



For immediate release

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## Whitman reveals which schools are helping poor, minority kids succeed—and why

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*“Sweating the Small Stuff is easily the best account of high-performing urban schools I have read.”*

—Lawrence Mead, Professor of Politics and Public Policy, New York University

*“In this illuminating book David Whitman shows that excellent schools can change the cultural habits and norms that threaten to keep disadvantaged kids off the ladder of social mobility in our land of opportunity.”*

—Abigail Thernstrom, vice chair, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and co-author, *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*

*“This book tells the story of six remarkable inner-city secondary schools that have eliminated the achievement gap...or at least come close. They are living proof that poor, minority kids can learn as much as middle-class white kids — and that great schools can make an enormous difference in their lives, thus giving the lie to defeatists, determinists, and apologists who insist that this isn’t really possible in today’s America.”*

—Chester E. Finn, Jr., President, Thomas B. Fordham Institute

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The most promising development in K-12 education in recent years is the emergence of a new breed of “paternalistic” secondary schools that enable disadvantaged students to close the achievement gap with their more affluent peers. These schools not only dramatically boost academic achievement but also build and reinforce the character traits and middle-class values that inner-city adolescents can use to rise out of poverty and onto the path of prosperity and mobility. David Whitman, a former award-winning journalist for *U.S. News & World Report*, describes these “no excuses” schools that teach children not only how to think keenly but also how to act properly in **Sweating the Small Stuff: Inner-City Schools and the New Paternalism** (Paperback \$16.95, ISBN: 978-0-615-21408-5, pub date: July 1, 2008, MEDIA EMBARGO UNTIL: August 15, 2008, 12:01 AM).

**Sweating the Small Stuff** takes readers inside six of the new paternalistic secondary schools: the American Indian Public Charter School in Oakland, CA; Amistad Academy in New Haven, CT; Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Chicago, IL; KIPP Academy in The Bronx, NY; the SEED School in Washington, DC; and the University Park Campus School in Worcester, MA. All of these schools have gifted, committed teachers and dedicated, forceful principals. They also have rigorous academic standards and longer school days and academic years. But the key to their success is that they tell students exactly how they are expected to behave—and then supervise student behavior, with real rewards for compliance and penalties for noncompliance. Teachers ceaselessly monitor student conduct and character development to ensure that adolescents act respectfully, develop self-discipline, display good manners, work hard, and take responsibility for their actions.

Unlike the forbidding paternalistic institutions of yesteryear, however, these schools are also warm, energized places, where students often form close bonds with teachers and principals. Instructors are caring and authoritative like strict parents, cajoling students in addition to directing them to stay on task. In some respects, these “paternalistic” schools supplant as well as supplement the customary role of the family for disadvantaged inner-city teenagers.

The founders of today’s paternalistic schools are committed education reformers—most are self-identified liberals—who believe that closing the achievement gulf between white and minority students is the central civil rights challenge of our time. And their schools are universally applauded for placing poor kids on the path toward college—and out of poverty. Yet the idea of reintroducing paternalism in urban schools remains deeply controversial. Whitman argues that it shouldn’t be.

**Sweating the Small Stuff** can be contrasted with Charles Murray’s upcoming controversial book, **Real Education**, in a review essay or media segment on education issues. Murray contends that expanded spending, educational choice, and remedial programs that aim to raise academic achievement among low-performing disadvantaged students are a form of “educational romanticism” doomed to failure and should be jettisoned in favor of a policy that deliberately targets America’s best and brightest. By contrast, David Whitman rejects the defeatist view of school reform. In his meticulous, ground-level examination of six urban schools, Whitman documents that good schools transform the academic and social performance of inner-city minority students. If American schools “sweat the small stuff,” students can—and do—benefit enormously.

### **About the Author:**

David Whitman is a freelance writer based in Washington, D.C. He was a senior writer for *U.S. News & World Report* from 1985 to 2003, where he chiefly covered social policy. His articles have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, the *Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, and numerous other publications. Whitman is the author of **The Mad, Mad World of Textbook Adoption** (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2004) and **The Optimism Gap: The I’m OK-They’re Not Syndrome and the Myth of American Decline** (Walker, 1998).

#### **SWEATING THE SMALL STUFF**

**Inner-City Schools and the New Paternalism**

David Whitman

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