

Failing at School: Lessons for Redesigning Urban High Schools (series on school reform)

Camille A. Farrington



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Roughly half of all incoming ninth graders across urban districts will fail classes and drop out of school without a diploma. *Failing at School* starts with the premise that urban American high schools generate such widespread student failure not because of some fault of the students who attend them but because high schools were designed to stratify achievement and let only the top performers advance to higher levels of education. This design is particularly detrimental for low-income, racial/ethnic minority students. To get different results, Farrington proposes fundamental changes based on what we now know about how students learn, what motivates them to engage in learning, and what kinds of educational systems and structures would best support their learning.

"This is a groundbreaking and eye-opening study because it does what few studies of high school truly do: get inside the hearts and minds of teen-agers and show what their experience of school looks and feels like to them. The analysis of students who fail is revealing and powerful. There are poignant and revealing stories of just how a few student mistakes or teacher insensitivities lead to unfortunate and long-lasting results. More importantly, these case studies, their nuances, and their implications take us beyond the clichés and simplistic theories about schools and reform. Most importantly, we read of tangible and intelligent solutions that can be instituted, based on the facts on the ground. I highly recommend this book to everyone interested in getting beyond the typical talking points of school reform."

-Grant Wiggins, Authentic Education

"Camille Farrington details how high schools trap students along developmental trajectories distorted by structural factors—resources, values and practices—beyond their control. Grounded firmly in research, she describes a better way forward. This book is an important contribution to the re-visioning of American high schools."

-Ronald F. Ferguson, faculty director, Achievement Gap Initiative, Harvard University

"Why is there such a pattern of failure in urban high schools? This is a vital issue for every city in America. Camille Farrington's analysis of the roots of this problem and suggestions for structural changes to break this cycle is the best I have seen. This book combines research and practitioner wisdom with common sense and heart, and for those of us engaged in this work, presents concrete directions for positive change."

-Ron Berger, chief academic officer, Expeditionary Learning

Book Features:

- Offers concrete strategies for redesigning high schools based on four dimensions of student achievement—structural, academic, developmental, and motivational.
- Highlights the voices of students to illustrate fundamental problems with the way we currently "do school."
- Addresses the new Common Core State Standards and the potential of this major reform effort to move us

toward equity and excellence.

Camille A. Farrington is a research associate (assistant professor) at The University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration and the Consortium on Chicago School Research and director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment for the Network for College Success.

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