

The cost of changing lives?

Lessons from the Making Waves Foundation

What does it cost to provide poor children with good schools and supports for their lives outside them? Not as much as you might think.

By John H. Scully and Glenn W. Holsclaw

It's getting harder and harder to believe that school reform, all by itself, will be enough to transform the lives of America's most disadvantaged children.

Consider the sober assessment offered recently by Massachusetts Commissioner of Education S. Paul Reville, in a blog for *Education Week*, where he said his state has "set the nation's highest standards," and been "tough on accountability" all the while investing billions in school capacity. Even so, students from the poorest communities continue to lag far behind their more affluent peers on every measure of achievement. "It is now clear," he concludes, that the prevailing school reform dogma is wrong: Schools alone can't be expected to make up for "the impediments to learning that are commonly associated with poverty." Disadvantaged children need and deserve great teachers and schools, and they also need and deserve many other sources of support.

But how much would it cost to finance those other supports in addition to better curricula, teaching materials, tests, and instruction? They include after-school tutoring, summer learning opportunities, college and career counseling, mental health services, and any other services that might help the poorest children succeed.

For those of us associated with the Making Waves Foundation, the price tag turns out to be quite modest. According to a rigorous analysis of our expenses, the cost of our services has been roughly \$21,000 per child per year. Sure, that's more than most school districts currently spend, but it's hardly excessive, especially in comparison to what some of the country's big urban systems currently spend. For example, per-student spending now stands at \$14,000 in Boston, more than \$16,000 in Washington, D.C., and more than \$18,000 in New York City. (For that matter, California now spends about \$35,000 per year for each inmate in its prison system.)

What's more, the decision to make that extra investment is a no-brainer, whatever it may cost. Since 1989, our foundation has provided comprehensive social services and academic supports to more than a thousand children selected via lottery from low-income neighborhoods in and around San Francisco and Richmond, Calif. Ninety-nine percent have graduated from high school or are on track to do so. And among those who have reached adulthood since we began our work, fully three-quarters have graduated from a four-year college (many of them from top-tier institutions such as Brown, Harvard, Stanford, Tufts, and

the University of California system). This year, Making Waves is helping 500 children in grades 5-9, and our goal is to reach 800 students annually in grades 5-12 by 2015.

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A \$15,000 education

On an annual per-student basis, the costs include:

Salaries for teachers and administrators:	\$7,600
Mental health counseling:	\$550
Meals:	\$600
Transportation:	\$700
Evaluate learning styles & support special needs:	\$900
Instructional materials/maintenance/rent:	\$1,650
After-school tutoring:	\$3,000



Our costs have dropped considerably from the figure that we came to a couple of years ago. Until recently, our expenses included the cost of sending our participating students to high-quality private and parochial schools. Recently, though, in an effort to better ensure that our participants receive consistent instruction throughout the day, we opened our own public charter school, which has relieved us of the tuition burden that we used to carry. As a result, our programs are now significantly less costly than they were just a few years ago. Today, we estimate our total per-child cost to be closer to \$15,000 per year — and that includes the roughly \$7,000 per child that our local district and the federal government provide for the operation of our charter school.

That budget allows us to provide a rigorous, full day of classroom instruction at our charter school or a private one and supports in five other critical areas:

- **Extra academic support.** Making Waves intensive tutoring and academic advising in small-group settings every school day, as well as a mandatory Saturday Academy (providing more than 80 additional hours per year of academic instruction). Students in grades 5–8 attend a Summer Academy, which adds up to an additional 120 hours of instruction, and students in grades 9–12 participate in two three-week workshops.
- **College counseling.** At Making Waves, planning for college begins in middle school, and support continues until our students complete a bachelor’s degree. That includes guidance in selecting an appropriate institution, obtaining scholarships, filling out paperwork, choosing classes and a major, preparing for graduate school, arranging for job interviews, and more. Further, we provide the same quality of SAT and GRE preparation that affluent families tend to pay for as a matter of course.
- **Mental health services.** Given the vast and largely unmet need for mental health services among children who live in poverty, we see it as a priority to offer high-quality counseling, addressing a wide range of issues, from psychiatric illness to addiction, gang involvement, anti-social behavior, and domestic violence. Rather than make referrals, we employ a staff of psychologists and social workers large enough to provide weekly 50-minute counseling sessions, and/or group therapy and family counseling to all students who need regular support.
- **Guidance on nutrition.** Over 20 years, we’ve become convinced (and the research backs us up) that iron deficiency, low protein intake, and other nutritional deficits have major

effects on students’ ability to concentrate, reason clearly, and remember what they’ve learned. So, we offer healthy meals and snacks, low in fat and sugar, to all students every day, modeling a healthy eating regimen for students and families to implement at home.

- **Parent involvement and education.** We require parents and caregivers to attend quarterly community meetings and to perform several hours of volunteer work annually. Further, we survey parents on their own needs and interests, and we try to provide them with appropriate resources. Currently, we serve more than 1,000 of our students’ family members, offering ongoing courses and monthly forums on parenting, nutrition, and other topics.

Making Waves manages to provide all of this for \$15,000 for our Making Waves Academy students, and \$21,000 for those in our Making Waves Education Program. We do so by relying on college students and former Wave Makers to tutor our young people, by developing partnerships with expert counselors and clinics, and by running an efficient program. We have learned that these services

For \$15,000 a year, Making Waves has been able to provide a full, high-quality school day, after-school and Saturday programs, summer academies, advising, mental health and nutritional counseling, adult learning resources, meals, and even transportation.



A group of Wave Makers learn more about nutrition by managing an organic vegetable garden at Making Waves Academy. (Photo: Matthew Reimer.)

can be more efficiently delivered and give students a more consistent dose if provided directly at the school level, which makes our charter school model our desired mode of expansion.

Our success in helping low-income students and families depends on more than just the kinds of supplemental services that we’ve chosen to offer. As is true of every education model, the specifics of the design are less important than the care with which they’re introduced, implemented, and sustained. At Making Waves, we’ve spent two decades building

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relationships with local community leaders, parents, and students — including many former students who've come back to work for us after college. And we've spent just as many years putting together a strong, cohesive team of teachers, tutors, counselors, advisors, and more. We wouldn't want anyone to think that they can replicate our approach right off the bat, without doing the painstaking work of amassing the good will, expertise, and confidence that characterize the work of Making Waves today.

AN 'EYE-OPENER'

But our work does have important implications for education reform.

First, we hope that it will be an eye-opener for

school reformers who continue to go through life with blinders on, focusing solely on academics and missing all sorts of powerful opportunities to help the nation's poorest children succeed.

Over the last several years, a number of school models have won acclaim by showing that consistent, rigorous, well-designed instruction can help even the most disadvantaged students to make significant academic progress. But, few provide the full array of high-quality tutoring, guidance, mental health services, nutritional counseling, family programs, and other services.

We have to ask, then: Why would reformers adopt a one-size-fits-all focus on providing effective classroom instruction when they could make broader ef-

Profiles of Making Waves students

REBECA RANGEL: "I got the chances my parents never knew"

In her early 30s, Rebeca Rangel is senior vice president at Bank of the West in San Francisco, managing community relations and often supporting efforts to aid under-resourced neighborhoods. In one sense, she's been preparing for this job her entire life.

Rangel's parents emigrated from Mexico to Richmond, Calif., in the 1960s, fresh after being married. Her mother worked nights as a janitor at the University of California, Berkeley while her father worked a range of jobs in manufacturing and other fields. Her father had only a 3rd-grade education; her mother, a 5th-grade education.

Rangel attended schools that consistently rank among the state's worst. At Making Waves, Rangel received intensive tutoring and instruction in the afternoons, evenings, and weekends. During the day, she attended The Branson School, a prestigious independent school in neighboring Marin County.



"I went from a school we entered through metal detectors to this country club environment, where backpacks were tossed to the side before you went into an auditorium or an all-school meeting," she said.

It would have been an expense beyond her family's means. "At that time, I was kind of scared of a \$70 house payment. I was making 95 cents to \$1 an hour," said her father, Ruben Rangel.

In school, the workload and long hours at Branson and with Making Waves was far more rigorous than anything she later encountered at Stanford University, where she earned a bachelor's degree in urban studies or at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, where she earned her master's degree.

Rangel woke up early to go to Branson and then attended the Making Waves program until 8 p.m. The workload at Branson was highly stressful, she said. "It took so much effort to close the gap I needed to make up from my primary education."

forts to help kids succeed, providing both effective instruction and a range of other supports? Whether those services are integrated into the regular public school system, as in many community schools, managed by separate public agencies, or incorporated into charter school models, they should be regarded as basic, non-negotiable public resources. Just as we expect our cities and states to provide all children with effective schools, we should expect them to provide all children with the other supports that make education success possible. And just as we expect schools to be held accountable for student learning, we should expect providers to be held accountable for children's progress on all other dimensions of health and welfare.

Second, we hope that our work will convince policy makers that such comprehensive wrap-around programs don't have to break the bank. For \$21,000 per student — and now closer to \$15,000 — we've been able to provide a full, high-quality school day, after-school and Saturday programs, summer academies, advising, mental health and nutritional counseling, adult learning resources, meals, and even transportation. No doubt, critics will point out hidden costs and otherwise quibble with our figures, but we don't mind. Our estimate may be a little high or a little low, but it's well within the realm of the possible. Policy makers don't need to ask whether such programs are affordable; their only question should be how soon can we put them in place. ■

SHAWN BOYKINS: Building an “academic identity”

Shawn Boykins graduated as part of the Second Wave, the second group of 50 Richmond, Calif., students admitted in 1995. He later earned degrees in electrical engineering from Tufts University and Arizona State University. He recently began working as an electrical engineer at CommScope Inc., a multinational telecommunications company based in North Carolina that focuses on broadband, wireless, and Shawn's primary interest, signal processing.



Boykins went to elementary and middle school in Richmond and started with Making Waves as a young teen. “There was a lot of emotional support, a lot of financial support,” he said. “Especially when starting out, my dad wasn't on top of his game. I had to get a ride home almost every night from the program because my dad was working, and there was no one who could come get me. They even provided bus fare to school every day. They went above and beyond to make sure that I had whatever I needed going forward.”

He credits the support of tutors and the program for helping him learn how to eat nutritionally, write clearly, and develop a drive for learning to satisfy his own curiosity that came as tutors helped him develop critical thinking skills, understand himself, and make sense of the world.

When Boykins entered the Branson School in Marin County with financial support from Making Waves, his grades were not stellar at first, but they improved over time, and Boykins — one of the few minority students at the school — developed leadership skills and excelled in theater. Making Waves also provided support for Boykins to travel to conferences and meet student leaders from other independent schools.

Making Waves helped Boykins think through which colleges to apply to and counseled him on how to apply and seek financial aid. At Tufts, Making Waves provided regular check-ins and advice on selecting courses and majors, academic and social mentoring, and tuition support.

After graduate school, Boykins returned to Northern California to tutor Waves students from their freshmen year through high school graduation. He also has tutored elementary school students.

“There's so much that students aren't getting at home or at school . . . and it just seems to be snowballing, the disadvantage or the disadvantages that these kids face,” Boykins said. “I've been working with 5th graders who don't know how to read, who don't know how to do multiplication. And it's a heavy, heavy lift.” But he said it's been rewarding, investing his own time to changing the course for students just like him.

Boykins credits Making Waves for also helping put his parents and siblings on solid ground as well. “With the help of Making Waves, my parents began to feel a lot more secure in themselves and were able to settle down and go forward, and I was able to be a role model for my younger siblings who were also Wave Makers and even my older sister,” he says.

Boykins' brother is a junior at UCLA and his youngest sister is now a sophomore at George Washington University in D.C.