

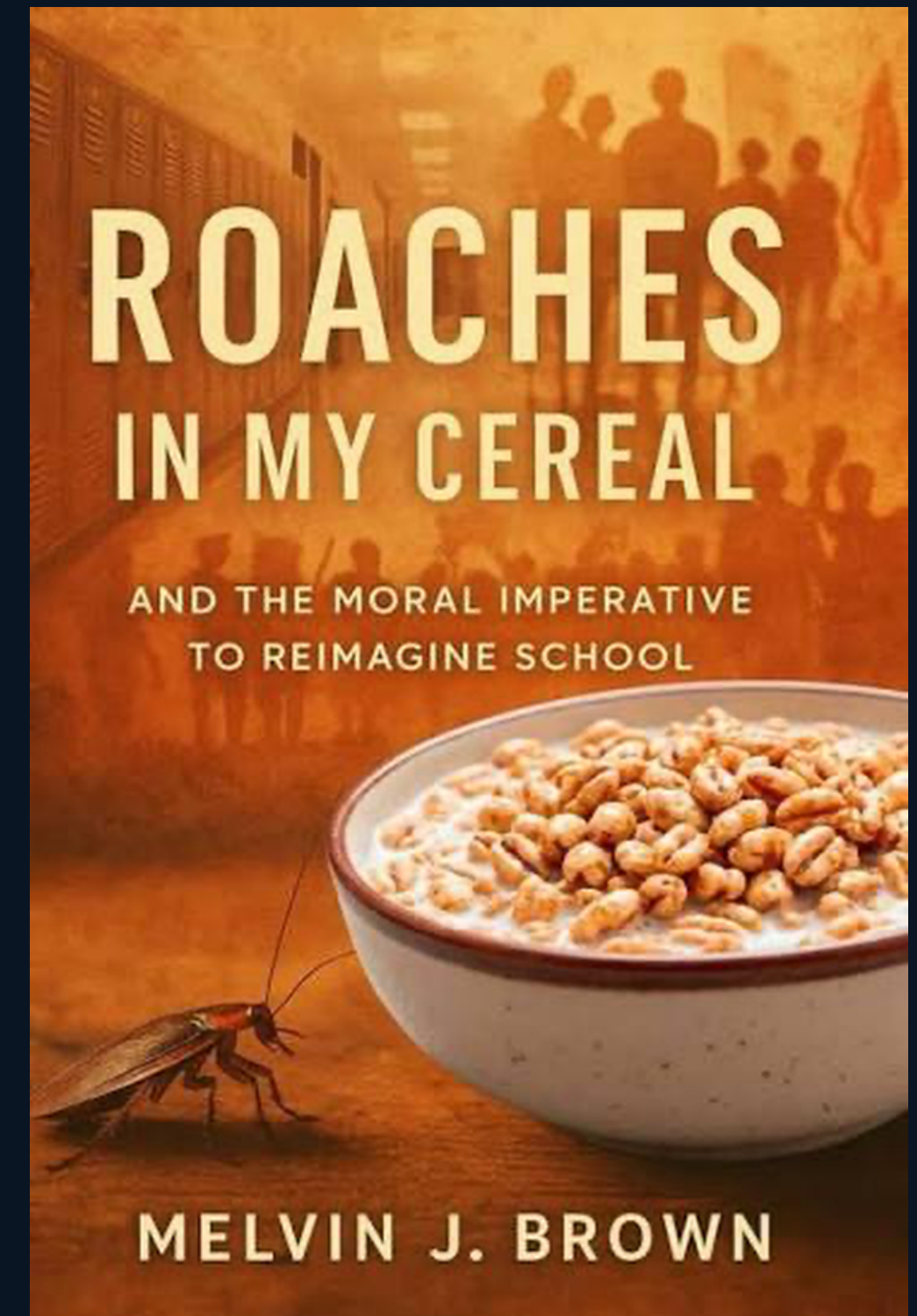
Roaches in My Cereal

And the Moral Imperative to Reimagine School



Dr. Melvin J. Brown

Author | Educator | Change Maker



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"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character — that is the goal of true education."

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Where Did This Title Come From?

- A real moment. A real shock.
- What happens when you discover something is deeply wrong?
- Do you put the bowl down and walk away?
- Or do you demand something better?





Dr. Melvin J. Brown

About Dr. Melvin J. Brown

- Educator | Author | Advocate
- Over three decades of experience in education
- Unapologetic advocate of public education and committed to equity, access, and opportunity for all students

"I wrote this book because our children deserve better — and so do the people who serve them."

Our Journey Today



See

The honest truth about
where we are



Understand

Why this is a moral
imperative



Imagine

What school could and
should look like



Act

What you can do starting
today

PART ONE

Seeing the Truth

"You cannot fix what you refuse to acknowledge."



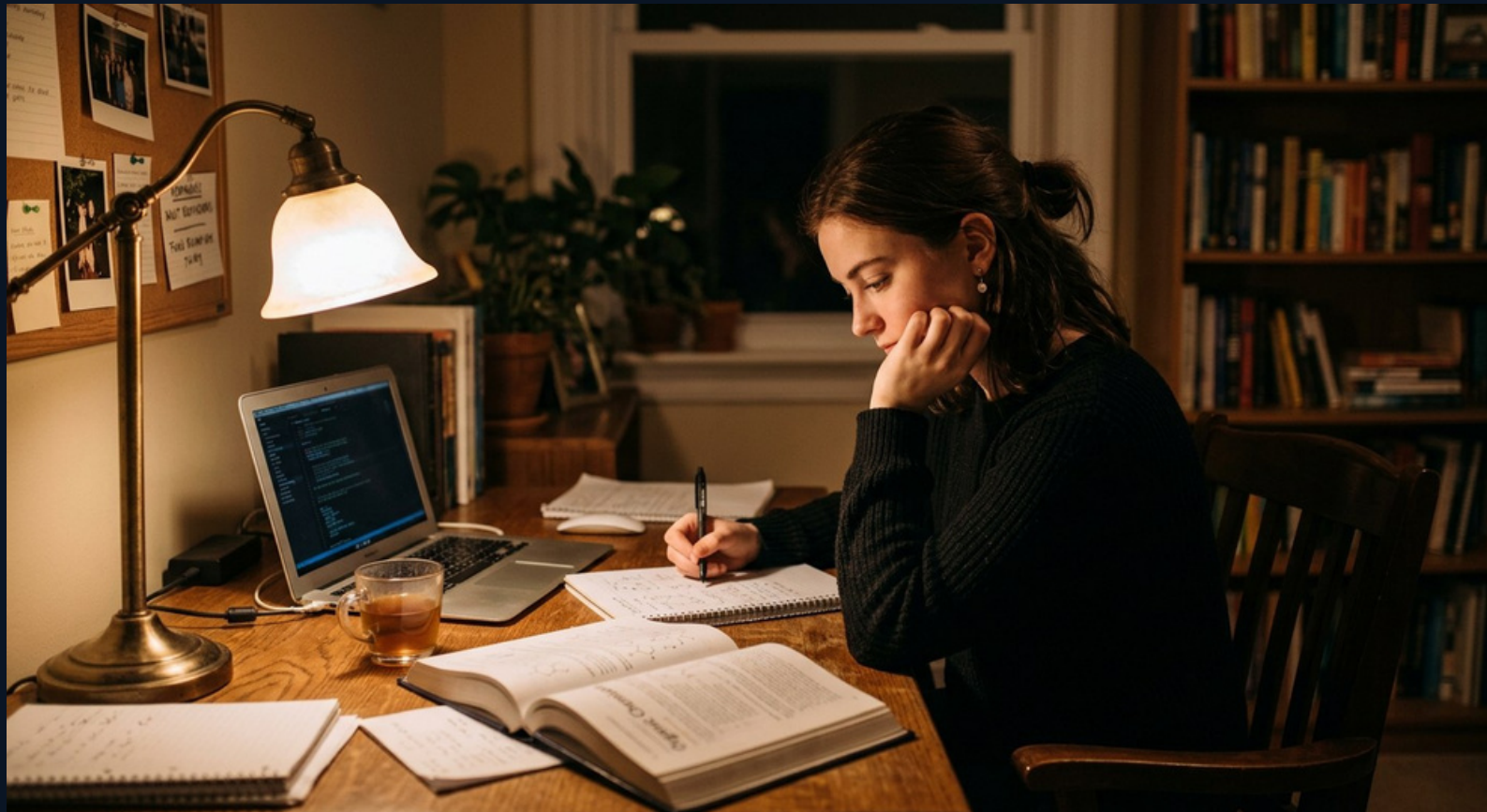
SEEING THE TRUTH

THE MORAL IMPERATIVE

REIMAGINING SCHOOL

THE CALL TO ACTION

The Reality We Cannot Ignore



- **1 in 5** students in the U.S. lives in poverty
- Reading and math proficiency rates remain alarmingly low in underserved communities
- School funding gaps persist across racial and economic lines
- Millions of students feel **unseen, unheard, and undervalued** every single day

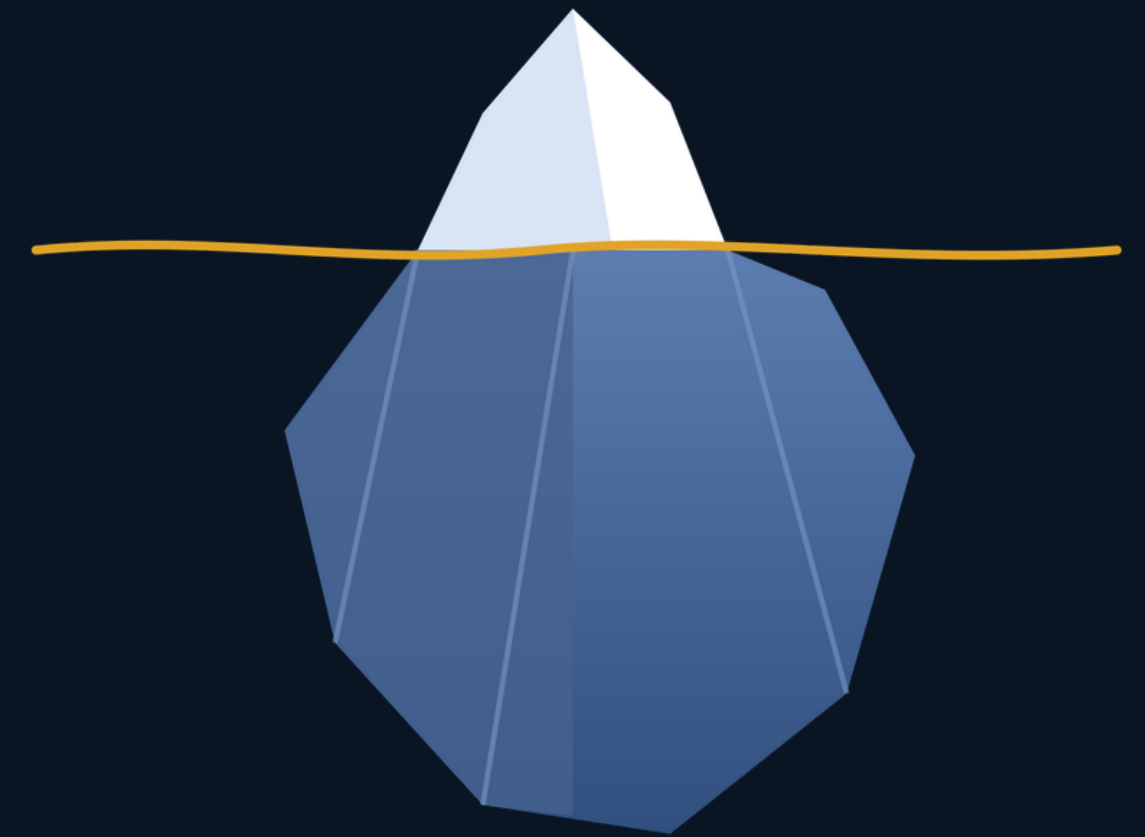
What We See vs. What's Really Happening

Above the surface:

- Test scores
- Graduation rates
- Attendance numbers

Below the surface:

- Trauma and mental health crises
- Teacher burnout and turnover
- Destroyed self-confidence
- Generational cycles of inequity



"I What Students Are Saying

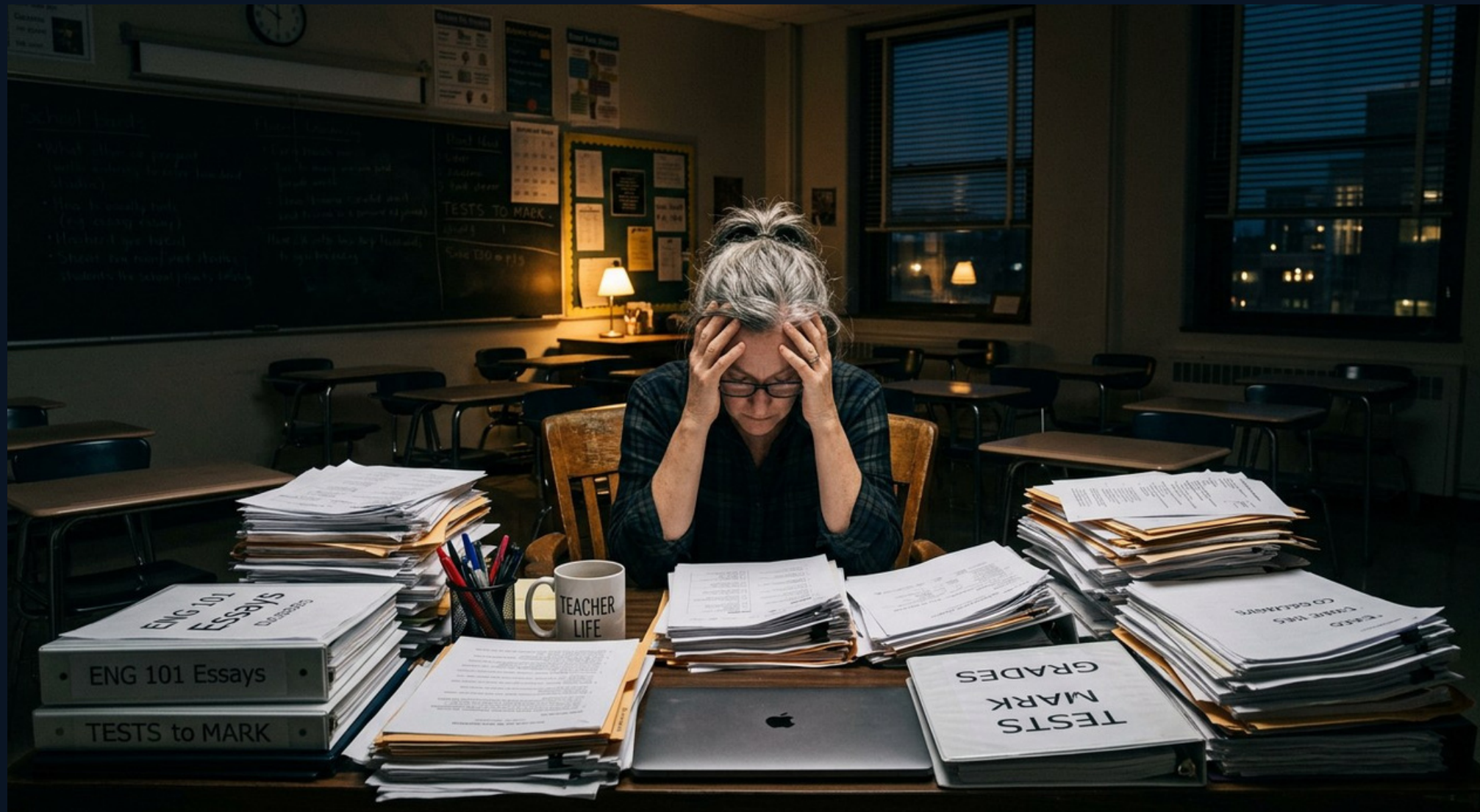
"Nobody ever asked me what I wanted to learn."

— Student, age 14

"I stopped trying because it didn't seem like it mattered anyway." — Student, age 16

"I felt invisible." — Student, age 12

We Are Also Losing Our Educators



- Teacher shortages at a critical high
- Burnout and mental health challenges rising
- Many educators entered the profession to **transform lives**
- The system is consuming the very people it needs most

When Schools Struggle, Communities Feel It

- Education is the **foundation** of every thriving community
- School struggle ripples into:
 - Higher incarceration rates
 - Lower economic mobility
 - Poorer health outcomes
 - Cycles of generational poverty



The school and the community rise or fall together

How did we get here?

And more importantly —

Are we willing to do something about it?

PART TWO

The Moral Imperative

"Justice is what love looks like in public."

— Dr. Cornel West



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Moral Imperative



- *noun* — A strongly felt principle that compels a particular kind of action; a duty that cannot be ignored without compromising one's integrity or values.
 - In education, the moral imperative is simple:
 - **Every child deserves an extraordinary education.**
 - *Not some children. Not most children.*
 - **Every. Single. Child.**

Why This Has to Be Personal

- Data doesn't move people. **Stories do.**
- Behind every statistic is a **name, a face, a family**
- Ask yourself:
 - *Whose child is this?*
 - *What do they deserve?*
 - *What would I want for MY child?*
- **Then give that to every child.**





What is possible



What is lost

What It Costs Us to Do Nothing

- Every year we wait, a generation is shaped by inadequacy
- Inaction is not neutral — **it is a choice**
- We are not just failing children academically
- We are failing them **spiritually, emotionally, and humanly**

Silence in the face of injustice is complicity



We Come From People Who Did the Impossible

- Generations before us fought for the right to be educated
- They were told it couldn't be done — and they did it anyway
- *We stand on the shoulders of giants*
- Their sacrifice demands our action
- **This generation's legacy is being written right now**

See. Believe. Act.

PART THREE

Reimagining School

"Don't tell me the sky is the limit when there are footprints on the moon."

— Paul Brandt



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Reimagining Is Not Destroying — It's Rebuilding

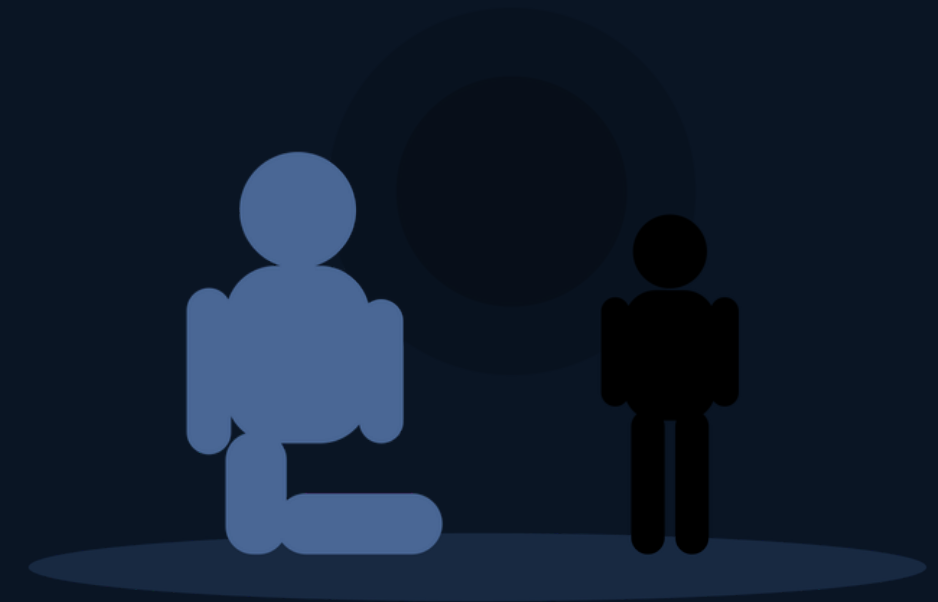
- It means **questioning assumptions** we have never questioned
- It means **centering students** instead of systems
- It means **elevating educators** instead of evaluating them to death
- It means **partnering with communities** instead of excluding them



Reimagining school is an act of radical love

Relationships Are the Foundation

- Research is clear: **students learn best from people they trust**
- Every student needs at least **one caring adult** in their school
- Relationships are not a "soft" skill — they are the **hardest and most important** work
- *When a student knows you see them, they become willing to try*



"Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Learning That Actually Comes Alive



- Move from **compliance** to **curiosity**
- Connect learning to **students' lives, cultures, and communities**
- Honor **multiple forms of intelligence**
- Make learning **relevant, rigorous, and joyful**
- *Ask students: What do YOU want to know? What problems do YOU want to solve?*

The goal is not just graduates — it's thinkers, creators, and contributors

Every Child Comes in With Assets

- Stop asking: *"What's wrong with this student?"*
- Start asking: *"What gifts does this student bring?"*
- **Asset-based thinking** vs. deficit-based thinking
- Every child is brilliant in ways we may not yet understand
- *Our job is to find the genius — not confirm the label*



"Every child is one caring adult away from being a success story."

Leadership That Transforms



- Great schools have **great leaders** — not managers, but visionaries
- Transformational leaders:
 - Lead with **love and accountability**
 - Build **culture before they build programs**
 - Develop teachers as **professionals**
 - Make decisions by asking: *"Is this good for kids?"*
 - Stay **connected to their WHY**

Leadership is not a position. It is a commitment.

The Village Has to Come Back

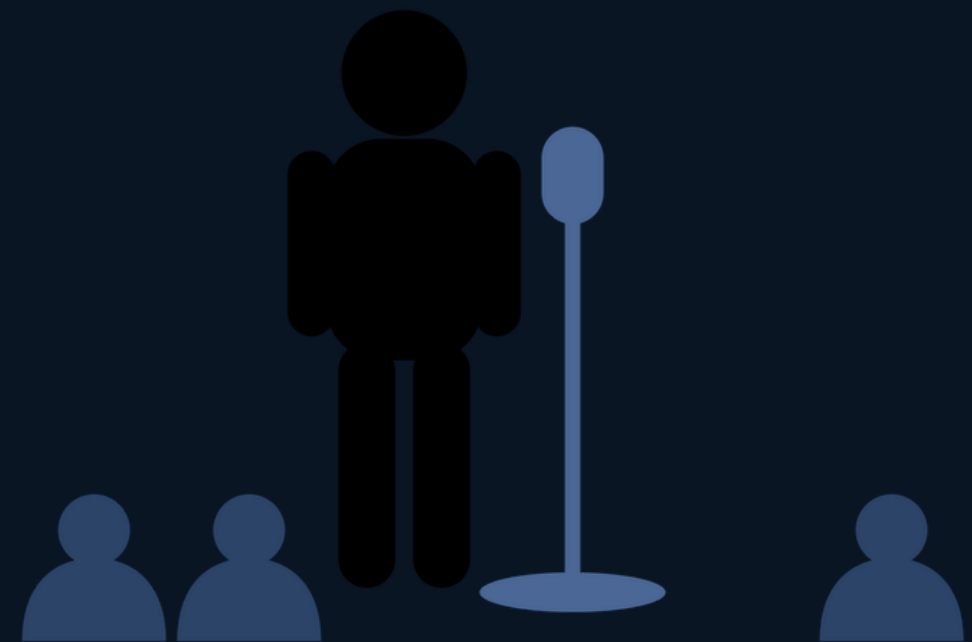


- Schools cannot do this alone — **nor should they**
- Every community has assets waiting to be activated:
 - Families as **partners, not problems**
 - Businesses as **investors in human capital**
 - Faith communities as **sources of support and stability**
 - Local government as **advocates and resource providers**

It truly takes a village — and the village has been waiting to be invited

Students Are Not Just Recipients — They Are Co-Creators

- Student voice is not a privilege — it is a **right**
- When students have agency, **engagement soars**
- Practical ways to elevate student voice:
 - Student-led conferences
 - Student seats on leadership teams
 - Co-designing classroom norms and learning experiences
 - Student advisory boards



Ask them: "What do you need? What would help? What would make this better?"

Culture Is the Soil — Everything Grows or Dies There

- Culture is **not** what you say — it's what you **do**, **celebrate**, and **tolerate**
- A reimagined school culture:
 - Makes every person feel **they belong**
 - Celebrates **effort and growth**, not just achievement
 - Holds **high expectations** with **deep support**
 - Turns **mistakes** into **learning opportunities**
 - Breathes **joy, purpose**, and **possibility**





Schools That Are Already Doing It

In reimagined schools, you will find:

- Students who are **excited to learn**
- Teachers who feel **valued and supported**
- Families who feel **welcomed and included**
- Communities that see the school as **their greatest asset**
- Leaders who measure success by **who students are becoming**

These schools exist. We can build more of them.

PART FOUR

The Call to Action

"The time is always right to do what is right."

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



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For Educators — Your Classroom Is Your Canvas



- **Know your students** — their names, their stories, their dreams
- **Speak life** into every student, especially the ones who are hardest to reach
- **Reflect on your practice** — ask: "Am I teaching the child in front of me?"
- **Collaborate** with colleagues — you are not alone in this
- **Protect your WHY** — remember why you started

You are not just a teacher. You are a life architect.

For School Leaders — Set the Tone, Carry the Vision



- **Lead with clarity** — know your vision and communicate it relentlessly
- **Be visible** — get out of your office and into the lives of your people
- **Invest in your teachers** — coaching, mentoring, and celebrating them
- **Remove barriers** that keep good teaching from happening
- **Make courageous decisions** — even when they are unpopular

The culture of your school is a reflection of your leadership.

For Communities — Show Up for Your Schools

- **Visit your local school** — not just for problems, but for partnership
- **Bring your skills and resources** — mentor, sponsor, volunteer
- **Advocate loudly** for equitable school funding and policy
- **Support families** in being engaged partners in education
- **Tell a new story** about your schools — celebrate wins publicly



Your investment in schools today is your investment in your community's future

Put the Bowl Down.



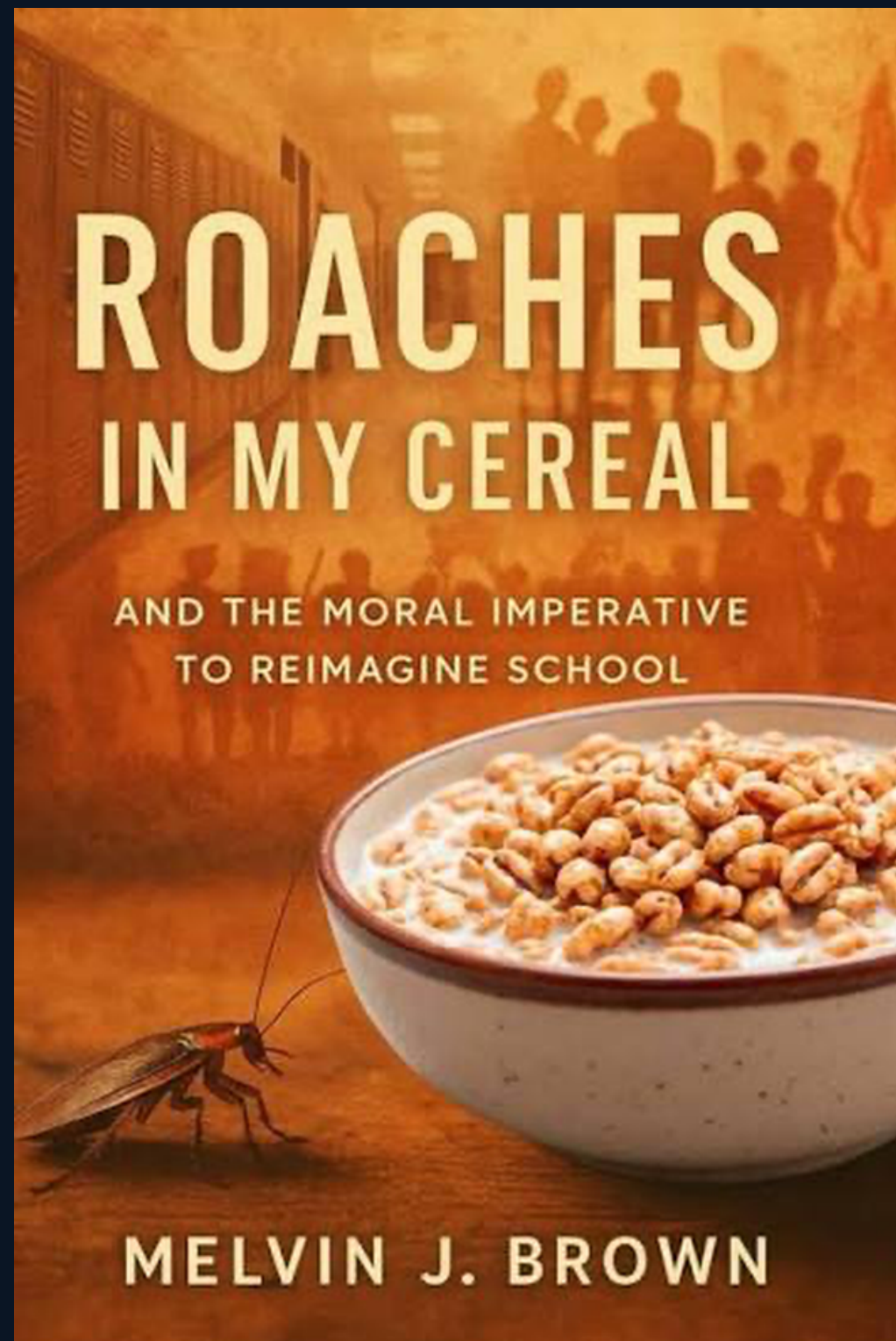
- Then build a better table.
- Before you leave this room, choose ONE:
 - One **student** whose story you will learn every week
 - One **practice** you will change on the first day
 - One **partner** you will invite in this month
 - One **voice** you will finally ask: "*What do you need?*"
- **Not someday. Monday.**

Let's Talk

- Questions, Pushback, and Hard Cases
- *What is the one thing you'd change tomorrow if nothing stood in your way?*
- *Where are you stuck?*
- *What are you already doing that others in this room need to hear about?*



No question is too small. No challenge is too hard to name.



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Inside the book:

- The full story behind the title
- A practical framework for **See. Believe. Act.**
- Real stories, real challenges, real moments through the eyes of a real kid
- Recommendations for staff book studies and PLCs
- Tools you can use in your building this semester

Available now — and built to be written in, argued with, and used.



Thank You.

Transforming Mindsets. Unlocking Potential. Changing the World.

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"Somewhere, a child is waiting for an adult to decide they are worth it. Be that adult."