

## *Compton District Resolves Civil Rights Complaints*

BY LYNN MURPHY

*After decades of trouble — with test scores, finances, and racial/ethnic tensions — there is good news in the Compton (California) Unified School District. Help from WestEd's Equity Assistance Center (EAC) is part of the story.*

In 1993 — citing the district's stranglehold on the lowest test scores in the state, financial problems verging on bankruptcy, and problems accompanying a district shift from predominately African American to predominately Latino — the state placed the Compton district into receivership.

Then things got worse.

Four years and five state-appointed district administrators later, in 1997, complaints filed with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) alleged a pattern of racial harassment and discrimination, sexual harassment, and failure to deal appropriately with English learners. A fourth complaint claimed that the state provided inequitable funding to run the district because students were predominantly racial/ethnic minorities (99% of students were and are racial/ethnic minorities).

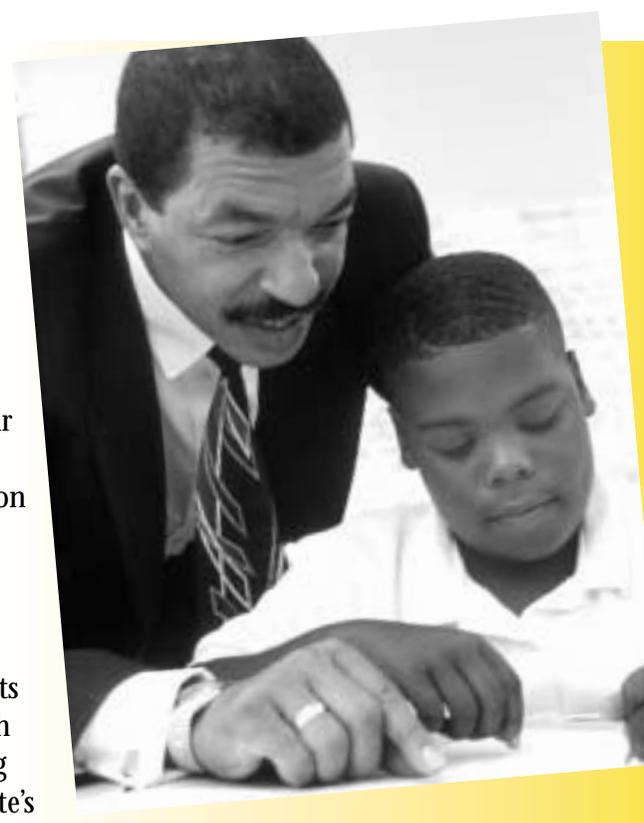
Two months later, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a class action

suit alleging that students in Compton were being denied their rights to an adequate education in a safe environment.

This spring the ACLU dropped its suit, satisfied with the changes being made and the state's commitment to

assure continuing progress. Student scores on the statewide Stanford-9 achievement test have moved up from the first quartile into the second quartile, with English learners making particularly notable gains. And the district continues, in partnership with WestEd's EAC, the work begun two years ago to remedy the OCR complaints with updated policies and procedures.

Dr. Randolph Ward, shown with student Kenneth Adams, has led the turnaround of the Compton district.



# Welcome

*Welcome to the new edition of Equity News, the newsletter of the WestEd Region IX Equity Assistance Center (EAC) serving Arizona, California, and Nevada. Our EAC is one of ten such federally funded regional centers serving the country's public schools. Our charge is to provide information, training, and technical assistance related to educational equity issues of race, gender, and national origin.*

*This issue of Equity News highlights a variety of activities that our center has recently undertaken — ranging from a long-term effort with the Compton (California) Unified School District to providing the kind of research findings and information that promotes proactive responses to equity concerns.*

*You will also learn about resources that can help strengthen your local response to issues of educational equity. Look for Web sites, data sources, and references to other organizations working to promote racial/ethnic integration, reduce racial isolation, and increase access to quality educational opportunities for all students.*

*We hope you enjoy this newsletter and find the articles useful in your work. Please call on us for help with any questions regarding educational equity.*

**Leonard Beckum**  
*Program Director*  
Center for Educational Equity  
WestEd  
300 Lakeside Drive, 18th Floor  
Oakland, California 94612-3534  
510/ 302-4207  
lbeckum@WestEd.org

**Anthony Sancho**  
*Project Director*  
Region IX Equity Assistance Center  
WestEd  
4665 Lampson Avenue  
Los Alamitos, California 90720-5139  
562/ 799-5108  
asancho@WestEd.org

WestEd is a nonprofit research, development, and service agency that works with education and other communities to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults. Drawing on the best knowledge from research and practice, the agency works with practitioners, policymakers, and others to address critical education issues. WestEd serves as one of the nation's designated Regional Educational Laboratories — originally created by Congress in 1966 — serving the states of Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. The agency's work also extends internationally. With headquarters in San Francisco, WestEd has offices across the United States.

For more information about WestEd, visit our Web site at [WestEd.org](http://WestEd.org); call 415/ 565-3000 or toll-free 877/ 4WestEd; or write: WestEd / 730 Harrison Street / San Francisco, CA 94107-1242.

The Equity Assistance Center is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Civil Rights Technical Assistance Program.

This newsletter was produced under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, its contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the federal government should not be assumed.



# Keeping Discipline Equitable and School Violence Down

BY LEONARD BECKUM

African American students are suspended or expelled from school at twice the rate of their European American counterparts, according to recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights.<sup>1</sup> Some blame this disparity on the combined effects of racism and the expansion of zero tolerance discipline policies.

Originally, zero tolerance policies referred to mandatory consequences for bringing to school “firearms” as defined in the federal Gun-Free School Act of 1994. Many states and local school districts then broadened the spectrum of student behaviors that were subject to zero tolerance penalties.

Now, in the wake of the Columbine High School shootings, sensitivities to potential school violence have never been higher. As disciplinary consequences increase in schools across the nation, so do concerns about fairness in the application of these policies.

In some instances, zero tolerance policies have resulted in punishments patently disproportionate to the “crime” — for example, suspending a first grader for bringing toenail clippers to

school, expelling a ninth grader for having sparklers in a book bag, or throwing high school students off the school bus, permanently, for throwing peanuts.<sup>2</sup> Not incidentally, some would say, these students were all African Americans.

While these are extreme instances, statistics show a pattern of bias in how zero tolerance policies are applied. For example, the suspension and expulsion rate for African American students in the San Francisco school district is three times their representation in the school population. In all districts surveyed by Oakland’s Applied Research Center (Austin, Boston, Chicago, Columbia, Denver, Durham, Los Angeles, Miami-Dade, Providence, Salem, and San Francisco), suspension and expulsion rates for African American students were consistently higher than their proportion of the student population, while rates for European Americans were consistently lower. (Rates for Hispanic/Latino students were more variable, but ranged up to four times their proportion of the student population.)<sup>3</sup>

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# Keeping Discipline Equitable and School Violence Down

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The *kinds* of zero tolerance offenses that get applied to students can also have racial overtones. In a study of practices in South Carolina schools in 1998-99, for example, African American students were charged with 69% of all “disturbing schools” offenses (defined as “loitering, disturbing peace, interfering or disturbing in any way education”). Not only are these relatively vague charges that are subject to bias or stereotypes, but the penalties that were applied are significant. In 70% of the cases, students were referred to law enforcement. Suspension was recommended for over 70% of the cases, and in 29% of these “disturbing schools” cases, students were referred for expulsion.<sup>4</sup> Presumably, these were cases not covered by other categories of misconduct, including “weapons,” “assault,” and “threatening school official.”



westEd’s Region IX Equity Assistance Center (EAC) does not take a position regarding the appropriateness or efficacy of zero tolerance policies. EAC’s role is to help districts ensure that policies are administered equitably. EAC is available to assist with training or other technical assistance that helps any staff who are implementing zero tolerance policies to do so consistently with all students.

The EAC also assists districts with the important task of working with their communities to help prevent school violence. While the media and public may focus on weapons-related violence, students experience many other less dramatic acts as contributing to an atmosphere of violence. For example, bullying tactics, name calling, or intimidation may be experienced by students as much more prevalent and more immediately threatening than knives or guns.

The EAC staff believe that proactive discipline policies, such as those identified by the American Federation of Teachers (see box), must be part of the solution to school violence. When such policies are applied consistently, everyone benefits. ■

## ***Essential Elements of Effective School Discipline:***<sup>5</sup>

1. *Promote effective classroom management.*
2. *Enact districtwide discipline codes.*
3. *Enforce the discipline code.*
4. *Implement programs to modify low-level student misbehavior.*
5. *Establish alternative placements for chronically disruptive and violent students.*
6. *Support the work of families, religious institutions, and communities in developing sound character in children.*

Resources referred to in this article include:

<sup>1</sup> “1997 Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Compliance Report,” Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, June 2000.

<sup>2</sup> “Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline Policies,” Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, June 2000, [www.law.harvard.edu/groups/civilrights/conferences/zero/zt\\_report2.html/](http://www.law.harvard.edu/groups/civilrights/conferences/zero/zt_report2.html/)

<sup>3</sup> “Facing the Consequences: An Examination of Racial Discrimination in U.S. Public Schools,” Oakland, CA: Applied Research Center, March 2000, [www.arc.org/erase/](http://www.arc.org/erase/).

<sup>4</sup> See note 2 above.

<sup>5</sup> “Setting the Stage for High Standards: Elements of Effective School Discipline,” Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers, October 1997, [www.aft.org/edissues/elements/Index.htm/](http://www.aft.org/edissues/elements/Index.htm/).

# Compton District *Resolves* *Civil Rights*

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A lot of people have made a difference — from Dr. Randolph Ward, who led the turnaround; to district staff who responded to the challenges on every side; to students, parents, and community members who said enough; and to EAC staff who have helped the district implement Voluntary Resolution Plans to not only address civil rights violations but to also take steps to ensure that they do not recur.

State Administrator Ward, who came to the district at the end of 1996, was determined to make a difference. “I grew up in Roxbury, Massachusetts — a community very much like Compton, with lots of the same problems — so I was comfortable here,” he says. “I was not about to be intimidated. But the problems that developed in Compton over thirty years don’t get fixed in one or two.”

From Ward’s point of view, the district’s whole culture had to change. “Compton had been in the pits so long they didn’t believe in the children or themselves.” Ward estimates that the beginning of the change started about six months into his tenure, when the message started to get through that the district was going to focus on results. “Student achievement was our number one goal,” he says. “There were clear expectations and support and monitoring systems. There was a lot of retraining, a lot of pounding away on the same messages, as well as weeding out those who were unwilling to move with us. But our teachers are making it happen.”

Accountability is one of Ward’s themes, and one thing he has instituted is a very public assessment of school facilities and instruction. Key Results Teams visit every school in the district and grade how well the building is being maintained on a scale from A to F. This year, for the first time, they will also rate how well instruction is being delivered. As Ward explains, “We post those grades on the buildings — just like Los Angeles restaurant ratings — because we want the community to help us hold the schools accountable.”

The community participates as well on the district steering committee, formed to address the OCR complaints. Co-chaired by WestEd’s Ernie Smith and Compton’s Associate Superintendent for Human Resources, Larry Marquand, the steering committee has developed comprehensive plans ranging from student participation in improving race relations to increased campus safety. Marquand is especially pleased with the diversity training and the parent leadership training that are being developed. “It’s going to help us get where we need to go,” he says. “We’re aiming to have no complaints, including from parents, that anyone is being treated differently because of race.”

Cathy Jones, the district’s Accountability Officer for the Desegregation Grant Office, has also worked with WestEd over the past two years. “We’ve started building the infrastructure,” she says. “I feel really good about our progress, about being able to make a difference.”

For EAC’s Ernie Smith, the lesson is this: “When you need help with civil rights compliance, seek it. There is no charge for the EAC’s services, and we’re professionals at this. We have networks of people we can put you in touch with. And when we work with a district ourselves, our role is to develop a balanced, triadic relationship among the district, OCR, and EAC.” For emphasis, she adds, “We don’t come in and take over. We’re consultants. We’re in touch with everyone, back and forth all the way, and that’s what makes it work.” ■



The Vanguard Learning Center is part of the Compton success story. Students Michael Craig, Ben Howard, and Sandy Sandoval are shown with Principal Deloris Davis Holmes and State Administrator Randolph Ward.

# How *EAC* Can Work With *Your District*

BY GERA HUMPHREY

Are you faced with issues of school reform and minimum standards? Is your district addressing issues of educational equity? Would you like help improving your district's response

to differences of race, gender, or national origin? If you are facing these or other concerns that have a diversity component, you may find that WestEd's Equity Assistance Center (EAC) is a valuable resource.

For example, the EAC has helped educators address concerns from ethnic-

minority students that they are underrepresented in advanced placement courses, complaints that coaches don't treat female and male athletes equitably, and frustration from parents of English learners who feel unwelcome in their children's schools.

A phone call to the WestEd EAC can yield targeted information on the spot. It can also begin a process of short- or long-term consultation and planning to address civil rights compliance issues or to develop school desegregation or within-school integration plans. Our services are federally funded and free to districts in Arizona, California, and Nevada. We work with administrators, teachers and school staffs, and parents and other community members.

Our staff brings a rich mixture of expertise in the areas of desegregation, inclusive instructional strategies, language and literacy, parent involvement, multicultural education, bilingual education, and cross-cultural relations.

**Leonard Beckum** is Director of the Center for Educational Equity and a member of the EAC staff. Previously, he served as Duke University's Vice President and Vice Provost and Professor of

Public Policy Studies and Education. Always with a focus on increasing schools' abilities to provide equitable opportunities for poor and minority students, Beckum has also served as Dean of the School of Education at City College, City University of New York; Senior Consultant with the Southeastern Equity Center in Miami, Florida; Director of the Race Desegregation Assistance Center (Region IX) for Educational Research and Development; and Principal Investigator for several National Institute of Education-funded research projects. He earned a BA from California State University, San Francisco, and a PhD from Stanford University.

**Anthony Sancho** is the EAC Project Director. Previously, he served as the Center's Associate Director for four years. For the last twenty years, Sancho has been involved in developing curriculum and training programs for teachers and administrators working with diverse student populations. He has provided technical assistance to districts across the country and has evaluated programs addressing the needs of English learners. Sancho received a BA in Spanish from the University of Texas at Austin, and both an MA in bilingual/multicultural education and a PhD in education from Claremont Graduate University.

**Ernie Smith** is a Senior Equity Associate who has been an elementary school lead teacher, professional developer, and administrator. At the university level, she has supervised student teachers and trained faculty and graduate students in cultural diversity. Her interests and expertise range from curriculum and instruction to gender equity, multicultural education, the schooling of African American males, cultural diversity, compliance with Title IV, professional development, and administrative development. Smith received a BA in elementary education from the Hampton Institute, an MA in education from Pepperdine University, and both an MA in teacher education and an EdD in curriculum/instruction from the University of Arizona.

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Working out of WestEd's Los Alamitos EAC office are Director Anthony Sancho and staff members Gera Humphrey, Ernie Smith, and Phyliss Coston.

Leonard Beckum leads the EAC work from WestEd's Center for Educational Equity in Oakland.



**Gera Humphrey** is an Equity Associate. She has taught English language development, served as an external school evaluator, and assisted underperforming schools. She has been an SB395 (formerly SB1969) trainer and an instructor in Cross-cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) teacher certification programs. Humphrey currently provides technical assistance and training to school districts on cross-cultural communication, second-language acquisition theories and methodologies, development and implementation of English learner programs, and parent/community leadership

development. She has a BA in Spanish, sociology, and English from Eastern New Mexico University and an MS in education administration from National University.

**Phyliss Coston** has been the EAC's Administrative Assistant for seven years. She handles all EAC arrangements and communications, among other responsibilities. Computer graphics are a special interest, and she is working toward a degree in electronic graphic design at Cypress College. ■

# NAEE Conference

## Showcases Effective Schools

BY ANTHONY SANCHO

**T**he conference of the National Association for Education Equity (NAEE) is an annual opportunity for the 10 regional Equity Assistance Centers to share skills, experiences, and knowledge — with each other and with local educators. This year, the WestEd EAC hosted the conference, held in Los Angeles, with co-sponsors Compton (California) Unified School District and Los Angeles Unified School District.

A new feature was to invite schools recognized in each region for having overcome significant challenges — such as poverty, low academic achievement, discipline problems, lack of parent involvement, and/or poor attendance — to make presentations during the conference. For example, one school told the story of how its bilingual first graders achieved the highest mathematics scores in the Long Beach district. A New York high school for immigrants reported on its success graduating and enrolling in college over 90% of its students. (See the full list of showcased schools in the box below.)

In another new and well received feature of the conference, student panelists from Los Angeles and Compton high schools responded candidly to questions about safety, violence, and harassment on their campuses. Their comments addressed some of the disturbing realities of life in urban schools, but offered hope for change, as well.

NAEE is now planning its 2001 conference, to be held February 6-9 at the Wyndham Miami Biscayne Bay Resort. The theme, "Creating Connections for Children," will be explored through workshops, by keynote speakers, and with school tours. A pre-conference institute on desegregation monitoring will be featured. Details and registration information will be available soon. ■



The annual NAEE Conference is an opportunity to participate in a range of professional workshops. Here, Minta Brown (center), manager of the California Department of Education's Educational Partnership Office, leads a group considering "Parents' Rights: Implications for Legislation."

### NAEE Showcase Schools 2000

Altura Elementary School, Aurora, CO  
Brooks Middle Magnet School, Wichita, KS  
Clara Barton Elementary School, Long Beach, CA  
International High School, Long Island City, NY  
Naranca Elementary School, El Cajon, CA  
Pimeria Alta Charter School, Nogales, AZ  
Stephen C. Foster Elementary School, Compton, CA  
Temple City Community Learning Center, Temple City, CA  
Woodlawn Elementary School, Portland, OR  
Yvonne Ewell Townview Magnet Center, Dallas, TX

# Gender-Equity Collaborations: A Winning Approach

BY ERNIE SMITH

As demand grows for technical assistance in the field of educational equity, collaborations across agencies providing these services make it possible to respond more comprehensively and to reach larger audiences than our separate organizations could manage independently.

In the area of gender equity, for example, the WestEd Equity Assistance Center's (EAC) collaborative relationships with two national organizations allow us to expand both our knowledge and reach in providing gender-equity services.

The Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) Equity Resource Center, [www.edc.org/WomensEquity/](http://www.edc.org/WomensEquity/), is a rich source of gender-equity publications, provides technical assistance, and hosts a network of equity professionals from around the country. Known as WEEA Associates, group members convene annually to address a particular equity issue. In the coming year, WEEA Associates, including WestEd EAC's Ernie Smith, will focus on the re-segregation of vocational education by gender. Group members are concerned that progress toward gender-neutral education has not only slowed, but in some cases slipped.

The National Coalition for Sex Equity in Education (NCSEE), [www.ncsee.org/](http://www.ncsee.org/), is another group that provides a voice for gender-equity advocates across the country. WestEd EAC clients benefit from the materials and resources developed by NCSEE. In return, EAC supports the NCSEE by contributing to its national newsletter, making presentations at NCSEE national conferences, and serving on the organization's steering committee. ■



Professional development begins at home, with EAC staffer Gera Humphrey leading a workshop for WestEd employees in honor of gender-equity advocate Myra Sadker.

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