**The Education System Power Game**

Ms. Lopez—You are a single Latina mom who earned her GED and works at a daycare center with two kids, Sean and Charlotte. Your income puts you just over the poverty line so you don’t receive government help to raise your children. You only have enough income to live in a neighborhood whose schools have bad reputations. That is, the high school has a 65% dropout rate. As Ms. Lopez, you decide to approach Mr. Gonzalez, a man you’ve heard has been organizing some neighborhood parents. You haven’t spent much time around upper middle class people or people with college degrees, so you sense you are at a disadvantage when trying to talk to people in positions of authority. You know they often judge you and people like you unfairly and you wish they’d listen to you.

Mr. Smith—You are a white father of three who sends his kids to one of the best public high schools in the country, High Flying High School. You have made sure your kids had expensive summer and after-school enrichment activities, including horseback riding, summer math camps at MIT, cooking classes and service learning in Paris, France, and an elite tennis league. You do this because you know without a rich essay and deep academic enhancement, your kids will not be admitted to this school because they won’t get high enough entrance scores. Year after year it is rated the U.S.’s #1 high school by U.S. News and World Report, located just outside of Washington, D.C. You are also an executive at an industry leader in online social media as a Senior Vice President of a company that employs 40,000 people. You let your kids know that money is no object when it comes to college and that you expect them to be as successful as you are some day. Your company doesn’t worry too much about U.S. school quality; you can just hire from abroad if you want to. You are worried that a lower percentage of graduates last year matriculated to Ivy League schools—only 36% as opposed to 39% the previous year. You have also heard High Flying is relaxing admissions standards to attract more diverse students while at the same time watering down academic rigor.

Mr. Gonzalez—You are a high school graduate from El Salvador who fled during the Civil War there in the late 1980s. You are married, have three children in school from elementary to high school, and you work as the manager of a local grocery store which caters to the Latino community. You have organized many Latino parents to agitate against the generally low expectations teachers have of Latino students at Meadowbrook High. This active parent group has tried to offer panel presentations to the staff about what many Latino families are really like to work against the stereotypes their kids bring home that they’ve overheard, about Latinos being “lazy” and just in the U.S. as “illegals.” At first the school was happy when you organized a bake sale to help pay for the 11th grade field trip to the zoo (the only field trip the kids ever take in high school). But once the parents started to ask questions about teachers who didn’t give challenging assignments and who conveyed stereotypes about Latinos to their kids, you were treated with hostility by the principal and administrators. You also tried to organize against the tracking in the school where only a small elite number of kids are told they are special and tried to institute an initiative you read about where each and every child takes at least one AP class. You were told bluntly that such an initiative would “never work.” That hasn’t stopped you from getting parents together and working privately to try and help the kids in the community get ahead.

Dr. Ball—You are the superintendent of the school district. A white man, you have started a yearly initiative—talk to the Board night (once a year) with parents. You run a sophisticated software program that randomly selects parents to attend this meeting. You know that it’s not really fair that some schools are better because they’re in “better” neighborhoods, but you can’t fix everything. Besides, the people who demonstrate their interests to you and get face time with you know how to advocate for themselves, and so you listen to and cater to them. They include middle class and upper class folks who work professional, salaried jobs, where they can take time off if they want to support their schools and also if they want to lobby for an issue of importance to them. You know in your district some PTAs will pay for faculty to take university classes each year for free, where PTAs with less affluent families do very little.

Mr. Cooper—You are a white parent board member with kids in one of the “better” middle schools in the district. You have a law degree and are a partner at a local firm. You feel badly that some kids don’t get to go to a great school, and you’d even be open to busing kids around the district to help mix them up across socioeconomic lines, as has been done in districts like Seattle and Louisville, Kentucky. However you just want to help the district run smoothly, so you don’t try to make waves. The people you were elected to represent geographically are more concerned about the band, drama, and soccer programs, anyway.

Mrs. Jones—You are a white mom of two kids in one of the “better” elementary schools in the district and a board member. You have a college degree but stay at home because that’s what you want to do while your husband works at the company he owns. You find it aggravating that Latinos and “others” don’t work out their own problems and take advantage of the education system. It’s a free education after all. You have one black friend who works at your husband’s company and so you feel like you know that if she made it, so can all black people and “others.” You know that talking about race makes people uncomfortable but sometimes you just speak your mind. You have never studied multicultural education or read about how racial, gender, and class problems are systemic throughout the world. You want to make sure your kids and the kids in your neighborhood schools get the best chances to succeed in an increasingly competitive world.

DIRECTIONS: Fill out the following roles and be ready to present it to the class.

1. Dr. Ball—explain why everyone is meeting today and thank them. Invite them to talk.

2. Mr. Gonzalez—explain why you are frustrated with Meadowbrook High School.

3. Mrs. Jones—tell Mr. Gonzalez you are sure the highly educated faculty in this district don’t hold prejudices and that maybe they are only being sensitive.

4. Mr. Smith—explain some of your worries about High Flying High School.

5. Dr. Ball—address Mr. Smith’s concerns by paraphrasing them back to him and reassuring him how you might address them.

6. Mr. Cooper—address Mr. Gonzalez and tell him you wish the schools were more equitable but you don’t see a good way to fix things. Busing all over the district doesn’t seem like a good idea to you. Too many parents would be mad.

7. Mr. Gonzalez—without getting too angry, explain that you’re just as happy to organize Latino families but you wish the administration would stop getting in your way.

8. Dr. Ball—explain that the district has many problems it must address.

9. Mr. Smith—side with Dr. Ball and say how important it is for the district to maintain the #1 ranking of all U.S. high schools in order for the entire district to benefit.

10. Ms. Lopez-try to say something to support Mr. Gonzalez, but get frustrated.

11. Mrs. Jones—say something that is supposed to be kind but condescending to Ms. Lopez to make her stop talking.

12. Mr. Cooper —thank everyone for attending.

13. Mr. Gonzalez and Ms. Lopez walk out—the others stay behind. Mrs. Jones says to Dr. Ball, “Well, good thing that is only once a year! I hope you know what you are doing to make sure High Flying High School stays #1.”

14. Mr. Cooper talks to Mr. Smith about trying to set up a summer internship for one of his kids with Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith agrees to help out.

15. Dr. Ball excuses himself saying he has a couple principals to call that night.