

**Making and Remaking Schools
Panel Introduction by Helen
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I am speaking here only to introduce. You don't want to hear the trials of working in a charter school, which of course is a model of accountability, which means that no matter what you do, if your test scores are not good, you can look at not having a school. We've just gone through our fifth year review. Fortunately the test scores did go up last year, so we're starting to show a "trend." It needs to be a trend for us to continue.

I did want to share with you what we heard from Mr. James Merriman, who is the head of the Charter School Institute, the overseeing group that works for SUNY Board of Trustees that decides whether or not we get to be a school. He read to us our mission statement, which was written by Taeko Onishi and our great friend Jay Murnane.

"The Ark Community Charter School's continuing mission is to create within the City of Troy a community that fosters the academic, social and spiritual growth of our members in an environment that is both supportive and challenging. In this community everyone is celebrated, respected and heard. All are intellectually engaged, socially concerned, ethically responsible, and culturally open minded."

Much of this is perhaps immeasurable. Yet it was recognized that most of this mission has been achieved. It was obvious visiting the school and spending a few days there that everyone is socially concerned, ethically responsible, culturally open minded, that

we have fostered social and spiritual growth, and that our children feel happy and safe. This though immeasurable is obvious: the atmosphere in the building, the way the children feel. From the beginning they have said this to us, that we have created a loving, comforting environment for our children where they feel safe and protected.

And yet none of that seems to matter. In the current political world what matters is academic success, something that some people believe is measurable by standardized tests, and that we will be giving these tests to younger and younger children.

You don't want to hear the rest of this tale. [It's enough] to know that Liliana and I and some of our other colleagues strive to keep our school alive and well -- a place where our children can explore and think and learn through their own interests, to be celebrated for whom they are -- as much as we can, within a continually restrictive environment.