what could really be implemented at the several work sites.

For more than ten years the Atlanta public schools have been organized on an area basis, with twenty or more schools assigned to an area headed by an area superintendent. The area superintendent is responsible for evaluating the principals and for securing training for principals when needed.

A systemwide program, the Administrative University, provides principal training in management functions, supervision, managing grievances, and leadership behavior. All these topics are related to the 1985 goals. The Administrative University is designed to ensure that each principal is trained to carry out those things that the school system expects of him or her. For example, the State Department of Education has installed a new supervision program for first-year teachers. All principals were given training in the program and required to demonstrate competency.

The school administration staff members directly concerned with the instructional program are my first reference group. They have direct impact on achievement of both faculty and staff. It is the first group that must be won in creating a community of believers.

The Atlanta public school administrators have come to believe, and it is showing up in test results, student and faculty attendance, lower drop-out rates, and more students going on to postsecondary institutions. To illustrate this, I quote Dr. Ernest Boyer's comments on the impressions received by a study group from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, during a visit to five Atlanta high schools in March 1981:

Based on our brief visit, I think all the members of the panel felt we saw a school system that was healthy and where academic priorities were clearly understood and where progress was being made.

Secondly, we were struck by a generally orderly, disciplined climate. This is contrary to some of the conventional wisdom that says the high schools are generally chaotic places. This is not true in Atlanta.

In my experience, schools are adrift because their academic goals are unclear. Certainly, there are problems [in the Atlanta Public Schools], but they are enormously benefited by the common agreement on what they're [trying to do]. I did sense that the community of Atlanta still believes that a good school system is important to the community.

The Teacher

I have always felt that almost all teachers want to teach their students well and would if they knew how. Teachers could better hide their lack of know-how when the curriculum was less complex and even educated people did not have to know so much. Today we are insisting in Atlanta and elsewhere that all the children be educated. We ask more of teachers than ever before. In 1979-80

the drop-out rate in Atlanta public schools was 5.9 percent. The systemwide average daily attendance was more than 93 percent. Students are staying in school, and the community expects them to learn.

The school system has used staff development as a vehicle for improving the performances of teachers. Through staff development, teachers have been supported to try new methods, determine the effectiveness of their strategies, plan with others, and even invent new techniques for working with students. Some significant support systems that have been employed in the school system are described briefly below:

Reading/Math Center—The Atlanta Public Schools Reading Center has been in operation for seven years. High, middle, and elementary schoolteachers spend from three days to one week at the center receiving individualized in-service training in the teaching of reading. Recent data from the Research and Evaluation Division indicate that the students of teachers who have participated in the Reading Center program score better on reading tests than students of teachers who have not had the Reading Center training. In short, the Reading Center is vital in the teacher preparation process.

In 1980-81 the Reading Center became the Reading and Mathematics Center. The expanded Center concept will provide in-depth in-service training in the area of mathematics as well as in the area of reading.

Comprehensive Early Assessment Program (CEAP)—CEAP is designed to provide complete documentation on entry-level assessment characteristics of all primary students. The early assessment program results enable the teacher to prepare experiences that are consistent with the students' needs. CEAP objectives are entry-level assessment, follow-up rescreening and further diagnosis, parental involvement, and appropriate placement. The early assessment and follow-up procedures impact achievement at the elementary level in the areas of students' attitudes, discipline, and learning.

Elementary Curriculum Development (ECD)—This implementation of the ECD Program began during the 1972-73 school year. At that time ten elementary schools comprised the entire pilot group. Ten additional schools were added during the 1973-74 school year, and the remaining elementary schools were added on an incremental basis.

The evaluation of the initial ten schools focused on teacher change—attendance and assessing individual instruction; and pupil change—attendance, gain scores on ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills), and self-concept. The initial evaluation of ECD indicated that, when implemented properly, the ECD model was effective in changing, in a positive direction, teacher attendance and individualization, pupil attendance, achievement, and self-concept. In short, ECD has been a successful program for Atlanta's elementary schools.

Alternative Education Program—The Atlanta public school system at present offers nine alternative education programs. These programs range from Schools without Walls—a joint venture between the Chamber of Commerce and the Atlanta public schools, to Cities in Schools—a program designed to assist dropouts and potential dropouts in acquiring a high-school diploma. Specifically, the Alternative Education Programs provide four distinct services to

students: (1) Career Exploration, (2) Community Services, (3) Independent Studies and (4) special programs for turned-off, or disaffected, students.

Alternative Education Programs impact students, curriculum, and instruction. Classroom teachers do not always support able students spending time in alternative programs, but they are usually supportive of students who achieve poorly.

Compensatory Education (Title I)—Compensatory Education Programs are designed to provide supplemental instructional activities for students who perform below their expected levels in reading, math, and communication skills. Title I has made staff development legitimate. Most citizens accept that it is important to provide training for staff. The Atlanta public schools program includes individualized instruction via programmed materials and in-service workshops for teachers and teacher aides. Title I includes components that are designed to directly impact students, teachers, curriculum and instruction, and community involvement.

Systemwide Objective Plan—The Systemwide Objective Plan is basically an instructional planning and management process, focusing on the achievement of the system's educational goals of reading and mathematics. Each school's administration—faculty and staff—collaboratively identifies school objectives, assesses school needs, plans specific strategies to meet needs, and identifies appropriate staff development functions relative to the accomplishment of individual school objectives. School teams, together with area personnel, evaluate the degree of improvement on each school objective prior to the development of the subsequent year's objective plan.

This system has forced teachers to talk to one another about student progress. The outcome is greater articulation between grades and schools. Everybody in school is made knowledgeable on what the goal is and what contribution is expected of each class and grade level.

In 1980 a new reporting tool was added to facilitate the discussion. Each basal reader at every grade level has a number of mastery levels, with the average basal having six to ten levels for one academic year. There is a publisher's mastery test for each level. Each month in the 1980-81 school year following the first quarter, teachers have indicated the levels completed by students. This report has been most helpful to teachers and administrators for grouping and for determining if too much time is being spent on certain sections. A number of students are scoring on tests at higher levels than they are placed in the readers.

Full-Day Kindergarten Program—In 1980 the full-day kindergarten program was implemented in the Atlanta public schools. The program is providing a great deal of flexibility for the classroom teacher in meeting each student's needs on an individual basis. Direct instruction and student-directed activities are provided for students on a planned basis in the areas of reading and mathematics. Performance objectives for prereading objectives have been developed, and records are maintained for placement purposes relative to first-grade placement.

Pupil Progression Policy—A Pupil Progression Policy for the elementary school level has been developed. This plan is consistent with the Elementary

Curriculum Program strategies and procedures in that student progress is individualized and based on the mastery of identified skill indicators appropriate for the individual student's level of progress.

The Pupil Progression Policy ensures that each student progressing from the primary elementary level to the intermediate level will have mastered the required minimum skills and competences to benefit from the intermediate instructional programs.

In addition to the development of needed programs and the training of teachers to carry out these programs, we have tried to find ways to discuss matters more with teachers and to include them in seeking solutions to problems that confront us.

The major task asked of me by the Atlanta public school teachers is to react vigorously to the unjust criticism heaped on teachers by the media. For example, the cover story of the April 20 *Newsweek* was "The Flunking Public Schools." The cover showed a knotted pencil. It was all very dramatic, but unfair.

When I visit schools, I go at 7:30 A.M. to meet with the school staff. I am invariably able to determine growth items for which I can commend the staff. The thirty to forty minutes that I can spend talking with each member of the school staff is valuable to me in learning of the successes that they are enjoying and the frustrations they are experiencing. It takes me three years to visit all the schools, but in that span of time I get a good feel for how things are going in the schools. Teachers feel good about the increases in student achievement, and they fully embrace the goals of 20 percent this year and the national norm in five years. Atlanta public school teachers are believers. The challenge ahead is stability. Teachers will continue to perform, provided their jobs are not constantly threatened. The ball is in the Board of Education and administrative staff's court. Can we handle a reduction in pupil population without causing a great disruption from reduction-in-force and building-closing programs? We must answer the challenge in ways that ensure that pupil progress does not suffer.

Students

In our efforts to build a community of believers we turned to the students themselves for contributions toward creating this condition. We assumed that the 1985 goal of the national norm as well as the 20 percent goal would not come to pass if students themselves did not expect to reach them. School staff and community persons have a lot of influence on students' expectations, but students themselves may have even a greater influence on their own and their peer's expectations (Table 8).

In attempting to create community enthusiasm for the 1985 goal, a students' town meeting was held in October 1980 for student leaders of middle schools and high schools. I presented the challenge of the 20 percent goal and the long-term goal of the national norm in five years. I pledged the support of parents, business, and the religious communities. Board members and cabinet members (executive school staff) were presented to the students. They were then invited to make comments and ask questions.

Table 8. Estimated Shifts in the Order of Influences on Youths 13 to 19 Years Old that Change Their Behavior

	1960		1980
1	Mother, father	Friends, peers	(up 2)
2	Teachers	Mother, father	(down 1)
3	Friends, peers	<i>Television, radio, records, movies</i>	(up 5)
4	Ministers, priests, rabbis	Teachers	(down 2)
5	Youth club leaders, counselors, advisers, scoutmasters, coaches, librarians	<i>Popular heroes, idols in sports and music</i>	(up 1)
6	Popular heroes, idols in sports and music	Ministers, priests, rabbis	(down 2)
7	Grandparents, uncles, aunts	<i>Newspapers, magazines</i>	(up 2)
8	Television, records, radio, movies	<i>Advertising</i>	(up 2)
9	Newspapers, magazines	Youth club leaders, counselors, advisers, scoutmasters, coaches, librarians	(down 4)
10	Advertising	Grandparents, uncles, aunts	(down 3)

*Johnston Company, synthesis of eighteen studies for youth and values-oriented clients, 1954-80

The questions flew thick and fast. I fielded the questions to the proper Board member or cabinet member. After one hour I realized all the questions could not be answered; I therefore asked the students to put them in writing, and I would see that they were answered. Some sixty questions were turned in.

These student leaders pledged that they would go back to their schools and work for the 20 percent goal and the national norm in five years. They further promised to return to a meeting in March 1981, at which time I would report on staff's progress in securing the support of the goals by parents, business, and the religious community.

Another means of reinforcing students' commitment to the goals has been for me and other staff members to go to schools to appear at assembly programs. At the beginning of the school year I sent middle-school and high-school principals a list of dates when I would be available for assemblies. So far I have spoken to all ten middle schools and eleven high-school student bodies. At each assembly program I reviewed the achievement progress of students at that school, restated the goals, and talked about the tasks that students must undertake if they are to be successful. I then answered questions about the goals and other student concerns. Principals report to me that this type of assembly is helpful in motivating students to improve their performances.

At the March 1981 town meeting with students I reported on the town meetings with parents, business representatives, and religious leaders. This information was well received by the students. They in turn reported on programs they had conducted at their own schools. They expressed their satisfactions as well as their frustrations in conducting their motivational programs. Some of their frustrations were related to the lack of staff support. These problems were referred to the appropriate cabinet member for follow-up.

Again, we responded to questions for more than one hour. Board members and cabinet members came away from this meeting as excited as they did after the first. We feel most students are members of the believing community and that we will reach and exceed the national norm in five years.

Parent Involvement

We believe in Atlanta that strong parent involvement in the day-to-day activities of the school will improve student achievement. Each year, when asked how they plan to involve parents, most local schools identify the Parent-Teacher and the Parent-Teacher-Student associations (PTA and PTSA) as the major vehicles of parent involvement.

During the more than twenty years of desegregation the PTA units lost members, and in some schools the units stopped functioning. In 1973 there were still separate PTA councils for blacks and whites, although the state and national organizations had merged.

The efforts at merging in Atlanta did not meet with early success. The black PTA council insisted on its identity and tended to disappear gradually, with the result that PTA membership diminished sharply. At the same time, the white PTA members, who were the backbone of the Atlanta Council, tended to drift away as their children graduated.

The PTA leadership did not despair and, in fact, began to reverse the membership loss in 1976. In 1980 PTA enjoyed a membership increase of two thousand, one of the greatest increases in the nation. Because most of the revitalized PTA members are employed, almost all activities occur in the evening. They take on the hard problems of low achievement, educational politics, health, teenage pregnancy, venereal disease, and so on. A new bond is developing between parents and school staff in the mutual effort of helping children to succeed. Staff are learning that parents with limited education and resources will demand greater school success. Parents are learning organizational skills in PTA, and they use them in working with or opposing staff. Most important, voluntarism is growing again in the schools. Parents are in the school regardless of the income level of the school community.

PTA is growing in Atlanta, not only because of the hard work of PTA members, but also because staff are working with and encouraging PTA at all levels. Principals attend Council and regional meetings, and cabinet members, all of whom are PTA members, set the pace by being present at these meetings.

A new parent organization, the Northside Parents Association, was organized by parents of children in predominantly white neighborhoods. This organization's express purpose was to stop white flight from the schools by assuring quality education in these schools. With the support and assistance of school staff, Northside parents conducted education fairs at schools and shopping centers in an attempt to sell their neighbors and friends on public schools. In the process of selling others, the Northside parents reinforced their own beliefs in public schools, and those of the school staffs in their mission.

Over the years we have encouraged PTA and other parent organizations to learn as much as possible about the operations of the school system so that they can share accurate information on the school system with others. Usually there

is a report on accomplishments given by a person from a different school work unit at each meeting. The school budget is reviewed at a Council meeting before adoption by the Board of Education, so that PTA representatives are prepared to appear before the Board on special budgeting concerns.

The Atlanta PTA has thirteen thousand members and continues to grow. It is the largest volunteer organization that works regularly with the schools. It, too, is a believer in Atlanta's children and schools.

Town Meetings

Three town meetings were held in the fall of 1980 to discuss the factors critical to the 1985 goals. Those factors include: criteria for keeping schools open; alternative education; graduation requirements; determining roles of key persons relative to students achieving the national norm in literacy skills; magnet schools; system interface with job market; reporting pupil progress; pupil transportation; evaluation of staff and instruction; and "wild card" sessions for unidentified topics that community members wished to discuss.

Each small group session was chaired by a community member, and staff members served as recorders. Summary reports on recommendations were given in *Connection*, the school system's newspaper, published six times each year and distributed to one hundred thousand persons.

Approximately two thousand persons participated in the three town meetings, and they affirmed the goals of 20 percent for fiscal year 1981 and the national norm by 1985. They touched on concerns such as transportation, which was not functioning as smoothly as desired, and school closings, but they realized cutbacks over the next five years will be necessary. Parents asked for assistance in developing skills in assisting their children to reach the goals. Parents who attended the town meetings demonstrated that parents not only want more for their children, but also that they believe in their children's abilities to learn.

Media, Higher Education, and Business Representatives Becoming Believers

In October 1980 we held a luncheon for the chief executive officers of the several broadcast and news media organizations. Various reports on achievement were distributed, and the plans for the school year and for the next five years were described. After answering their questions on the issues, we requested their help and cooperation both in enlightening the public about the factors vital to the system's five-year goal of achieving the national norm and in reporting accurately all Atlanta public schools news.

The news and broadcast media seemed excited about the goals, and to a person pledged support in publicizing the goals. At some time throughout the school year all the media have done something special in a positive way on the school system, with the greatest contribution being made by WSB-Channel 2, Atlanta's more popular TV station by showing an hour-long program at 8:00 P.M. on a Friday evening. This program was narrated by one of Atlanta's most popular news commentators and was designed to highlight student accomplish-

ments. Media representatives are helping Atlantans to become believers. The WSB general manager stated recently that he was overwhelmed by the amount of mail he has received commending the station for the program. A follow-up luncheon with media representatives was held in May with the Board of Education and the administration to review the outcomes of the year.

Higher Education

There has been a close tie between higher education and the Atlanta public schools for several years. Each month the deans of the schools of education and school executives meet at breakfast and talk about happenings at their respective institutions. Further, we discuss how we can help one another. These informal discussions have led to such programs as exchanges of principals and professors, collaboration in seeking funds for programs, Atlanta University taking over the substitute teacher program in one area of the school system, and the development of joint programs such as a summer school for the gifted, which is operated in an Atlanta public school but attracts students from the metropolitan area. There is a full-time staff, but students from the several colleges and universities receive their clinical training at the one center. We have developed a sense of trust that allows this quality program to be provided students.

The Atlanta public school friends from higher education have become full partners with Atlanta public school staff in cultivating the business and religious communities to become believers.

Business Community

A partnership of higher education, the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, and the Atlanta public schools was formed at a town meeting for 200 business, industrial, political, and educational leaders in January 1981. Governor George Busbee, in greeting the group, said, "I want to thank all of you for allowing me to share in a moment of great promise for the city of Atlanta and the great state of Georgia. I enthusiastically endorse the partnership which is represented here." Frank Smith, vice-president of the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce said, "Talk about those things that you can do or that you would like to do to help public education in Atlanta." Dr. Michael Mescon of Georgia State University, the first professor of private enterprise in America, said, "We as a nation are satisfied to just get by, not because we don't have the wits or are not smart enough; but what is lacking is commitment, the willingness to do what has to be done. We have an opportunity to indicate that the commitment is present and that this community is willing and prepared to close that monumental gap that often exists between mouth and movement."

At the conclusion of the meeting, 100 of the 200 executives committed their organizations to assist the Atlanta public schools. Several weeks later a second meeting was held with those representatives or their designees to effect the relationship between the business organization and a school or work unit in the school system. Business, industry, and government had not only become believers in education, but they also have become producers of education.

Religious Leaders

The school system has been accustomed to working with representatives from higher education and business but has had little contact with representatives from the religious community. Before convening a meeting for the religious community, a fourteen-member steering committee of clergy from various denominations and faiths was formed. The committee was instrumental in shaping the direction of the program, which started out as being one for improving communication with the school system and expanding the base for child advocacy.

Equal numbers of religious leaders and school staff, primarily principals, attended the meeting, and some of the suggestions resulting from the meeting included important school announcements (such as immunization information) in church bulletins, Big Brother and Big Sister programs, Adopt-a-School, tutors for reading, and providing child shelter for latchkey children.

After the meeting the steering committee continued to meet and formulate programs, resulting in a religious community commitment to provide child shelter for latchkey children this summer in the twenty-six public housing locations in the city. The budget for this program is more than \$500,000. Indeed, the religious community has become a believer.

In May 1981 all the members of the partnership were informed that the Atlanta public school students realized the first-year goal of a 20 percent gain, or more than 35 percent students now scoring above the national norm in

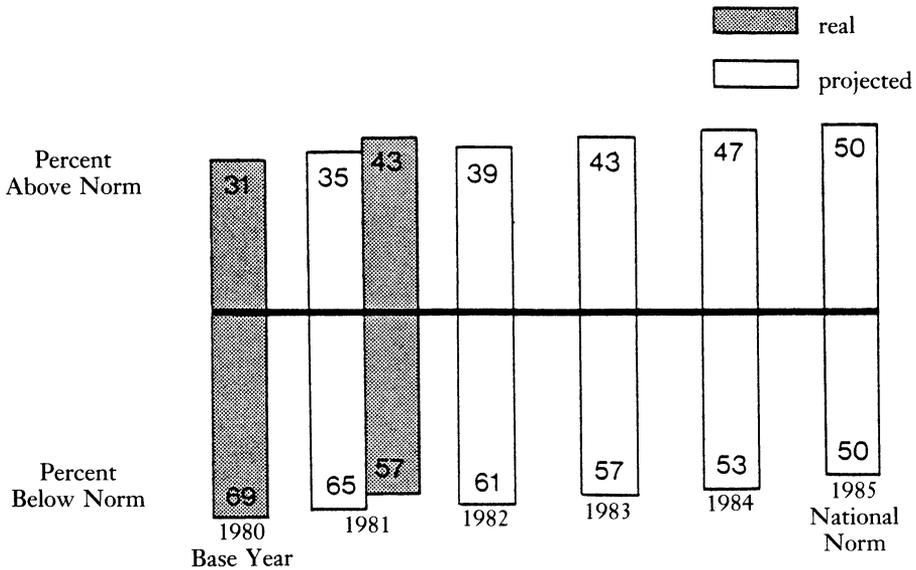


Figure 1. Projection toward National Norm for Atlanta Public Schools in Reading

reading and mathematics measured by the CAT (California Achievement Test). Further, they were informed of the 1982 goal (Figures 1 and 2).

Our city has a long history of caring. Individuals, business, and organizations have consistently given of their time, talents, and money. It is hoped that with our organized partnership of the business community, Chamber of Commerce, religious community, and higher education, our students will directly benefit from the abundance of these educative agents and agencies.

In response to a request for their expertise, suggestions and know-how in establishing school programs have taken place. They have provided staff and have made tangible gifts after being asked specific requests. They are actually teaching on specific topics requested by classroom teachers. Their advice has been priceless, yet no bill for consultants' fees has been presented. For example, the banking community is setting up banking equipment in a school so that our students can learn how to use it. Ford Motor Company has offered motors for students to learn to repair. On-the-job training is taking place. Artists are teaching our elementary students. Some of their work is on loan at our school art galleries. Delta Air Lines presented a share of their stock to each of five students from Washington, Northside, Douglass, and Therrell high schools who were winners in a writing assignment. Attorneys are lecturing in social studies classes. Executives from the Coca Cola Company taught sixth-grade and seventh-grade students on a regular basis. Two churches have joined together in adopting a school.

Children in Atlanta are increasingly supported by a community of believers. They are regularly shown evidence that adults from all walks of life care about

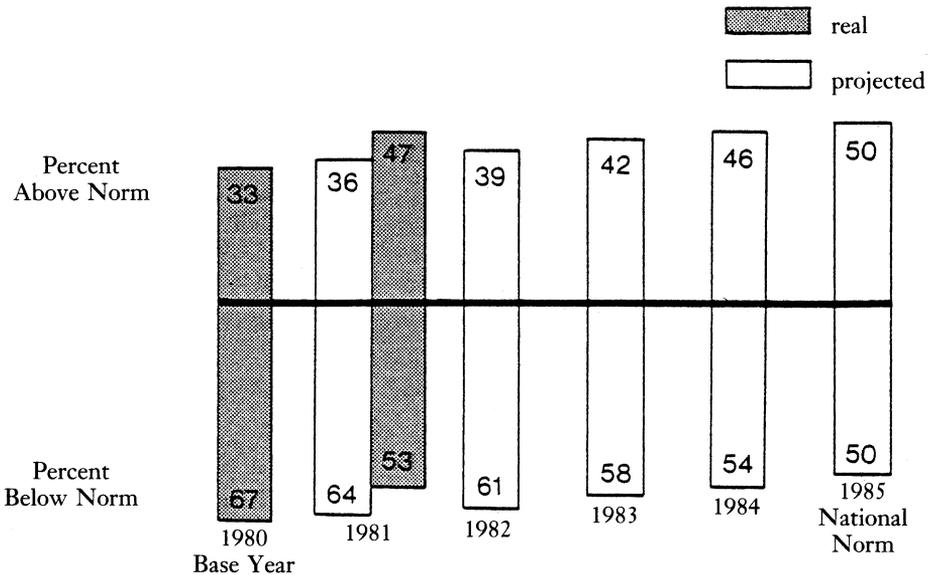


Figure 2. Projection toward National Norm for Atlanta Public Schools in Math

them. Children are given more opportunities to express themselves on the goals and objectives that they set for themselves and that are established for them by others. Students are being challenged to succeed.

Atlanta is a city of believers in children.

Who will make the city joyful
who will wipe away its tears?
Who will tell the children stories
who will make their clear eyes gleam?

Maybe lawyers nursing tender flowers
Businessmen exploring stars
Maybe those who listen to the children
Or beyond the other maybes
Maybe you and maybe me.