



# **New Hope for Urban High Schools: Cultural Reform, Moral Leadership, and Community Partnership**

*Lisa Gonsalves, John Leonard*

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The last sixty years have seen tremendous strides in high school education. More young people of all races and backgrounds are graduating from high school, with more credits in tougher courses, than ever before. However, our dropout rate is still too high and far too many graduates are not prepared for college. High school reform for city schools has been particularly challenging where poverty and racism have undermined the high school experience. Educators have relied upon two reform strategies: the curricular strategy focuses on the academic content that is delivered in the classroom, content reformers have adjusted. They also have restructured the high school itself to maximize the impact of the classroom. This book offers an additional strategy, one essential for real change: the cultural reform strategy. Cultural change—a fundamental change in the beliefs, attitudes and expectations of the stakeholders—is difficult to achieve. Yet, without a change in the culture of the high school, curricular and structural reforms will have limited impact on raising student engagement.

The authors illustrate the history of high school reform, and develop a case for the necessity of cultural reform, by taking an intimate look at one very typical urban high school—Dorchester High School in Boston. Dorchester High faced trends, policies, and challenges similar to those of high schools all over the country, so that the lessons learned there should be instructive for urban high schools across America. Gonsalves and Leonard also examine Dorchester High in the context of community partnerships and relationships.

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