

FROM THE EDITOR

Risk and Hope



Hope is a risky proposition these days, as the financial markets in the U.S. and the world teeter precariously and our nation remains in the middle of grueling conflicts abroad. But if the 22-month race for president taught us anything, it's that voters are hoping for dramatic changes in the weeks and months to come, even as they keep their fingers and toes crossed and look ahead with wary eyes.

This first issue of the new calendar year reflects the conflict between risk and hope, no more so than in Lawrence Hardy's cover story on middle schools. For the past two years, starting in December 2006, we have looked at the factors that make children "at risk" for failure in school and in life.

Larry's series of award-winning stories (available on ASBJ.com) have examined the impact that poverty, crime, and neighborhood influences have on low-income children who attend struggling schools. We also have looked at mental health issues, the rise in the number of children with autism, and now at the challenges students face at perhaps the most vulnerable times of their lives.

Two decades ago, middle-grades education was all the rage. Now, in the grand scope of K-12 public education, middle schools have reverted to their place as the forgotten middle child. So much attention is focused on early childhood education and high school

reform—the inputs and outputs, you might say—that students in grades six through eight are being ignored again.

Or are they?

After finishing his reporting, Larry asked us to consider changing the "Children at Risk" name to something "more positive," in part to reflect the theme of change that is moving throughout the country now and in part to reflect what schools are doing to meet the needs of the at-risk population.

"These children, whatever their needs, have strengths, talents—and promise," he says. "America's future is inextricably tied to these children's success—and that's not boilerplate; it has been said by many experts that unless we find a way to educate poor, minority, non-native language-speaking children ... our preeminence will become history."

Those are strong words, but Larry also has a point. So that is why we have changed the name of this occasional series, using this month's cover story as an opportunity to transition from "Children at Risk" to "Children of Hope." In future months, you can look forward to additional stories that look at students as, in Larry's words, "a resource to be nurtured, not a problem to be solved."

Until next month, ...

Glenn Cook, Editor-in-Chief