

Rights, Respect and Responsibility:
Final Report on the County of Hampshire
Rights Education Initiative
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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the evaluation research conducted over the past three years on the Hampshire Education Authority's *Rights, Respect and Responsibility* (RRR) initiative. The RRR initiative was started in Hampshire in 2003 after prior visits by Hampshire teachers and senior administrators to the Cape Breton University Children's Rights Centre whose directors had evaluated a program of children's rights education in schools in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada. Like the Cape Breton program, the RRR is based on and consistent with the rights of children as articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The RRR extended the Cape Breton Program through systematic and strategic implementation of the initiative, through the widespread provision of teacher training, and through a whole-school reform approach. Overall, the RRR initiative must be considered to be a major success.

The three-year evaluation started with 18 schools (5 infant, 5 primary and 8 junior) representing the variety of geographic and socioeconomic contexts of Hampshire. Two of the junior schools who agreed to participate did not provide any data, and by the final year of measure, a further 3 schools had dropped out (1 junior, 1 infant and 1 primary) leaving a final sample size of 13 schools (4 infant, 4 primary and 5 junior). . The ages of the pupils were from 5 to 11 years and class sizes ranged from 32 to 40 pupils.

Over the three years of the study, five schools evidenced complete implementation of the RRR (2 infant, 1 primary, 2 junior). Four of the schools had fully implemented RRR in the first year. In these schools, the rights of the Convention were explicitly taught and were used as the overarching framework for all school policies and

practices. Children's rights were respected throughout the school and systematic provision of opportunities for meaningful participation was a priority. The schools in which implementation was less complete had either focused on responsibilities rather than rights, had respected children's rights but failed to explicitly teach them, or had selectively taught specific Convention rights in some areas only, for example the right to nutrition taught in a health class. In these cases, the benefits of the RRR were less in evidence, and particularly problematic was children's misunderstanding of rights as contingent on fulfilling responsibilities or as synonymous with rules. The differences in levels of implementation appeared to be primarily a function of the commitment, planning and leadership of the head teacher. Analyses of data were performed comparing outcomes by level of implementation. The effects were significant across all measures.

Teachers in the schools in which the RRR was fully implemented reported that their pupils showed higher levels of engagement, rights-respecting behaviours, and participation. They reported also decreasing levels of teacher burnout during the implementation of RRR which sustained over the time of the study. Teachers in these schools reported decreased levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of their pupils, and increased levels of a sense of achievement.

Pupils in the schools in which the RRR was fully implemented demonstrated a greater understanding of rights and responsibilities than did their peers in the schools in which the RRR was less fully implemented. They had knowledge of the specific rights of the Convention, they understood the nature and value of respecting rights, and they understood that rights imply but are independent of responsibilities. Pupils who were aged 9 and up completed surveys assessing their level of engagement in the school.

Again those in the fully implemented RRR schools showed higher scores than their peers in the less fully implemented RRR schools. Pupils in schools in which RRR was fully implemented reported higher levels of enjoying school, a more rights-respecting, fair and caring school environment, and more supportive and cooperative relationships with their peers and teachers.

Among the more intriguing findings in the three years of the evaluation research, and one which we aim to pursue, is the possibility that the positive effects of RRR are the most pronounced in the schools which are in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods. Within this sample, the most pronounced improvements in pupils' motivations, behaviours, engagement, and academic performance were in the schools with the greatest proportion of disadvantaged students. The knowledge that they are rights-bearing citizens of the present and the experience with having their rights respected – in particular their participation rights – appears to have profoundly affected these children. This requires more study.

In summary, the RRR has been demonstrated to be a very effective means not only of children's rights education, but of education. The schools that are rights-consistent and rights-respecting are functioning optimally and in the words of the overarching principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in "the child's best interests." As such, Hampshire has provided an outstanding model of how to provide children's rights education. It is a model that can and should be emulated in all education jurisdictions.

Background

It has been our privilege to assess the implementation process and outcomes of the Hampshire Education Authority's *Rights, Respect and Responsibility* initiative over the past four years.¹ Building on a program of children's rights education in Cape Breton, Canada, Hampshire County can now be considered a global leader in its promotion and support of schools that provide education consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely and the most quickly ratified convention in world history. The United Kingdom ratified the Convention in 1991, obligating authorities to ensure that their laws, policies, and practices are consistent with the Convention. The Convention provides a standard that describes a global consensus on the human rights of children. Thus it provides a basis for assessing the degree to which the human rights of children are protected and respected at all levels – local, national, and international.

Children's rights education is the explicit teaching of the rights in the Convention in an environment that itself models and respects those rights. The overarching goals and content of children's rights education are specified in articles 29 and 42. Article 42 requires that appropriate and active means are used to disseminate knowledge about the principles and provisions of the Convention. Children are to be taught explicitly about their Convention rights. Article 29 requires that the content of education be such that it promotes the optimum physical, social, and cognitive development of each child, as well as engendering in children respect for their family, human rights and equality for all

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others, and the natural environment. The appropriate pedagogy and the basis for school rules and regulations are described in articles 12-16 and 28. The participation rights of the Convention, as described in articles 12 through 15, identify the appropriate pedagogy. These articles obligate educators to provide opportunities for children to be heard in matters that affect them (article 12) and for the age-appropriate exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, access to information, freedom of thought and religion, and freedom to association and peaceful assembly (articles 13-15). In addition, article 16 protects the child's privacy and has relevance to policies such as locker searches. And under article 28, children have the right to disciplinary procedures that protect the dignity of the child and are in conformity with the other Convention rights. The *Rights, Respect and Responsibility* initiative was designed to be consistent with and reflect these rights of the child.

Impelled by an awareness of how secular schools have been disadvantaged by their lack of universal values and principles, and by reading the research findings from Cape Breton on the benefits of children's rights education, Hampshire education officials adopted children's rights education as their overarching values framework. Led by County Inspector for Intercultural Education, Ian Massey, two groups of teachers and administrators spent study leave in Cape Breton in 2002 and 2003. (A further group including secondary level teachers spent study leave in Cape Breton in 2004.) Returning to England, they decided to develop a comprehensive program of children's rights education in Hampshire, and some schools undertook rights-based school reform. In 2004, the Hampshire Education Authority officially launched the *Rights, Respect, and Responsibility Initiative* (RRR) county-wide with infant, primary and junior schools. By

2005, RRR had been introduced in varying levels to over 300 schools at the primary level.

The Hampshire Education Authority may be seen as a global leader of children's rights education for two fundamental reasons. The first reason is because of its effort to incorporate children's rights education not only into the curriculum, but also into school policies, school practices, and the school ethos. RRR requires that schools engage children with the daily practice of children's rights through making it a part of school codes of conduct and regulations, mission statements, classroom charters, and student council activities. The second reason is because of the success of the RRR in meeting its aims. A summary of the preliminary evaluation evidence suggests that the objectives of improving children's knowledge of their rights, promoting rights-respecting attitudes and behaviors, and having a rights-based school ethos were being met.

Preliminary Findings

Prior to the three-year evaluation, we conducted a preliminary assessment in Hampshire County with 11 head teachers and 87 classroom teachers in order to determine the success of the early experiences with RRR. In this evaluation we assessed teachers' experiences with (1) the RRR training provided (2) the challenges faced implementing and sustaining RRR, and (3) the impact of RRR on students' behaviors and attitudes, and on teachers' own classroom experiences.

The preliminary assessment provided a similar pattern of data to that obtained in the Cape Breton children's rights education program. The training teachers received was described in very positive terms. Teachers reported few difficulties adjusting their

teaching styles although changes were made to accommodate greater participation of students. These included the development of new rights-based class and school charters with student input, the provision of greater autonomy to student councils (with teacher support and guidance), the greater involvement of students in school and community liaisons, and modifications of teacher behavior to ensure the rights of each child were respected.

For the most part, teachers reported positive changes in pupils' behaviour describing more cooperative behaviours, fewer incidents of bullying, and less confrontational approaches to conflict resolution. Changes also were reported in pupils' approach to learning. Pupils were said to be more engaged and more willing to take control of their own learning. And although not systematically measured in this assessment, teachers also reported changes in their own behaviours and attitudes. Teachers reported a greater sense of efficacy and empowerment, enjoyment in teaching, and more positive attitudes toward their students.

These preliminary findings from Hampshire, like the data from Cape Breton, were based on a relatively short-term (one to two years) experience with a children's rights-based approach to teaching and behaviour management. But it is not unusual for a new initiative to show benefits. The key test is whether initial benefits endure or strengthen over time.

Findings Over Time

Moving beyond the preliminary assessment, 18 schools in Hampshire County, representing a variety of geographic and socioeconomic contexts, agreed to participate in

a three year study. There were 5 infant schools, 5 primary schools, and 8 junior schools. The ages of the pupils were from 5 to 11 years and class sizes ranged from 32 to 40 pupils. Two of the junior schools who agreed to participate did not provide any data, and by the final year of measure, a further 3 schools had dropped out leaving a final sample size of 13 schools (4 infant, 4 primary and 5 junior). Nonetheless, we have been able to identify factors that have facilitated the implementation, and to address whether the positive effects obtained in the short term are sustained in the longer term.

Implementing RRR

There has been significant variation in the extent to which the schools have implemented the RRR. Some level of implementation has been reported at each of the participating schools. However, over the three years of the study, only five schools have achieved full implementation. Four of these did so at the first year of measure. We divided the schools in our study into two basic categories: (1) fully implemented schools or FI schools where the implementation of RRR was essentially complete, and (2) partially implemented schools or PI schools where implementation was done only in part.

FI or fully implemented schools were ones that were consistent with the Convention in both the content and style of teaching. The central place of children's rights in the school was reinforced through school and classroom charters of rights, through posters around the school, and through a central place for the rights of the child in policy statements. Pupils were taught their Convention rights through rights and responsibilities being integrated into all subject areas and school practices. Teachers made use of cooperative learning and role play, and schools provided systematic

opportunities for meaningful pupil participation. Such opportunities included pupil-run school councils from age 4 (with teacher support rather than control), school newspapers completely run by pupils, pupil input into school spending (e.g., purchase of aquarium), pupil input into topics and issues studied in class, and pupil voice listened to in school and classroom activities. Pupils also were involved in school committees. An example of how effective that can be is seen in one of the infant schools. Asked for her questions in interviewing a candidate for a lunch time staff vacancy, the child asked: *Are you a good cook? Do you like children? Do you shout?*

PI schools or ones categorized as partially implemented had either fragmented their implementation of RRR, and or used it selectively. While embracing the RRR initiative, some schools had decided to teach the Rs in temporal sequence. In such cases, the 'Rights R' had not yet been reached; teaching of respect or responsibility was the focus. Children in these schools appeared to be learning (incorrectly) that the rights of the child were contingent on the exercise of their responsibilities. Other schools had rights incorporated into some classrooms or topics, for example health, but not across the curriculum or across the school. And in some cases, it had been decided that it was no longer necessary to teach the specific rights of the Convention because they had been absorbed into the school ethos. Most commonly RRR was used only as a tool for behavior management. In these cases, the implementation of RRR tended to stop after the class had decided upon a classroom charter of rights and responsibilities. The children understood their rights to be nothing more than the rules of their classrooms. Factors that differentiated those schools in which RRR was fully implemented (FI schools) from those in which it was only partially implemented (PI schools) were as follows.

First, there was no difference in the number of training sessions attended by teachers, or from whom they received the training (training provided by the county, in school, or by UNICEF). However, teachers from FI schools reported greater satisfaction with training than did those from PI schools. Although in all schools, teachers expressed high levels of support for children's rights, those in FI schools did indicate significantly higher levels of support than did those in PI schools. In addition, teachers in FI schools expressed more support for student participation in the classroom, and for democratic teaching. When asked about challenges faced in implementing the RRR (for example, excess workload, resistance to the idea of children having rights, and concerns about testing), teachers in FI schools reported significantly fewer challenges than did those in PI schools. Moreover, the availability of resources and supports was perceived differently. Teachers from PI schools reported not only substantially fewer resources being available to them but also less desire for additional resources. It is noteworthy also that teachers in FI schools were significantly more likely than others to report positive changes in their pupils' behaviors, especially rights respecting behaviors during the first year of implementation.

Overall, it was in the comparison of head teacher interview data that the greatest differences were found. Head teachers in FI schools were more likely than those in PI schools to have taken RRR training and to report having been more satisfied with the training than their counterparts in PI schools. Likely in consequence of this was the finding that head teachers in FI schools reported that the current teaching practices in their school, and the goals of other policies and programs such as Every Child Matters and Healthy Schools, were very consistent with the aims of RRR. All of the programs,

they said, were focused on promoting healthy child development and a positive school climate. From their point of view, RRR worked nicely as a framework for other programs and for school functioning. On the other hand, head teachers in PI schools tended to see RRR as simply another new initiative for which they must find time. Such differences between FI and PI schools persisted over the three years.

Not surprisingly, there were large differences in levels of planning, commitment, and leadership between head teachers in FI and PI schools. In the PI schools, there typically had not been a systematic plan. Rather, developments tended to occur on an ad hoc basis without a system in place for the in-house training of new teaching staff and without a plan for the incorporation of RRR into the whole school. Meanwhile, in FI schools, there typically was long-term and systematic planning for the introduction and incorporation of RRR across the whole school. In addition, in FI schools, 97 percent of respondents reported that there was a clear leader in place for the school and that this leader was the head teacher, compared with only 31 percent in PI schools. In PI schools, respondents were more likely to report that the leader was a teacher. Overall, these data strongly indicate the importance of the head teacher's commitment to the program, confidence that it can be implemented, and competence to do so.

Effects on Teachers Over Time

Over the three years of the study, we received very few negative comments from teachers. It is likely that those who were not responding positively to teaching RRR were those whose schools dropped out of the research. Among schools who continued to participate, the positive responses of the preliminary study appeared to be maintained

over time. Two findings were particularly noteworthy: (1) the effect of RRR on teacher perceptions of pupil behaviours and on teacher burnout, and (2) the relation between teacher burnout and pupil participation. There are three components of burnout. One is emotional exhaustion. This component deals with the stressful effects of the job on the energy levels of the teacher, and the measure contains items such as “I feel used up at the end of the work day” and “I feel frustrated by my job”. A second, depersonalization, describes a state in which teachers feel detached and unable to empathize with their pupils to an appreciable degree (for example, “I don’t really care what happens to some of my pupils”). The third component is called personal achievement and it describes teachers’ sense of accomplishment on the job (for example, “I feel exhilarated after working closely with my pupils”).

Teacher burnout is most often associated with pupil behavioral maladjustment. Because of this, we had expected that since teachers in FI schools were reporting more right-respecting behaviours among their pupils, and higher rates of pupil engagement and self-regulation in learning and behaviour, their levels of burnout would decrease. And we did find that compared with the PI schools, teachers in the FI schools were significantly more likely to report increases in levels of pupil engagement and decreases in their levels of burnout. Compared with their peers in the PI schools, pupils in the FI schools were said to show greater respect for property, greater respect for the rights of others, increased participation and improved behaviors, and over time they showed increasingly higher levels of participation and improved positive behaviors. Their teachers reported significantly lower levels of burnout.

Not surprisingly, reduced burnout appeared to be effected most during the time period in which the efforts at implementing the RRR were greater. Those schools which had fully implemented the initiative at the first time of measure showed the greatest reduction in teacher burnout between the end of the first year of study and the end of the second year. Those schools which increased their level of implementation between the second and third times of measure, showed reduced teacher burnout during that time. Generally however, the greatest gains overall seem to occur in schools which fully implemented the RRR at the outset and whose level of implementation stayed high. In these cases, the decreases in burnout levels were generally maintained or continued to decrease over the three years of the study. Pupil behaviours that were associated with RRR were found to be strongly predictive of teachers' lower levels of burnout.

The extent to which pupils were perceived to respect property was a strong predictor of teachers' level of emotional exhaustion. Teachers in FI schools were more likely to report that their pupils were careful with school books, their peers' belongings, and classroom and playground equipment, and that they maintained a clean and tidy classroom and school environment. In turn, these teachers reported lower levels of emotional exhaustion.

The level of pupil participation was a very strong predictor of teacher depersonalization, and of a teacher's sense of personal achievement. In addition, students' respect for the rights of others predicted a sense of personal achievement among teachers. In essence, when children are behaving in a socially responsible, rights-respecting way in the classroom, and particularly when they are actively involved in their classroom and school activities, teachers have improved relationships with the pupils and

a greater sense that their teaching is effective. In the words of one teacher, “*Teaching RRR has reminded me why I went into teaching – to make a difference.*” Seeing the children’s behavior and learning improve, seeing children become more engaged in school clearly is rewarding for teachers. In fact, many teachers noted how pleased they were with the improvements they noted in their students. As one commented, “*the more you respect the kids and the more you let them participate in the classroom, the more they respect you.*”

Effects on Pupils Over Time

Our study found two key effects of RRR on pupils: (1) a deeper understanding of rights and responsibilities, and (2) a higher level of school engagement.

Understanding rights and responsibilities. The teacher reports on pupil behaviour summarized above indicate that in FI schools, pupils developed a greater understanding of rights and responsibilities and became increasingly respectful of the rights of others. Pupil interviews and pupil surveys showed that pupils in FI schools, compared with their peers in PI schools, had a greater understanding of the concept of rights and a more accurate understanding of the relations among rights, respect, and responsibilities.

We note first that there were no differences in the extent to which the children reported liking their school. In consequence, any differences in level of understanding can be attributed to the differences in the level of implementation of RRR rather than children internalizing values because of increased positive affect about school.

Across age and sex, interview data demonstrated that children in FI schools demonstrated greater understanding of their rights and responsibilities than did pupils in PI schools. When asked what it means for children to have rights, a striking majority of children from PI schools said they did not know. In contrast, for the most part, pupils from FI schools described specific rights in concrete terms. Pupils in PI schools appear to have more understanding of responsibilities than of rights. However, it is noteworthy that they were more likely to conceive of responsibilities as obligations to look after property than as obligations to other people. Pupils in FI schools differed substantially from those in PI schools in their apparent awareness of responsibilities towards other people and the link between rights and responsibilities. For example, one child reported that *“the most important responsibility is to make sure everyone has their rights.”*

When asked what they had learned about rights and responsibilities, a small majority of children in PI schools reported not knowing. The greatest differences here between the two categories of schools were in children’s descriptions of specific rights and in their awareness of rights violations. Relatively few children in PI schools were able to describe any specific rights. Only children from FI schools were able to give precise descriptions of the specific rights of the child and to conceptualize rights in terms of rights violations from a social justice perspective. For example, one child said: *“Quite a few rights aren’t working properly – for example, not everyone has clean water and government is not supporting them properly.”*

Very few children from either school type believed that having rights allows for self-determination or freedom of action. Their justifications, however, were quite different. The most common explanation given by children from PI schools was the need

to defer to authority. The most common explanation given by children in FI schools was the need to avoid violating the rights of others. As stated by one child: *“No, because you cannot have the right to bully someone as it is disrespectful.”*

A large majority of children from PI schools were not able to describe any benefit of children having rights. Children from FI schools were significantly more likely than those from PI schools to describe a number of ways in which children’s lives are improved through respect for their rights in the personal realm and in the community. One child put it this way: *“My friend was very badly behaved before we learned about rights, respect and responsibilities, but now he behaves.”* and *“It makes the world more equal.”*

Engagement in school. Our self-report measure of engagement was limited to pupils age 9 – 11 years, old enough to independently complete a survey. Surveys were completed by a total of 590 pupils (311 female and 279 male) from the schools in the RRR study. Of these, 370 pupils were in FI schools and 220 were in PI schools.

Engagement was defined in three constructs. Academic orientation described the pupils’ enjoyment in learning and sense of accomplishment. School climate described pupils’ beliefs that their school was fair, that their rights were respected, and that they feel safe and cared for at school. Relationships described pupils’ perception of support and cooperation among their peers and with their teachers. On each of these indices of engagement, ratings of pupils in FI schools were significantly higher than were those of pupils in PI schools. Pupils in FI schools then showed higher overall engagement in school than did their peers in PI schools.

Summary

Overall, the RRR demonstrates a model of successful school reform. Although we must be somewhat cautious generalizing from our sample of schools, it is possible that our findings actually underestimate the capacity of RRR to improve schooling. Our data are somewhat limited by the attrition rates of the research. Not only did 5 schools drop out, but others did not provide all data each year of the study. Although at first glance this may appear to indicate dissatisfaction with the program, it may have resulted, at least in part, from evaluation fatigue. Having introduced the Rights Respecting School Certificate Program in Hampshire, UNICEF UK also undertook evaluations and had interviewers at some of the schools enrolled in the research program. The UNICEF evaluations sometimes conflicted temporally with the research evaluations, and created some confusion among pupils and teachers. Nonetheless, we can confidently say that where RRR has been fully implemented, teachers and pupils are showing many benefits. Teachers are feeling less stressed and enjoying their classes more, and are able to see the positive effects on their pupils of the work they are doing. Pupils are aware of their rights, they respect the rights of others, they feel respected, and their levels of participation and engagement in school have increased. Schools in which RRR has been fully implemented emanate an atmosphere of mutual respect and harmonious functioning. They are clearly, in the words of the overarching principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in “the child’s best interests.”

And Into the Future

Among the more intriguing findings in the three years of the evaluation research is the possibility that the positive effects of RRR are the most pronounced in the schools which are in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods. In such schools, absences and behavioral incidents have decreased markedly; and test scores, motivation, and self-regulation in learning and behavior, and parental involvement have increased significantly. Pupils' behaviour, academic motivation, and achievement test scores have shown remarkable improvement. It would appear that the rights education program has altered the educational experiences, and in turn, the motivations and aspirations of the pupils.

Pupils living in adverse family circumstances, through RRR, are perhaps for the first time experiencing respect, success, and hope for their futures. In the words of one pupil, "*It (RRR) gives you self-encouragement knowing that you have rights and someone cares about it.*" There is reason to believe that RRR may in fact function as a protective factor in promoting educational resilience among children living in adversity.

Educational resilience describes the likelihood of success in school among students who are at-risk of failure because of personal and social circumstances. Researchers have identified a number of factors that are predictive of educational resilience. These include having a positive school experience, self-confidence, positive aspirations, and parental involvement in the school. The most frequently identified predictor of educational resilience is pupil participation.

Pupil participation in the school enhances commitment to learning, achievement, academic aspirations, engagement in school, enjoyment in school, self-esteem, and

optimism for the future. Participation is associated with increased attendance and fewer problem behaviors. However, historically it has proven difficult to engage pupils from disadvantaged families and to provide them with meaningful participation opportunities.

The RRR appears to facilitate pupil participation by providing a common set of values across the school. Children's rights as the values base and guiding principle shared by pupils, teachers, and school administrators, creates a sense of community in the school. And respect for rights becomes the values framework the pupils use to make decisions, decide behaviors, and guide participation. For example, participation in the formation of a classroom charter of rights is made meaningful through knowledge of children's rights and awareness of the value of children's rights. Charters, as seen in the following examples, often referred to specific rights of the Convention and their implications: *"We have a right to be heard. We have the responsibility to listen to others and respect their ideas."* *"We all have a right to learn so we will work together as a team."* Similarly, rights have been used to guide participation in classroom discussions, student council decisions, critical commentary in school newspapers, and interactions with members of the schools' boards of governors and local communities. For many disadvantaged pupils, the meaningful participation promoted by RRR may be providing them opportunities to develop their skills and interests in new ways. As one head teacher noted, many of the pupils are for the first time experiencing respect, success, and hope for their futures: *"they know now that they don't need drugs and can see their way out of their parental problem."*

We plan to empirically pursue the possibility that RRR functions as a protective factor and promotes educational resilience in our future research. If this is the case, the

RRR would provide a very cost-effective and relatively easily implemented means of improving schools and educational outcomes among all pupils. Unlike traditional interventions that require identification of at-risk groups of pupils and specialized (often expensive) programming, RRR can be universally applied and have a positive effect on every pupil and teacher.

In the meantime, we remain very optimistic about the continued success and expansion of the RRR. Not only are more schools in Hampshire becoming involved in the RRR program, but the initiative is inspiring the introduction of rights education in many other jurisdictions, including other countries such as New Zealand. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child repeatedly has called for comprehensive rights education in schools. Hampshire's experience with RRR shows that this is not only possible but also highly desirable.

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