

## **The Backdrop: Challenges Facing Public Schools**

By David Bundy (2015)

We live in a world of continuous and rapid change. All of us are impacted by economic, social, demographic and technological change at an increasingly accelerating pace. All indications are that this pace of change will continue. In order to survive in such an environment, we must adapt.

Our public schools are highly affected by the changes in our world. It is in our public schools that all of these changes intersect, and schools are challenged to do more than ever to educate our children for success in today's economy.

Our public schools represent the institution with the greatest potential for interactions with children and families. In the U.S., 90 percent of all children and almost 100 percent of children at or below the poverty level attend public schools.

Never in our history has education been more vital to the future prospects of our youth. The need for new skill sets in the workplace is driving schools to provide new requirements to dramatically improve the skills of graduating students. In *Teaching the New Basic Skills*, economists Richard Murnane and Frank Levy demonstrated that nearly half of 17-year-olds in the U.S. do not possess the skills necessary to earn a middle-class living. Those skills include reading and math at a minimum ninth-grade level, problem-solving, the ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing, knowledge of and comfort with technology, and the ability to work productively in diverse groups.

Education does not exist as a separate component in the lives of children and families. Our society views education as the route to greater opportunity but often fails to see how current socio-economic conditions affect achievement. To best serve our children, we will need to understand and take account of the changing realities in the world outside our schools.

Many of our children need more support and guidance than they are currently receiving. It is not possible for schools to provide sufficient guidance and support alone; they must work in concert with the total community to assist children as they grow. The barriers we have placed between our schools and community organizations increase costs, lessen efficiency and, in the end, hold children back from achieving the skills they need to be successful in our increasingly complex world. We must work together.

