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Education forum will explore links between schools, community

By [Jennifer McNulty](#)

Educators and parents seeking a model for education that's rooted in community and civic engagement will want to attend a free public forum on Wednesday, April 5, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. in the Merrill College Cultural Center.

Participants will describe several projects in which students in low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse neighborhoods benefited from links between their school and the broader community. Discussion will focus on ways that school-community connections empower students, enhance academic achievement, and energize democracy by building alliances and encouraging activism.

"School reform in this country has largely failed poor students and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds," said Ronald Glass, associate professor of education, who is organizing the forum. "The focus on standards and testing ignores the conditions outside of school that make it difficult for kids to learn."

Such poverty-related factors as inadequate health and dental care, substandard housing, and poor nutrition make it difficult for many children to succeed, said Glass. "There's only so much schools can do, which is why we want to link school reform with broader community development issues," he said. "If we want to help low-income students, we need to help their parents."

Glass hopes to launch a project on the Central Coast that would engage parents, businesses, unions, students, teachers, churches, and community organizers.

Forum attendees will learn about projects around the world that have integrated education, community, and democracy:

- **Luis Gandin** of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre, Brazil, will describe the Workers' Party Citizen School experiment and the educational and political impacts of the construction of 70 schools in the city's poorest neighborhoods.
- **Gustavo Fischman** of Arizona State University will discuss the global Educative Cities movement, an effort to integrate all the cultural and educational spaces of cities, such as museums, parks, schools, and universities, in the service of advancing the poor.
- **Pia Wong** of California State University, Sacramento, and director of the Equity Network in Sacramento, will discuss the network's partnership with 12 professional



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development schools that serve poor immigrants from Laos, Mexico, and the Ukraine. She will discuss projects that involve parents, integrate garden-based science into the curriculum, and develop bilingual science curriculum around the health issues of the community: diabetes, heart disease, and drug and alcohol abuse.

- **Pauline Lipman**, director of the Institute for Teacher Development and Research at DePaul University, will discuss urban school reform in Chicago and the convergence of local and global economic and education policy forces that shape efforts to improve education and the capacity of teachers to make a difference for both students and communities.

Local educators will respond to the guest presentations and discuss themes within the context of the Central Coast region. The forum is being cosponsored by the Education Department and the UCSC Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community (CJTC). Opening remarks will be made by Glass, Rodney Ogawa, chair of the UCSC Education Department, and Manuel Pastor, codirector of CJTC and a professor of Latin American and Latino studies. Increasing parental involvement in educational policy making would help "energize" communities, said Pastor.

Noting the initial underrepresentation of Latinos in the recent debate over school closings in Santa Cruz, Pastor said, "Ultimately, many families were energized and did voice their concerns." Community schools could provide another bridge to greater engagement, especially if they provided English-language instruction to parents and others, said Pastor. "English is the biggest factor boosting economic outcomes," he noted.

Glass doesn't shy away from measuring the academic impact of community-based reforms on students in standard ways: by testing students and measuring drop-out and retention rates. Community impact could be gauged by evaluating measures of political engagement, such as voting rates. "We believe meaningful education improves test outcomes, while education that focuses strictly on test outcomes fails to be meaningful," he said.

The initiatives being launched by the symposium are "long-term and open-ended," said Glass. "It's a democratic process of bringing forces together in a way that makes sense for a particular community. It's not a top-down approach where the university dictates the scope of the project. This forum is an invitation to a conversation."