perpetuated within our communities and schools,
• Creating the space for the participants to undertake the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth to eliminate their behaviors that support the cycle of inequity (i.e., fostering trust, increasing confidence, decreasing pretense and passivity).

By the end of our Seminar, we challenge you to be ready, willing and able to interrupt inequity and oppression in your school, build the alliances required to create that equitable reality, encourage new leaders to emerge, and to support these new leaders to reflect on the issues of equity that arise in their lives and work. All schools need to create safe opportunities for educators to share and reflect upon stories and experiences about how racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression have affected our lives as individuals, parents, educators, and citizens. In CES Small Schools it is our responsibility to do so.

We continue to be guided by these essential questions:
• What do I need to know and be able to do to interrupt inequities in my school?
• What do I need to know and be able to do to create, foster and sustain an equitable Professional Learning Community?
• How does a Professional Learning Community focused on equity and social justice increase student success in school and in life?

In order for us to attend rigorously to these questions, please come prepared to work hard, complete nightly assignments, and engage in a professional discussion that will renew our passion for teaching and learning. Please read and come prepared to discuss the two texts: “Hip Hop in the Classroom,” and “What Do We Mean by Rigor.”

Because the work of this Seminar is tied so closely to our work as educators in our individual settings, we ask you to bring samples of student or adult work. If you are not currently teaching, then please bring a piece of your work for the purpose of receiving feedback or a dilemma you face as a leader for educational equity. We will make the time to honor all the work that you bring.

We hope you know how excited we are to continue our critically important work together.

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the Collaborative Assessment Conference would be useful here. This might eliminate predetermining the participants to a particular “view” of the class or students in question.
• Assignment or prompt that generated the student work
• Student learning goals or standards that inform the work
• Potential clarifying questions might be, “How are all students being served with this assignment?” or “How was it different for the members of this particular class?
• Samples of student work — photocopies of work, classroom, and other forms with student names removed.

More questions to consider: How did the presenter select the work? Was it truly random? Does it represent not only the range of learning, but also the range of diversity in the class?
• Evaluation format — scoring rubric and/or assessment criteria, etc.
• Questions here could focus on how evaluation is handled. Are clear, high expectations stated for all, using student-friendly language that guides the students to equitable outcomes?
• Focusing question for feedback
• Participants are silent, questions are entertained at this time.

3. Clarifying Questions — 5 minutes
• Participants have an opportunity to ask “clarifying” questions in order to get information that may have been omitted in the presentation that they feel would help them to understand the context for the student work. Clarifying questions are matters of “fact.” The facilitator should be sure to limit the questions to those that are “clarifying,” judging which questions more properly belong in the warm/cool feedback section.

4. Examination of Student Work Samples — 15 minutes
• Participants look closely at the work, taking notes on where it seems to be in tune with the stated goals, and where there might be a problem. Participants focus particularly on the presenter’s

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NSRF’s Living History: An Interview with Lakweisha Tibbs
Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Lakweisha, can you tell me about your job and how you use your coaching skills in your work with parents and family members?

My official job description is Family Partnership Specialist. Due to rising attention about the parental role in support of student achievement, the Chattanooga non-profit community, in my case the Urban League, joined forces with the Hamilton County School System to design a program that would place point people in nine urban elementary schools to address parental engagement. I’m one of those point people.

In terms of what I do, you have about 72 hours? Because it may take that long for me to describe my job. No, seriously, I’ll just give you some highlights. One of my responsibilities is the identification and organization of an Action Team of parents/family members and school staff, who will put the school’s Family-Community Partnership Plan into action.

What’s the Family-Community Partnership Plan?

The Family-Community Partnership Plan brings staff and families together in order to achieve the school improvement plan’s goals. My role in this process is all about facilitating collaboration and communication. My Coaches’ training gave me some skills for my toolbox that help me approach issues with parents and teachers so that we can have real conversations about concerns both groups have.

What are some of the challenges you’ve faced?

It’s been rough. One of the first things I had to do was find out how interested the staff really was in parental input. Lots of times parents are invited to meetings where presenters talk at them and then the parents don’t come back. Since my job was about creating a partnership, I wanted to guarantee that a consistent parental base would be present at the table.

Using text-based and other protocols has helped me hold a place at the table for everyone’s voice, especially the missing voice of the parents.

What steps have you taken to get a base of parents engaged?

I felt I needed a dominant parent voice in the group, not just one or two folks who are totally outnumbered by teachers and administra-
tors. I knew that parents would find safety in numbers and would be more willing to speak up if they came as a group.

I also wanted to make sure that our meetings went beyond the traditional one-way transmission model where schools tell parents how to help with homework at home but parents don’t get to tell schools what they need.

But back to your question, I make home visits. I meet with groups of parents at our school. I coordinate an after school/weekend literacy tutorial program that works with community organizations and resources along with teacher consultants to yield measurable academic improvements for students.

I basically communicate with families. I use student and school data to ask parents my number one question: If you don’t defend your kids, who will? I don’t stop there though, I also work to give parents the skills and opportunities they need to speak up and be heard.

I remember when we met last summer, you told me about parents lobbying and holding a press conference. Can you refresh my memory about these actions?

Sure, the first thing was the press conference. Here in Chattanooga, we’ve been working really hard to improve the student scores. We’ve been under the gun at schools like mine and we’ve made a tremendous gain of ten points in just one year, the highest gain in the state. Well, after

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we found out our results a county commissioner said the praise of our progress wasn’t earned. He said, at the end of the day, we were still failing. It was a gut punch to all of us, staff, parents and the community. Here we were holding Early Bird sessions from 6:30-7:30 every morning, organizing Saturday school etc., and he said we were failures. Everybody was upset, but the parents were up in arms and wanted to respond. We had a meeting to prepare and the parents went on to advocate for themselves. The parents got listed on the docket at the next school board meeting and they called a press conference before the meeting. Parents demanded an apology from the County Commissioner, and they got it!

How about the family members who went to lobby? I remember you telling me about them too.

The parents who went to lobby were upset with possible plans to cut back funding for a Pre-K initiative called Stand for Children Connecticut. I think these parents were empowered to make their voices heard because of their participation on the Action Team.

It sounds like you’re work has fostered some truly meaningful collaboration. What’s next on your agenda?

The Associate Superintendent of Elementary Education has noticed the way parents are stepping up at my school and has asked me to organize a conference across the nine targeted schools. The conference will be a chance for a broader group of concerned parents to pool their questions and their skills in support of their kids. I’m really excited about this opportunity, and the respect for parental engagement that it represents.

All of your work sounds exciting to me! It’s refreshing to hear from a young professional who hasn’t been infected with the “these parents don’t care” bias that is so widespread among teachers and school staff. How have you avoided the common, deficit view of parents, especially poor parents of color?

I don’t know. I just never felt, never believed, that most parents did not want to be involved in their children’s education. I started my job with lots of observations. I observed teachers and students, parents and students, and teachers and parents. I always figured that the kids were the center, the focus of all we do and I set out to build bridges so we could work together.

In addition to your work with parents and teachers I know that you are also a spoken word poet. Do these two sides of your talents ever come together?

As a matter of fact, I once shared my poem, “Your Babies Are Crying”, at a Parents’ meeting. I wrote it when I started this job.

Read Lakewaha’s poem on the following page. For more information about her work, you may contact her at hlhibb@hotmail.com

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

adopted June 2001

The National School Reform Faculty is rooted in four beliefs:

- School people, working together, can make real and lasting improvements in their own schools;
- Teachers and administrators must help each other turn theories into practice and standards into actual student learning;
- The key to this effort is the development of a “learning community” based on public, collaborative examination of both adult and student work;
- To create this community, practitioners need high-quality training and sustained support.

Gordon Parks

On Tuesday, March 7, 2006, Gordon Parks, a giant of a man, a Renaissance man by all counts, died. Gordon Parks was an acquaintance of mine and a person my daughter, who worked at the Time Photography Lab in NYC, got to know and treasure on a personal level. We are both saddened by his death. My favorite picture is of my daughter with Gordon Parks.

In my classroom, we used the internet. Gordon Parks’ vast work, and his movies, his videos and particularly his latest work “Half Past Autumn,” to discover what it means to be a Renaissance man and to explore the notion of a Renaissance.

We used this in-depth study of Gordon Parks to bridge to the Harlem Renaissance and then to study the Italian Renaissance. My students and I now had a lens to use, a reason and a will to look at the Italian Renaissance.

How do I, as an African American school Coach, help a young, white teacher and other teachers both black and white discover how to engage African American students in wanting to learn about the Italian Renaissance? I learned as a teacher how to surround myself and my students with the cultures of our heritages; the African American, Asian and Latino heritages. We used that cloak of personal cultural knowledge to bridge to the dominant European culture. This is the only way I know to engage students who do not look like the dominant American culture in learning about the European culture. Without using a similar approach with high school students who represent cultures other than the dominant culture, you get compliance at best and/or classroom management issues with disruptive, defiant behaviors. I feel privileged to have been able to explore deeply the life and works of Gordon Parks with my students. I will miss Gordon Parks’ presence, but I will always be grateful for having known him, grateful for his work and grateful for the time I spent with my students exploring his genius.

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The Renaissance Across Difference:
Engaging African American, Latino and Mainstream High School Students in the Italian Renaissance and a Tribute to Gordon Parks
Camilla Greene, Connecticut