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**Race-Race Initiative: Promising
Practices**



ONE AMERICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The President's Initiative on Race

December, 1997

*The New Executive Office Building
Washington, DC 20503
202/395-1010*

Dear Friends:

Creating One America will require effort from all Americans. One of the most important efforts of the President's Initiative on Race is to identify promising practices that are being utilized to bridge racial divides around our nation. Many groups of Americans are fostering racial dialogue, reducing disparities, promoting racial inclusion and facilitating racial reconciliation in their own communities. By highlighting these practices, we hope to provide useful information to other communities that are working on similar efforts. Our work to identify these efforts is ongoing and will culminate in the publication of a compendium that summarizes many of these promising practices.

In addition to providing summaries of these promising practices, we also want to develop brief but more in-depth case studies of a select few efforts. While each case study can only represent one experience with race and racial diversity in America, we believe that these studies can help others think about their individual experiences with race and can teach broader lessons. Therefore, each case study will end with a section devoted to lessons learned and include additional questions that emerge from the case study.

We chose Bailey's Elementary School of the Fairfax County Public Schools system as the first of these more in-depth profiles of promising practices. As President Clinton has mentioned on several occasions, Fairfax County's racial and ethnic transformation makes it a microcosm of change. His interest in discovering how these demographic changes have affected students as well as parents and educators led us to Bailey's Elementary School. While some of the experiences at Bailey's are unique, Bailey's offers valuable lessons in how schools can manage their growing student diversity.

We hope that you will find this information useful as we work together toward reaching One America.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judith A. Winston".

Judith A. Winston
Executive Director



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Bailey's Elementary School
Educational Strategies for Making Diversity an Asset

December 1997

Commissioned by the President's Initiative on Race

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Bailey's Elementary School

"Just living at Bailey's opens your mind."

--Bailey's Elementary School teacher

During the summer of 1997, two young boys drowned while swimming in Fairfax County's Lake Barcroft. The boys, whose families had recently immigrated to the United States from Somalia, were students at Bailey's Elementary School. Although the tragedy occurred while school was out of session for the summer, Bailey's staff wished to share their grief with, and pay their respects to, the boys' families. Realizing that they had no knowledge of Somali and Islamic mourning customs and funeral services, they contacted the Fairfax County Public Schools central office to request a briefing on the proper way and time to approach the families in their homes, and about the proper protocol to observe at the funeral service. After the briefing, the principal, assistant principal, and several teachers visited the families' homes; 15 staff members from Bailey's proceeded to attend the funeral services at the mosque, entering through a back door as they had been advised, with their arms, legs, and heads covered. In accordance with Islamic tradition, only the men in the group attended the graveside services. This awareness of and respect for their students' cultural heritages is a major reason that staff at Bailey's have made their school an educational, social, and cultural haven for students from all backgrounds.

School Context and History

Bailey's Elementary School is located in the Fairfax County Public School (FCPS) system, a school district with the highest enrollment of any district in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area and one of the highest enrollments in the United States. Although the racial/ethnic composition of the student population in Fairfax County is roughly comparable to that of the nation's, FCPS has a higher proportion of Asian students and slightly lower proportions of Hispanics and African Americans. More significantly, FCPS has seen its student population undergo a rapid socioeconomic and racial/ethnic transformation as more immigrant and refugee families have settled in Fairfax County. Since 1981-82, the percentage of White students in FCPS has fallen from 84 percent to 64 percent. As part of that trend, for each year since 1992-93, the number of minority students has grown by about 6 percent, although the effects of these demographic trends have been experienced more keenly in some areas than others.

Bailey's Elementary School serves one of Fairfax County's most richly diverse areas. As immigrant and refugee families settled in Bailey's attendance area, the percentage of its students who did not speak English as their first language grew from 64 percent in 1984 to 87 percent in 1991. In 1991, concerned that all students at Bailey's, native and non-native English-speakers alike, were educationally and culturally disadvantaged by the departure of native English-speaking students, a group of parents from Bailey's threatened to sue the county unless it redrew the school's attendance boundaries to raise the proportion of native English speakers. More controversy ensued when parents of native English speakers, whose children would be included in the new boundaries, protested that they did not want their children sent to a school where they would be in the minority. When the county balked at redrawing the boundaries, the group of Bailey's parents lobbied the district to create a magnet program at Bailey's that would draw more native English-speaking students to the school. The school board approved the parents' plan for a magnet school, voting to spend \$3 million to make Bailey's the county's first elementary magnet school. A committee composed of district administrators, university representatives, school staff, and parents designed the new magnet program (described below), and parents continue to be strong advocates for it.

When the school reopened as the Bailey's Elementary School for the Arts and Sciences in the fall of 1992, it emerged from the controversy more diverse than ever and with new resources to meet the educational needs of its students. Today, it serves about 900 students from 40 countries who speak 20 different languages. Almost half (45 percent) of Bailey's students are Hispanic, 25 percent are White, 20 percent are Asian, and 10 percent are African American. Bailey's is currently experiencing an influx of refugees from Bosnia and Somalia, who began arriving in 1996. About 300 out-of-boundary students (i.e., students who reside outside of Bailey's attendance area), required by the county to be fluent in English, vie for 30 first-grade openings each year; altogether, about 200 out-of-boundary students attend Bailey's.

Two new wings added to the school house state-of-the-art resources areas, including a television studio, computer and science labs, a musical technology lab (including synthesizers and computer programs that teach music), a performing arts studio, a Math Exploratorium, a large gymnasium, and an art room. Principal Carol Franz reminds envious visitors, of which the school has many, "To whom much is given, much is expected." Indeed, expectations for Bailey's are high, and its dedicated staff have met or exceeded most of them with thoughtful leadership, careful planning, and innovative ideas.

Even with the new resources provided by the magnet program, Bailey's still faced daunting challenges, beginning with the need to bring the community back together after the bitter battle over

whether to redraw the school's boundaries. The depth of some parents' bitterness in the wake of that struggle are best reflected in the comments of the school's former PTA president, who told *The Washington Post* after the school board's vote to fund the magnet program, "If you want to know the price of racism in Fairfax County, it's \$3 million." If the magnet program was to be a success, Bailey's would have to show families throughout the community that its multicultural environment would benefit all students. Other challenges, many of which the school still faces, included a high rate of student mobility, educating students of disparate skill levels, including different levels of English-language proficiency, integrating all of the school's new resources into the classroom-based curriculum, and providing planning time and professional development opportunities that enable teachers to implement the challenging integrated curriculum.

The Bailey's Approach

Despite some community members' vocal opposition to sending their students to a school where the majority of students do not speak English as their native language, Bailey's took the bold step of choosing to integrate all students, exposing them to the same curriculum and resources. Bailey's staff developed goals to reflect their commitment to provide students with a first-rate education. These goals are to:

- Maintain a learning environment that communicates high expectations for all students
- Meet every child's educational needs at their developmental level, using a diverse array of instructional strategies as needed
- Give students many different types of opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned and can do
- Give staff members responsibility for developing and implementing appropriate strategies and programs
- Allow students a voice in their own education

Ingrained in the school's culture is the unwritten goal of maximizing cross-cultural interaction and understanding. This commitment is reflected in almost everything the school does, from the way it puts together its classroom rosters to its choice of curriculum and instructional strategies. When Bailey's became a magnet school, the staff decided to integrate its out-of-boundary students rather than create a special program for them, as many magnet schools do. So far, the school's efforts have

produced not only strong academic results, but broad-based community support for the school. The school's educational strategies enable it to use its diversity as a strength.

Classroom Rosters

Bailey's commitment to building a truly integrated school community begins with its classroom rosters. In accordance with its ethic of equity, the school resists isolating students based on their level of English-language proficiency or skill levels. The school categorizes every student in the school according to multiple criteria, not to segregate them, but to promote diversity in every classroom so that students learn to work with peers from all backgrounds and abilities. Some of the categories used include students' English proficiency, race/ethnicity, gender, academic skill level, native language, special education status, and more. This approach allows the school to ensure that every classroom contains a mix of students from all categories. Both native English speakers (who learn about other nations and languages) and English language learners ("The kids need English-speaking role models," commented a teacher) benefit from this approach.

Professional Staff

Bailey's relies heavily on its teachers' professionalism to ensure that the school meets all students' needs. Though not as diverse as their students--the vast majority of classroom teachers are White women--it is only through

teachers' shared commitment to developing and successfully implementing Bailey's imaginative curriculum and their appreciation for the opportunities presented by their students' diversity, that Bailey's can provide its students with an appropriate education. The principal recruits teachers based on their desire and ability to work with diverse populations (some have experience teaching, living, or studying in other cultures). She also looks for candidates with a knowledge of appropriate instructional strategies or a desire to learn those strategies through opportunities provided by the county or other organizations.

"Empowering teachers makes a lot more happen than holding the power yourself."

Carol Franz, Principal

The school's professional atmosphere is sustained through weekly grade-level meetings (which include the Spanish Immersion, special education, and ESL teachers), a monthly Teacher Research group, paid planning time during the summer, and informal interactions among teachers. All these

opportunities allow teachers to exchange ideas, explore and suggest alternative strategies for teaching diverse groups of students, and pursue their own personal and professional growth. “What I’ve learned about teaching I learned here,” one teacher assured us. The 20 members of Bailey’s teacher research group select their own research questions, conduct research, and share their findings through articles and presentations. According to one member, the group provides “a time for us to be reflective practitioners. We can really think about what we’re doing in our classroom.” It comes as little surprise, then, that three Bailey’s teachers recently completed the challenging requirements for earning national certification for teaching from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Curriculum and Instruction

Bailey’s unique educational program, developed and refined by teachers and parents at the school, is designed to both take advantage of and account for students’ diversity. The curriculum revolves around conceptual units that include substantial hands-on and interactive learning activities that help students master the necessary knowledge and skills. Students are quick to point out the benefits of this approach: “You actually get to do something instead of just sitting down and reading a book,” said one student enthusiastically. Teachers develop lessons that include a conceptual base that all students are expected to master, a second tier that students are expected to understand according to their different developmental levels, and a third level designed for the most advanced students. The units require students to work together, conduct some basic research, and use varied materials and strategies to demonstrate what they learn. At the conclusion of some units, classes create and display an “exhibit” about what they have learned. The school has a display area reserved for the exhibits so that students throughout the school can learn from their peers in other classes and grades.

This instructional approach has three primary advantages for Bailey’s students. First, it encourages students to work together, creating supportive relationships that help all students learn. Indeed, teachers and students alike told us that students often take the initiative in helping new students become acclimated to their classes and in working together to solve problems. Second, the use of multiple instructional strategies, including hands-on teaching strategies and demonstrations, gives all students alternative modes for learning the subject matter. For students who learn better by engaging in hands-on activities and demonstrating what they learn in tangible ways, teachers’ use of hands-on learning helps reinforce the skills and knowledge learned through reading and other means. Students with limited English proficiency may derive the greatest benefits from this approach: compared with learning through reading or listening, learning through doing and showing relies less on language proficiency. Third, Bailey’s instructional approach enables teachers to work with students of varied

academic abilities at the same time. The multi-level unit designs give all students the opportunity to learn and grow according to their talents, efforts, and skills.

Spanish-Language Immersion and English-as-a-Second Language (ESL)

Bailey's Spanish Partial-Immersion program, which predates its magnet status by three years, serves about 150 students in grades 1-5. Students enrolled in the program receive reading/language arts and social studies instruction in English, and math, science, and health instruction in Spanish. Two program features reflect Bailey's commitment to building cross-cultural contact, and distinguish this program from similar programs in other schools. First, the program welcomes native Spanish speaking students so that they can model fluent Spanish for non-native Spanish speakers. Second, students in the partial-immersion program are not kept together for the subjects they study in English. Instead, they are scattered in classrooms throughout the school as part of Bailey's approach to ensuring diversity in all classrooms, thus preventing an elitist atmosphere within the partial-immersion program.

Bailey's applies similar principles to its English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Students eligible for ESL services are assigned to all classrooms. Only those speaking very little English (typically those students who have just arrived in the United States) leave the classroom for ESL instruction. First-graders are not pulled out at all for ESL instruction. Bailey's also blurs the distinction between classroom teachers and teachers who provide ESL instruction; several teachers who provide ESL instruction have their own classrooms, with a mixture of students from all backgrounds and language proficiency levels.

Resource Areas

The \$3 million renovation of Bailey's established numerous resource areas, including a television studio, computer and science labs, a musical technology lab (including synthesizers and computer programs that teach music), a performing arts studio, a Math Exploratorium, a large gymnasium, and an art room. Although

the resources available to students and teachers at Bailey's are impressive, the school's policy of giving all students and teachers equal access to those resources is also important to its mission. For instance,

"Resource areas provide a richness to the program and provide an opportunity for our second language learners to be more experiential. It's like an enrichment program for everybody."

Carol Franz, Principal

not only do all fifth-grade students rotate through the school's television studio to produce a morning news report on closed-circuit television, but all are encouraged to play different roles, including anchor, cameraperson, and various technical roles. Besides the television studio, the other resource labs, each staffed by a teacher or instructional assistant, exist only to enrich and enhance classroom instruction. Instead of offering a separate curriculum apart from what students are learning in their classes, resource labs work with classroom teachers to build upon what students are learning in their classrooms. For example, second graders use the science lab to dissect invertebrates once they learn about them in class, and teachers use the performing arts stage to arrange small-scale class performances based on books that their students have read in class. Classroom teachers schedule time in a lab according to their need, not according to a predetermined schedule. Weekly schedules distributed by resource staff alert classroom teachers to gaps available to be filled on short notice.

Class Meetings

Almost all classes in grades 3-5 hold class meetings regularly to allow students to share good news with their classmates and teachers and to discuss issues affecting students either individually or collectively. Each room has a box into which only students can drop suggestions for issues to discuss during class meetings; at each meeting, the teacher draws one or more suggestions from the box for the group to discuss during the meeting. Although a variety of topics are discussed, issues related to interpersonal relations are common. During one meeting in particular, the students sat in a circle on the floor to encourage participation by all students. The meeting began with students sharing positive observations about their classmates. They then spent 15 minutes discussing possible solutions to the problem of students tripping over bookbags left on the floor. Another teacher recounted that he drew a card from the suggestion box on the first day of school from a student who did not wish to sit next to another student because "her skin is black." The teacher reported that he had to give very little direction to the discussion because students in his class were eager to express their disapproval. While this discussion no doubt has deeper social consequences than the bookbag problem, perhaps of greater significance than the specific topics that students discuss is the fact that through these meetings, students from all backgrounds become accustomed to working together to solve problems. According to one teacher, class meetings are an asset because "the walls fall down--you're building a classroom community."

Parent and Community Involvement

Parents and community members actively support teaching and learning at Bailey’s. The Bailey’s Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) has an active membership that is composed of parents of all races, religions, and nationalities. The PTA provides books for the Reading Is Fundamental program, sponsors Teacher Appreciation Week, funds cultural assemblies, and provides each teacher with a \$50 gift annually in appreciation for their hard work during the year. According to the PTA president, teachers may spend the money however they choose, but most decide to spend it on school supplies and instructional materials. To better communicate with parents at the school, the PTA publishes its newsletter in five languages. Some PTA members adopt families who are new to the United States, helping them to settle into their new homes, find employment, enroll their children in school, and gain access to the services they need.

“We wanted to send our children to a school that looks like America.”

Bailey’s parent

Bailey’s principal and PTA members forge partnerships with community organizations in order to enhance the resources and services available to Bailey’s students and families. For example, nursing students from George Mason University not only enrich the school’s health curriculum but also offer health screenings and home-based follow-ups. Some parents establish ties with social service agencies to provide clothing and furniture for families new to the country. U.S. Forest Service employees serve as mentors, and students from nearby J.E.B. Stuart High School tutor Bailey’s students in the after-school Homework Center. These additional services are a testament to the school’s commitment to meeting its students’ needs.

Bailey’s also supports parents’ efforts to help their children succeed in school. Bailey’s uses a Total School Approach grant¹ from FCPS to employ a full-time Hispanic parent liaison. The liaison’s primary responsibility is to reach out to the school’s Hispanic parents, but in

“This school takes advantage of every resource [it has]--you don’t have to speak the language, you don’t have to be educated [to help].”

Bailey’s Parent Liaison

¹Total School Approach grants replaced the school district’s Minority Student Achievement discretionary grants, which had been a key component of the county’s efforts to raise the academic achievement of minority students.

reality she provides all parents with valuable information and access to various services, all in an environment of friendship and support. For example, she helped one parent secure a job as a custodian in the school, providing a reference on his behalf to the county employment office. Working out of a large trailer that serves as a Parent Center, she arranges presentations to parents by county agencies that provide family services, helps parents find jobs, and manages a food and toy "boutique" that consists of donated items. The county also offers adult ESL classes in the trailer. According to the liaison, "Parents in the area know that they can come here and ask for help and get it." The parent liaison has worked hard to develop activities that bring parents of all backgrounds together. For example, twice a month, she invites parents to a potluck breakfast that includes a presentation or discussion of interest to them. This Breakfast Club, as she calls it, gives parents an opportunity to meet one another, try foods from different countries, and discuss or learn about the particular theme for that breakfast. Through the Breakfast Club program, parents have shared their family histories and cultural differences and similarities. As one parent observed, "If we know each other, we get along better." The welcoming atmosphere generated by the parent liaison also encourages parents to become more involved. For example, parents volunteer in classrooms, serve as chaperones on field trips, and help with special events such as stage productions (by sewing costumes) and the school's International Fair (by furnishing food, clothing, and music from their respective countries).

Staff members are also invested in making parents feel welcome. Parents are invited to join their children for breakfast and lunch, and many do. On the day of our visit, several parents had come to enjoy the special "Thanksgiving lunch" with their children. According to the principal, "The school is very open, and parents can come and go through the building without a prearranged visit." Parents are also encouraged to speak with staff about any problems. "When I come to find solutions to problems," one parent confirmed, "I am not brushed aside. The staff works to help parents solve problems. You can't ask for more than that. We work together to come up with solutions." Parents are also encouraged to become familiar with what their children are learning through Family Science Nights, Family Literacy Nights, and "tool kits" consisting of educational materials and games sent home with first graders on a rotating basis. In addition, office staff and parent volunteers compile folders containing student work, letters to parents, lunch menus, and calendars that are sent home with every student each Thursday.

Evidence of Success

Bailey's efforts have yielded a vibrant and integrated school community as well as impressive academic outcomes. In 1996-97, the first year that Fairfax County administered the Stanford

Achievement Test Ninth Edition (Stanford 9), Bailey's fifth-graders scored, on average, at the 70th percentile in reading and the 74th percentile in math. Those scores fell just below the districtwide averages, but far exceeded both the state and national averages. The school was unable to provide scores according to students' race/ethnicity and language proficiency for 1996-97. In earlier years, however, scores on the district's Program of Studies math tests for non-native English speakers at Bailey's were on a par with the scores of native English speakers. On the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, which FCPS no longer administers, composite scores from 1992 to 1994 improved for students from all racial groups. Although white students scored considerably higher in all subject areas than did African American and Hispanic students, the gap between them narrowed over that time period.

Just as important as Bailey's academic achievement is its success in bringing together children and families from all backgrounds. A fifth-grader from the Philippines told about the day she needed a partner to edit something she had written. The only person available was an African American student with whom she did not get along. After working together, the two became good friends, and now they hope one day to become a famous singing duet. The class meetings, Breakfast Club, and International Fair

"You learn about different countries and cultures just by being friends with the person sitting next to you."

Bailey's student

"In second grade, I didn't speak English and they did hand motions to me. In third grade I understood more English. Now [in fifth grade], I help students who don't speak English."

Bailey's student

reflect the school's commitment to forging a shared experience for all students. Several students confirmed teachers' views that students help newcomers settle into their new environments. When asked how they communicate with students who don't speak the same language, one student said, "We're like their friends, but we can't really communicate with them. We use tone of voice, signs with our hands, acting out. It feels sometimes like you're the teacher." Students were pleased with their experiences at Bailey's: "It would be very boring to have people from the same country," one student commented. "That's why my mother lets me come here," explained another.

Lessons for Other Schools

There is no question that most schools will never match the material resources available to students at Bailey's or that those resources have contributed greatly to the school's success. Nevertheless, there is still much that other schools serving diverse student populations can learn from Bailey's. The school has worked hard to become the multicultural haven that it is today. Twenty years

ago, Bailey's was still a neighborhood school with a student body that was predominantly, but it was experiencing an influx of Hispanic and Asian students. Students who were not fluent in English often missed out on much of the learning that occurred in the classroom. For large portions of each day, these students left the room to learn English, and when they returned, they often could not follow the lesson; what's more, they received little or no help from their fellow students. Cross-cultural tensions also existed among students, and occasionally manifested themselves in fights, name-calling, and more. According to every administrator, teacher, student, and parent with whom we spoke, Bailey's enjoys a whole new culture of cross-cultural respect and academic excellence 20 years later that has emerged from the staff's hard work and thoughtful implementation of educational strategies designed to use diversity as a strength.

The first lesson that other schools can learn from Bailey's is the importance of creating a commitment to building a community of learners in which all students are represented and appreciated. This begins with its policy of developing representative class rosters and, to the extent possible, meeting all students' educational needs in the classroom rather than pulling students out of class. It includes maintaining high expectations for all students, a commitment to high academic standards, and adopting a curriculum that enables all students, not just those proficient in English, to master important skills and content. Finally, it entails a recognition of the value of diversity in the classroom, inviting students to share their stories and experiences while encouraging cross-cultural teaming.

Another key to Bailey's success has been the principal's focus on recruiting skilled and dedicated teachers, and on creating a professional atmosphere in which those teachers have access to the material and professional resources they need to serve their students. Without the skill that Bailey's teachers bring to the job, the school's educational program would struggle under the tremendous challenges facing the school. The principal identifies and hires teachers who welcome the opportunity to teach in a multicultural setting and finds ways to support them professionally. She musters resources that help keep teachers informed about the varied cultural norms they encounter in their classrooms. She also provides them with opportunities to grow as professionals by collaborating with their peers. Funding from the magnet program has enabled teachers to meet for one or two weeks each summer to develop and fine-tune a curriculum suited to their students. Other schools wishing to replicate this approach might turn to funding from any of several U.S. Department of Education programs, including Title I, the Eisenhower professional development program, or Goals 2000. The Teacher Research group, which teachers run on their own initiative and time, speaks to their commitment to staying abreast of the latest research in their profession and to maintaining an environment that welcomes the open exchange of ideas.

A third element of Bailey's success is its dedication not just to informing and involving parents, but to offering them whatever assistance they need to be effective and better parents. Its efforts are rewarded by parents' active involvement in the school, which only serves to enrich the learning environment. The centerpiece of the school's effort, of course, is the parent liaison. Without full-time attention to parents' needs, schools quickly find that parent support and involvement lags. Other schools that receive federal Title I funds and that wish to increase their parent involvement would do well to replicate the position of parent liaison by using the portion of Title I funds reserved for parent involvement activities.

Questions for Further Consideration

1. How does daily classroom instruction reflect the school's ethic of equity? Do all students have equal opportunities to learn and to demonstrate what they learn in the classroom?
2. What mechanisms (e.g., staff, resources, tests, tools) does Bailey's have in place to help incoming students make a successful transition to their new school environment?
3. What accounts for the gaps in the performance of White and other students at Bailey's? How does the size of gaps found at Bailey's compare with similar gaps at other schools in the district? In the country?
4. What is the composition of the pool from which Bailey's hires new teachers? Do other schools in the county have more success in hiring qualified minority candidates? Why or why not?
5. How do Bailey's students perform when they advance to middle and high school?