

For nine weeks, Bennet and two dozen aides and volunteers had been fanning out across neighborhoods like Pedro's, trying to sell school to skeptical kids. The campaign had been harder to start than a political one, since many of its targets were illegal and didn't want to be found, and the goal was not just a trip to the polls. Still, with the help of Julissa and seven other students who were hired as peer counsellors and part-time sleuths, the district managed to locate all but ten of the former Manual students. Weekend visits began, and hundreds of reclamation projects got under way. "Oh, I'm in school, it's going great," said almost every child to whom Bennet spoke, especially on the days when Univision sent a cameraman to accompany him. Then he got better at asking the questions.

In the first month of school, four hundred and sixty-three former Manual students showed up—a better rate of return than after previous summers, and a number that averted a public-relations debacle. The first weeks meant little, though: math had not yet become confusing and term papers weren't due. Bennet and his people kept pounding on doors and shaking chain-link gates—better not to surprise the dogs, they'd learned. And the number of children in school held steady.

Aides rode the bus with pregnant girls, showing them a school where they could bring their babies, and argued with parents about the value of a high-school diploma. A band of outreach workers, the educational equivalents of repo men, arranged part-time jobs and night-school curricula for other resisters. "We've been trying to erect reforms over this weak political, economic, and cultural scaffolding," Bennet said after one long day of visits. "It's not impossible, but, God, it's really, really hard." Absenteeism remained high, and every success was contingent; it took a month to get Pedro into school, whereupon he failed all of his courses. But one rainy night last fall the head repo man, Steve Dobo, sensed that something had changed when he asked a young man hanging out on a corner if he knew how to find a certain kid. "You the police?" was what he expected, along with the rolling of eyes. Instead he got "You the schools?"

Bennet didn't have much time, then, to think through what he'd set in motion: a systematic pursuit of the sort of student who lowered aggregate test scores and teacher morale. Owing to a statewide crackdown on illegal immigrants, kindergartners were showing up at school without a record of a home or a parent; teachers were complaining that the pace of reform left them exhausted; and he'd started a crusade against the lack-

lustre achievement at North High—this time, involving the community first.

Still, the fight to reclaim the former Manual students had no precedent in the age of No Child Left Behind. Out of panic, and of motivations that involved personal vanity as well as social justice, a safety net was being strung under a school system's hardest cases—one involving parents, mentors, fast-food restaurant managers, United Airlines executives and city-council members who knocked on doors, an engrossed media, nonprofit organizations, and student leaders like Julissa Torrez. Meanwhile, Bennet had persuaded foundations to donate staff and funds to keep the tracking effort going for three years, after which the effort's impact would be studied for application in other Denver schools, and in other cities, too. The notion of high expectations for poor children had been converted from the rhetorical to the specific and pragmatic, and a rescue effort that once seemed a sinkhole of time and effort began to look like a prototype.

Norberto Felix-Cruz knew that something was up when he returned from work one Saturday evening to hear that he'd missed a visit from a freckled guy in sneakers, and, more important, a reporter from "9NEWS." They wanted to know what he and his cousins were thinking about school. What Norberto was thinking was simple: fear of jail had ruled out drug dealing that summer, and now the lack of drug-dealing income ruled out school. But, as he did his drywall the next week, he wondered whether the man in sneakers was in league with the J.R.O.T.C. teacher, who seemed to be on his case, too.

People were waiting for him at North High; that was the line, and he didn't quite believe it, since his presence in school had barely registered before. But, on his way to and from work, he passed kids whose presence had registered even less than his own, kids whom Julissa had marked, in her yearbook, with an "x." They were heading to the bus stop with backpacks of books. They wore T-shirts that said "Manual Survivor." One morning after a job was finished and the rent had been paid, he drove to North High and enrolled. J.R.O.T.C. was social death there, too, so the battalion-commander job was his. It felt OK, until he was driving home on the freeway a week later, and the driver next to him lost control of his car. Norberto was unhurt, but the truck on which his jobs depended had five thousand dollars' worth of damage. His mother told him to quit North High the next day.

However, when the insurance payment arrived, three weeks later, and put the family debts in order, Norberto

decided to try again. The only school near his house was an online charter school like Julissa's; it recruited from the juvenile-justice system, and didn't aim high. But it was the best shot he had at a diploma, and he took it.

"What bugs me is how the principal tries to identify," Norberto said to Julissa one cloudless autumn afternoon. "He says stuff like 'I know where you boys are coming from, you gangstas, caught up in the 'hood.'" They were riding in the patched-up truck, comparing their new schools. Norberto was doing well, and liked his math and art teachers. "They don't help you all that much—you're sort of on your own," he said. "But I guess I'll be on my own in real life, too." Julissa was similarly ambivalent: the kids in her online school looked at MySpace instead of studying, and there didn't seem to be any books. However, with the encouragement of several mentors whom she'd acquired while working on the Manual rescue, she was about to transfer to Thomas Jefferson, one of the stronger public high schools in the city.

"The principal there, Sandra—I'm getting to know her, and you can just tell she's out there for kids," she told Norberto. She added that she now had a "meetings notebook" in addition to her poetry one, and that

Sandra's cell-phone number was in it. "It's where I scribble things down when I go visit the parents who don't have time to come to community meetings, or when we talk about what the new Manual should look like, or when I do a pop-up visit at a high school—like, when a Manual student calls the center and says she's being mistreated. I've got Bennet's cell-phone number in there, too."

Norberto said, "Like, for me this school year, I'm letting my spark up, trying to focus. But sometimes, you know, I can't even sleep. I miss school for work, and, ten years into the future, all I am is a dropout."

"Yeah, I have to miss school, too, to do my pop-ups."

"Hey, Julissa. I didn't say you. I was talking about me, Norberto. I was trying to tell you—"

He braked hard: a police standoff, twelve officers kneeling behind sedans, guns pointed at a small brown house. He swerved down a side street as Julissa leaned out the window, trying to watch their backs. "The eleven-year-old with the Uzi, no one wants to get to the core of it," he murmured, and then let the subject go. Julissa was full of fresher conversation, and he was going to have to work to keep up.

## Chapter 13 Review Questions

1. What are the four dominant reorganization prescriptions, or "the four tides of reform," outlined in Paul Light's essay? Their sources? Impacts? Upsides and downsides of each one? Why does he argue that today can be characterized as an era of "hyper-reform"? What does Light mean by that term?
2. Based upon your reading of the case study, "Expectations," does Light's "four tides" thesis which was drawn from the federal government apply to local level reorganizations? If so, why? If not, why not? Also his "hyper-reform" thesis?
3. Think about Norton Long's concept of "administrative power" that was discussed in chapter 4. How does administrative power influence the success or failure of government reorganizations? In this case, where did Superintendent Bennet's power come from to initiate reforms? What were the sources of his opposition?
4. In retrospect, how should Bennet have better crafted his reorganization strategy before he implemented it? Learned more about the community that Manual served? Communicated his ideas for change more effectively? What are the seminal lessons in this case regarding effective planning for administrative reorganization in order to ensure success?
5. Why did the author entitle this story "Expectations"? Its importance throughout? How did the expectations of those involved with this school reform initiative affect the outcome? Bennet's expectations? Denver's leaders'? Parents'? Students'? Teachers'? Employers'? Why are expectations so difficult to understand yet so vital to shaping what happens in this case, or for that matter any reorganization case?
6. Ultimately how should this reorganization initiative be evaluated? By what criteria or yardstick can its success or failure be measured?