

Taking Responsibility:

Using Public Engagement to Reform Our Public Schools



PUBLIC
EDUCATION
NETWORK

Public involvement. Public education. Public benefit.

A Message to Public Education Advocates:

Democracy's strength lies in the ability of people to understand and participate in decisions that affect them, their families, and their society.

In this country, we look to our system of public education to sustain and reflect the promise of democracy by giving all children, regardless of race or class or language ability, access to a high-quality education. Educating all of our children to high standards, however, is a collective responsibility, one that requires a certain kind of citizen—a citizen who can move beyond self-interest to build a vital community.

These citizens can be found in communities participating in a policy initiative sponsored by Public Education Network (PEN). The people in these communities—people of diverse backgrounds, ethnicity, race, income levels, and neighborhoods—are deliberating, taking public action, and working together in ways they never have before to improve the quality of education in their public schools.

Taking Responsibility: Using Public Engagement to Reform Our Public Schools reveals how local education funds (LEFs) help strengthen democracy by working with their communities to structure, convene, and apply lessons learned from a series of local exercises in public engagement. The stories in *Taking Responsibility* make it clear that public engagement is a key element in achieving the structural and policy changes needed to ensure a quality education for all children.

To document the work taking place in these communities, PEN asked Collaborative Communications Group to capture and articulate the knowledge emerging from the initiative. But *Taking Responsibility* is not meant to be an evaluation of PEN's policy initiative; indeed, as our research partner Policy Studies Associates completes its formative and summative examination, its evaluation findings may temper what is written here. Nonetheless, the findings to date do support PEN's long-held premise that the quality of education delivered in America's public schools reflects the degree to which we, as individuals, take personal responsibility for our public schools.



Wendy D. Puriefoy
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Introduction

Taking Responsibility: Using Public Engagement to Reform Our Public Schools reflects on the work of communities participating in PEN's policy initiative, which focuses on public engagement as the key element in sustainable school reform and on local education funds (LEFs) as key intermediaries in the engagement process.

This document provides a snapshot of what has taken place in these communities and what LEFs have learned in the process of implementing this initiative. The issues, lessons, and challenges highlighted here have been gleaned from notes from strategic discussions and meetings, program reports, LEF profiles, review of local documentation, interviews with team members from the local sites, and site visit reports. These stories and related information will undoubtedly influence future phases of the work. We hope this document proves helpful to the communities involved in this initiative, to other members of Public Education Network, and to anyone interested in organizing or supporting efforts to engage the public in public education.

How the publication is organized

Taking Responsibility is organized according to the theoretical framework underlying PEN's policy initiative, starting with a description of the theory itself and then delving into the strategies used to implement it. In applying the theory to real-world situations, LEFs work to engage the public to influence policy by gathering and analyzing data, by building broad constituencies to support change, and by developing community-wide strategic plans.

The publication tracks this engagement process, beginning with an examination of the theory, moving through implementation strategies toward the desired policy change, highlighting a series of insights gained, and ending with a description of the role played by LEFs and the questions they are considering as they move forward. The online version of this guide, which is posted on the PEN website, www.PublicEducation.org, includes links to the organizations, resources, and tools identified here.

Chapter 1, “Why Public Engagement Matters,” examines the theory behind the policy initiative along with the underlying political, economic, and education reform contexts. These contexts are background for a deeply held conviction about the need to engage the public around public education issues, which, in turn, led PEN to formulate a theory of action for education reform.

Chapters 2 through 5 deal with specific strategies to put the theory into practice as the sites engage their communities to address specific policy issues. Each chapter begins with a short story illustrating a particular strategy, followed by a description of the steps taken by the LEFs to implement the strategy, and concludes with lessons learned about why the strategy is an important part of the engagement process.

Chapter 2, “Bringing Data to the Public,” describes the process of data collection, analysis, and utilization, and how LEFs use information to get the public to take action: informing, encouraging participation, creating urgency, providing benchmarks to measure accountability, and setting priorities for policy and practice. The chapter includes data collecting frameworks that LEFs and their communities used to identify opportunities for policy change.

Chapter 3, “Reaching Diverse Communities,” describes the challenges that arise in building a broad-based constituency to support education reform, and the many ways LEFs reach out to groups typically not invited to participate in discussions about school reform and community improvement.

Chapter 4, “Developing Consensus, Setting Priorities,” describes a strategic planning process that leads to the development of a shared vision and the identification of community priorities. By bringing together diverse stakeholders and moving them to action, the process creates a mechanism for approving a final plan, and generates the authentic community ownership and level of community responsibility needed to implement the plan successfully.

Chapter 5, “Influencing Policy Change,” describes the challenges—along with tactics for addressing them—inherent in attempting to influence policy change. The chapter portrays a policy environment challenging to local policymakers and practitioners alike, and provides a framework for identifying access points along the spectrum of policy change.

Chapter 6, “Sharing Insights,” includes a midcourse perspective on community engagement, how to sustain the work, and the importance and challenges of committing to a process that demands continual learning. These insights can serve as guideposts for future work undertaken by LEFs, and as a prototype for foundations and reform community members interested in investing in education, community change, continual improvement, and sustained engagement.

Chapter 7, “It Takes an LEF,” describes the role of LEFs as champions and architects of civic change. Communities attempting to resolve education problems must have civic capacity, namely, the ability to bring people together, find common ground, and act collectively on an idea that furthers the well-being of the entire community, not just that of a particular segment or group. This chapter examines civic capacity, the multiple roles and relationships required to create it, and how LEFs are working to build it.

As PEN’s policy initiative continues, so, too, does the discussion of which strategies are most effective in shaping policy and sustaining community engagement, of how to go about building community and school district capacity for meaningful engagement, and of the LEF organizational capacity needed to champion this work. Since this is a work-in-progress, please join us in reflecting on the midpoint achievements and lessons learned from this important work.

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Why Public Engagement Matters

“PEN’s policy initiative promotes public engagement as the central tenet of an ambitious public school reform agenda.”

In 2001, spurred on by the political, school reform, and economic landscape, Public Education Network crafted a policy initiative to connect people to their public institutions at a time when faith in those institutions was eroding.

PEN’s policy initiative promotes public engagement as the central tenet of an ambitious public school reform agenda. While other school reform efforts may incorporate some degree of public engagement, PEN made engagement the centerpiece of its policy initiative, thus sending a clear message that an engaged community is the single most important factor in attaining and sustaining high-quality public education for all children.

This unique approach distinguishes PEN’s initiative from other school reform efforts in that the impetus for change comes directly from the community. Furthermore, the policy initiative incorporated an overarching theory of action, which posited that public engagement linked to specific school reform goals would lead to sustained changes in policy and practice, and would generate public responsibility for public education. In developing this theory, PEN hypothesized that the power for change inherent in broad-based engagement of diverse constituencies, organized in a structured and strategic way, and focused on specific content areas, would improve public school systems.

PEN’s Theory of Action

Public Engagement + Specific School Reform Goals =
Sustained Policy and Practice and Public Responsibility for Public Schools

PEN believes that for significant improvement in public education to occur and be sustained, community will and capacity have to be strengthened to take on responsibility for improving education outcomes. School superintendents and school boards come and go and, as they move through the revolving door of leadership, improvements in policy and practice often get lost. This frequent change in direction and leadership diverts attention from complicated school reform issues and reduces the odds of achieving lasting reform. To mitigate this churn, PEN’s theory of action calls for the development of a community-held vision of education reform created through a variety of public engagement activities.

The Evolution of LEFs

Since their inception in 1983, LEFs have worked to improve public education for low-income and minority children. The nature of their work has evolved over time and this evolution guides PEN's theory of action.

Most LEFs began by making small grants to individual teachers and individual schools, and by organizing professional development opportunities for principals and teachers. During the past 20 years, LEFs have shifted their focus from small programs to system change. Through strategic programs and technical assistance, LEFs support school reform efforts and serve as leaders in building district, civic, and community capacity. LEFs maintain a delicate balance with schools and school districts—-independent of them, but with deep knowledge and understanding of what takes place in schools and in district central offices. In this role, LEFs often become “critical friends” of the school districts they seek to reform.

In their unique position as intermediaries between school districts and the communities, LEFs safeguard and advance school reform efforts. They use data to create a more informed public. They manage grassroots public engagement campaigns. They help voters understand school reform issues and encourage them to vote in school board elections, for bond referenda, and for other education measures.

The contributions to public school reform made by LEFs and other independent community-based organizations have garnered recognition from the leading national foundations. LEFs, launched with seed funding from the Ford Foundation, were some of the beneficiaries of the largest private gift—Walter H. Annenberg's \$500 million “challenge” grant—ever made to public education. In addition, national funders such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have looked to LEFs as their intermediaries of choice for high school transformation.

“...the 2001 National Assessment of Educational Progress scores confirmed what many feared: Despite considerable expense and effort, the country had not solved the student achievement gap.”

The School Reform Context: A Focus on Transformation

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* brought to light the serious failings of the nation's schools, particularly in urban areas with high concentrations of poor students. In the years that followed, both the education community and the public-at-large became disillusioned about the progress being made toward the goals set forth in that watershed report.

By 2001, total government spending for education was approximately \$648 billion. That same year, \$2.8 billion—nearly one-quarter of total foundation giving—also went to education. Still, the 2001 National Assessment of Educational Progress scores confirmed what many feared: Despite considerable expense and effort, the country had not solved the student achievement gap. Vast disparities in student achievement existed between white and Asian students and their African-American and Hispanic peers, and disparities continued to grow between middle- and upper-middle-class students and students living in the suburbs in comparison to low-income and minority students living in urban areas.

It was becoming increasingly clear to those active in public school reform that improving outcomes in individual schools was unlikely to change the education landscape for all students. Even when schools did improve, these improvements could not go to scale or be sustained without support from the district. A growing number of foundations and school reform organizations began to focus attention on systemic reform actions aimed at improving all schools in the system, and on actions aimed at improving policy and leadership at the district level.

The Political Context: Lack of Confidence in Public Education

By the late 1990s, demands for school improvement had become increasingly urgent and families were beginning to vote with their feet—and not just families with ready access to alternatives, but poor and minority families who were least served by the failing public systems.

The concept of privatizing public schools picked up steam, and a variety of options such as charter schools, home schooling, voucher programs for private schools, and privatization of public school operations came into favor.

- The first charter school was founded in Minnesota in 1992. Today, the Center for Education Reform reports that the number of charter schools nationwide is close to 3,000, with some 685,000 students in 37 states and the District of Columbia. The schools tend to be concentrated in urban areas.
- The US Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports that the number of public schools managed by private companies more than tripled, from 135 in 1998 to 417 in 2003.
- Voucher programs expanded. In addition to the closely observed pilot programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland, Florida became the first state to legislate vouchers. The troubled District of Columbia public school system has a new voucher plan backed by the mayor and by the Bush administration. Lawmakers in Colorado also passed a voucher bill, though that has since been ruled unconstitutional.



- Some experts argue that home schooling is the fastest growing form of education in the country. Reliable estimates are hard to pin down since states define and track home school enrollment differently, but estimates from the National Home Education Research Institute range from 850,000 students in 1999 to somewhere between 1.7 and 2.1 million students in 2003.
- Top-down pressure to “fix” schools is being felt by municipal governments as well as by school districts. Mayors across the country are becoming more involved in education issues, with some threatening to take over what they call nonresponsive, underperforming districts. The governor of Pennsylvania even proposed to hand over the Philadelphia school system to a private management company, a move that would have turned one of the country’s largest school systems into the biggest public school privatization experiment ever.

The Policy Context: More Accountability, Fewer Resources

As the sense of urgency increased, resources declined. State education budgets began to suffer severe cuts, and schools across the country were facing financial shortfalls. Under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, schools face severe sanctions if they fail to raise test scores, but many of the reform efforts being put into place to meet NCLB mandates will not immediately translate into higher test scores. The inadequacy of federal and state financial resources further ensures that the progress envisioned under NCLB will lag behind federal deadlines.

A 2001 PEN/*Education Week* poll revealed that Americans ranked education as their highest public priority and that the American public in general—not just parents concerned about their own children—was committed to and supportive of public education. Despite this affirmation, many respondents said they needed better information in order to give their schools meaningful support. These poll results reinforced PEN’s belief that school systems should respond to community demands and that the public stood ready to do something to improve public education.

PEN Fashions a New Approach

PEN believed that low-income, minority students faced significant barriers to learning and that existing efforts to reform school districts would not improve education for all students. Furthermore, federal and state policies emphasizing quality in education often failed to provide adequate funding to support needed reforms.

The need for sustained attention to school reform efforts, and for steadfast community commitment while changes unfurled, became more and more clear. Mobilizing assets to create conditions whereby all children could succeed would require a shared responsibility.

PEN set out to develop new school-community relationships that would foster a reform ethos of “We’re in this together.” PEN based its approach to school reform on the following assumptions: Broad-based engagement matters; the content of engagement matters; relationships and, therefore, intermediary organizations matter; and the process of engagement matters.

Broad-based engagement matters

Local education funds (LEFs) have always practiced some form of engagement, but many had focused on engagement within the school district, or on engagement of civic elites—namely, the corporate, social, municipal, and political leaders of the community. LEFs also employed a traditional communications outreach to build support for a specific strategy or action. But PEN believed, and sought to demonstrate through a new policy initiative, that neither approach was sufficient. PEN's policy initiative would focus on creating a rich, deep, broad-based grass-roots school reform constituency that traversed neighborhoods, sectors, and school communities.

PEN believes that community leaders and ordinary individuals have shared interests. Broad-based engagement that incorporates strong, collaborative relationships and connections across diverse constituencies is vital for developing a shared community vision for school reform.

Key Engagement Audiences

The theory of action turns the traditional power relationship on its head, inviting community members previously ignored, disenfranchised, or disillusioned to help build a reform constituency:

- The community-at-large*: individuals not represented by organized stakeholder groups—youth, seniors, new immigrants, young marrieds, empty nesters—who may not see themselves as having any connection to public education
- Organized stakeholders: unions, PTAs, business groups, the faith community, and civic and community associations with the power to influence policymakers
- Policymakers: people with authority to change policy and allocate resources

** This group is particularly critical to school reform efforts. If a community vision is to be created and sustained, the 75 to 80 percent of the community who have no children in public schools but who pay taxes, vote for bond referenda, and vote in school board and general elections must be involved.*

The content of engagement matters

People will become engaged only in issues that are meaningful to them. Process is important, but so is content. Engagement must focus on issues people care about and on content that informs their decision making. In designing its policy initiative, PEN decided to focus on three policy areas critical to school reform: standards and accountability, teacher quality, and schools and community.

- Standards and accountability. The policy initiative focus, which drew upon findings from an earlier standards initiative conducted in 1998–2000, seeks to establish systems by which communities hold their school systems and themselves accountable for ensuring that all children have the opportunity to achieve at high levels.



- **Teacher quality.** PEN's teacher quality initiative focuses on improving teacher skills and capacity, working conditions, and compensation. The initiative has the following goals: 1) provide community members and policymakers with credible district and state data on teacher quality; 2) create strategic community action plans that address local teacher quality issues; 3) develop measures of progress for goals in the community action plan; and 4) build a constituency for teacher quality that advocates for state and local policy change.
- **Schools and community.** The schools and community initiative seeks to provide young people with the integrated supports and opportunities they need to become successful adults. PEN believes that positive academic and social outcomes for children can be achieved only through the collaboration of schools and communities working together to implement effective education reform and provide comprehensive supports and programs. The initiative, therefore, supports community-based youth development programs and seeks to reduce the fragmentation among educational and social services that hinder effectiveness.

Relationships and intermediary organizations matter

For sound research-based policies to be identified, resources preserved and allocated, and effective practices sustained, the public must be involved in establishing priorities for those policies, resources, and practices. PEN's policy initiative highlights the significant role intermediary organizations play as the connective tissue between process and content and as nurturers of relationships between schools and communities.

Trust underlies relationships between citizens, schools, and other public institutions. Trust takes time and honest, open dialogue. Intermediary organizations provide the leadership and the facilitation to convene people around issues, build bridges across sectors, create space for conversations, and connect the community to the institutions serving it. Since most communities have little experience in deliberating or coming to consensus on education issues, community capacity to engage in discussions of this nature has to be developed as well. This aspect of LEF effectiveness is explored in greater detail in chapter 7.

The process of engagement matters

PEN envisioned a policy initiative that would build civic capacity capable of supporting reform efforts and focus community attention on results. While acknowledging that school and system change cannot be achieved quickly or easily, the initiative nonetheless sought to address the conditions that sustain and support change.

A key to PEN's theory of action was the notion that the more community stakeholders became engaged with one another, the more likely they were to discuss issues and work together to create solutions. Because of the time spent in conversation, finding common ground, building relationships, and getting various partners involved—work that is typically the most tedious and least glamorous aspects of public engagement—those thus engaged would insist on getting results. In other words, by working through the difficult public decision-making process, the public would ultimately take responsibility for education improvement and for the policy changes necessary to sustain it.

“...an active citizenry has the responsibility to elect public officials who support quality public education and to hold them accountable...”

A common thread runs through all three focus areas—standards and accountability, teacher quality, and schools and community—of the initiative, namely, that public engagement activities supported by reliable data will build community accountability for providing the policies, the practices, and the conditions needed for children to meet high standards of academic achievement.

Key Engagement Strategies

Engaging a wide range of stakeholders requires diverse strategies. LEFs use four, each of which is described in detail in succeeding chapters:

- **Data analysis**—a community-wide process of gathering, analyzing, and discussing strategic direction based on quantifiable data about relevant school reform efforts
- **Constituency building**—broad-based engagement designed to reach across all sectors of the community and to engage people from each sector
- **Community-wide strategic planning**—a process leading to a broad community vision for what needs to be accomplished in public schools, how the changes will take place, and who is responsible for implementing the changes
- **Advocacy**—a tool for addressing barriers to the strategic plan at state and local levels and for uncovering opportunities to accelerate the plan's effectiveness

Putting the Public Back into Public Education

PEN's approach to school reform is ambitious. Its strength lies in people who are able to understand and participate in the decisions that affect them, their families, and their society. It rests on the belief that everyone has a stake in our public schools, and that an active citizenry has the responsibility to elect public officials who support quality public education and to hold them accountable for allocating the resources needed to improve schools for all children.

The theory of action is about transformation. It is about the transformation of individual interests to collective interest, about moving people from involvement to engagement. The following chapters provide a work-in-progress perspective on the theory of action as it unfolds in 14 communities across the nation.



Data levels the playing field and generates different relationships.

Bringing Data to the Public

Data is at the center of education reform.

The more people have data, the more action they are willing to take.



IN CHATTANOOGA, TN, THE PUBLIC EDUCATION FOUNDATION (PEF) ADDRESSED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT BY FIRST INVESTIGATING THE DISTRIBUTION OF HIGH-QUALITY TEACHERS IN URBAN AND SUBURBAN AREAS.

PEF negotiated with the Hamilton County School district to develop an electronic system for collecting and reporting data on teacher characteristics. In exchange, PEF was to be granted full access to district data. Because of its long-standing relationship with PEF, the district readily agreed to the arrangement.

The arrangement has significant benefits for both parties. The district is able to collect more consistent data about teachers, schools, and student achievement, and can also use this data for NCLB reporting requirements. PEF, using PEN's teacher quality data framework, is able to analyze factors that contribute to or detract from teaching quality and identify teacher distribution patterns. The data confirms what the community had deduced anecdotally: high-quality teachers were not equally distributed across Hamilton County schools.

The countywide school district, created in 1996 when the city of Chattanooga district merged with the surrounding county district, educates 41,000 students in both low-income urban areas and affluent suburban areas. PEF found a typical urban/suburban divide in teacher quality in the 80 schools in the combined school district and was able to present the school district with data showing that the urban schools had more inexperienced teachers, fewer teachers certified in their subject area, and more unfilled requests for substitute teachers.

The district took immediate action on the substitute teacher issue. "When the superintendent saw our data, he hired 20 permanent substitutes who are available first to urban middle and elementary schools," recounts Annie Hall, PEF's lead consultant on the teacher quality initiative. Two years after the policy was implemented, the rate at which substitute requests are filled in urban areas is almost equal to the rate in suburban areas. The data analysis helped establish PEF "as a source of accurate unbiased information," says Hall. "It strengthened our role as an intermediary."

PEF continues to tackle issues of teacher experience and certification through its teacher quality initiative. It has conducted 24 focus groups with diverse constituents—parents, educators, business and civic leaders, students, elected officials, and members of the media—to collect qualitative data on quality teaching. PEF was instrumental in helping the community reach consensus on what constitutes a quality teacher, but PEF wanted to know more. Using available data, PEF identified 100 highly effective teachers and then embarked upon a long-term study to pinpoint the attributes and methods that distinguish these exemplary teachers. PEF's groundbreaking research has been presented at national conferences and was used to create a training video for Hamilton County teachers. The school district is also using the research findings to attract and keep teachers who demonstrate a positive effect on student performance.

“Data builds a knowledge base for future action,
and it builds momentum for change.”

As the Chattanooga experience illustrates, information is powerful: It can shed new light on entrenched practices, create understanding, and act as a catalyst for change. LEFs participating in PEN’s policy initiative use the power of information to help the public understand complex issues, which is the first step in getting the public to take action. They begin by gathering data on the quality of public education in their communities, focusing on specific education issues along with the district’s capacity to change policy and practice.

Community-building organizations tend to use data to identify community assets and capacities that can be used to address challenges. School reform advocates tend to use data to expose deficits in school and community capacity and gaps in student achievement. This latter approach typically uses quantitative data such as the number of students and the number of teachers in specific categories; standardized test scores; the presence/absence of services, supports, and opportunities in the community; and teacher qualifications across the district and in individual schools. The PEN initiative is unique in marrying the two approaches to develop a more complete picture of schools in the larger context of community. LEFs gathered civic data from surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other processes to supplement traditional data about needs and assets and bring education issues to the attention of the community.

This proved to be challenging work for LEFs and for school districts, particularly given the new NCLB requirements. The combination of school and civic data will continue to shape the PEN initiative as it moves forward, and as public awareness of specific issues grows, data will be used to determine how to change policy and practice.

Data Collection Frameworks

LEFs participating in the initiative began their work by collecting data related to school and community issues. PEN, in partnership with national experts and education organizations, developed data frameworks to help set the initiative’s focus and direction for change.

The standards and accountability data framework is based on five opportunities-to-learn policy areas that yield more equitable opportunities that, in turn, lead to more equitable outcomes. The framework follows a child’s time in school, focusing on the best set of opportunities for each stage of learning. Beginning with entering school ready to learn, the framework then addresses what should be in place once a child is in school—a rich curriculum aligned to standards, with high-quality instruction from highly qualified teachers, in a school environment conducive to learning, augmented by a comprehensive set of community services that support and enhance learning. See Appendix I for a more complete description of the framework.

The schools and community data framework is derived from work done by full-service community school advocates and experts in youth development on the vital link between the lives students lead outside of school and their success as learners. In *Safe Passage: Making It Through Adolescence in a Risky Society*, researcher Joy Dryfoos estimates that up to 35 percent of 14-year-olds have a high to very high risk of delinquency and an additional 25 percent have a moderate risk. The schools and community focus is also influenced by the principles underlying youth engagement, an intervention strategy that recognizes the strengths young people bring to the learning process and encourages the deliberate practice of those strengths.



The schools and community data framework is based on a vision of public schools as partnerships for excellence that permanently change the educational landscape. This vision, developed by the Coalition for Community Schools, sees public schools as hubs of inventive, enduring relationships between educators, families, community volunteers, businesses, health and social service agencies, youth development organizations, and others committed to children. See Appendix II for five elements of successful community schools, along with outcomes and indicators for each.

In a report from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, the commission noted that "low-income students are losing the most—with the highest turnover, highest number of first-year teachers, highest number of out-of-field teachers." The teacher quality data framework draws on this finding to examine who is teaching, where they are teaching, and what types of support are available to them to do their job. The teacher quality framework includes factors such as basic characteristics (levels and types of certification), distribution (placement), and flow (entering or exiting the system, or moving between schools within the system) and adds information about working conditions such as the state of school facilities, class size, equipment and supplies, scheduling, mentoring, and the amount and quality of professional development. Taken together, the framework positions teacher quality as an equity issue, providing the public with information that is rarely included in the reports that school districts distribute to the public. See Appendix III for a detailed discussion of the framework.

Data: The Heart of Engagement

PEN's policy initiative is based on the belief that, with good information, anyone can be an effective decision maker. Data builds a knowledge base for future action, and it builds momentum for change. The more people have information, the more willing they are to act on that information.

To make good decisions, people need access to timely and rich data that is understandable and specific to the issue at hand. In many public engagement efforts, constituencies may have a place at the table, but they remain at a disadvantage because they are not privy to data or information held by the "experts." When everyone has equal access to data, there is greater equality in the decision-making process. Readily available data levels the playing field, shifts the power structure, and gives rise to different relationships among stakeholders.

Data collection, though tricky, yields transparency. Data provides a picture of education outcomes by age, race, and income level, as well as a picture of the relationships among various indicators. When LEFs collect data on conditions in their public schools and in their communities, and engage the public in making meaning of the findings, they embark on a process that can lead to policy change.

More often than not, however, organizations tend to withhold data from the public unless a concerted effort is made to obtain it. School systems are no exception, and many fear their data will be used to reveal inaccuracies, gaps, and shortcomings in performance. But with NCLB requirements and other high-stakes accountability mechanisms now being implemented, districts are under increased pressure to demonstrate progress and to share evidence of this progress with the public.



Prior to their involvement in PEN's policy initiative, few LEFs had experience in gathering comprehensive data and presenting it to the public. Seeking information on school system capacity was new and sometimes difficult work for LEFs. In Chattanooga, the Public Education Foundation (PEF) approached the district with an idea that served both organizations well. PEF would fund a district database and create the necessary infrastructure for the district to gather consistent data for state and national requirements. The database would be housed and maintained by PEF, which, in turn, would have open access for its data collection and public reporting needs.

Overall, LEFs have been successful in reassuring their school systems that the data they wanted was not going to be used to point fingers. In instances where school systems were reluctant to cooperate, LEFs were able to pull data from alternative sources.

Data pushes partnerships to deeper levels. LEFs often need strategic partners—organizations with additional constituencies, knowledge, and skills—in order to present data to a wider public. Sometimes, however, partners can have conflicting agendas, and LEFs have to revise plans for collecting and releasing data in view of their partners' issues and concerns.

In Seattle, the school district initially agreed to release data about teacher characteristics, but then required the Alliance for Education to make a series of formal requests for the data, which, ultimately, were never granted. The LEF then elected to gather more civic data about teacher quality, which laid the groundwork for their ensuing public engagement campaign. When the district had an opportunity to review the civic data gathered by the alliance, they realized that the LEF genuinely wanted to work in partnership with the district to improve the public schools. The district has since become much more open to the LEF's data collection efforts and has also embraced public engagement as a strategy for reaching out to the community.

New Visions for Public Schools in New York City wanted to release disaggregated data about teacher preparation to the press, but its partners were reluctant to make the data public. To maintain the relationship, New Visions agreed to release only overall data to the press and provide the disaggregated data to its partners so that they could gain a better understanding of the issues raised by the data. This flexibility and responsiveness on the part of New Visions strengthened the partnership and helped move the initiative forward.

Data creates accountability baselines for outcomes. Prior to the launch of the policy initiative, data was not given much attention by school districts and communities. By using data to define the issues and generate a sense of urgency, LEFs were able to create a new vehicle for accountability and increase public demand for increased accountability in public systems.

The Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership (PA PEP), a coalition of LEFs, adopted a version of PEN's opportunities-to-learn (OTL) standards and used it to hold elected officials and school districts accountable for meeting those standards. The LEFs asked candidates for elected office to take a public position on the need to

“Civic data...helps build relationships between individuals and groups in the community.”

DISCUSSION

provide equitable opportunities for all students to learn. PA PEP also reviewed school district budgets to find out which districts were able to meet OTL standards for their students.

Data informs policy and practice priorities. As communities become engaged around data, new priorities for action emerge. Special interest constituencies, such as those advocating for more advanced placement classes or those seeking more funding for special education, often reconsider their priorities in light of new and urgent information.

In Mobile, AL, popular cultural activities such as band and athletics often came first in the competition for the school district's limited funds. But when the district released data about teacher quality and student achievement in schools serving low-income minority students, the data helped the school board make decisions that would improve learning conditions for students most in need. The school board reconstituted Mobile's low-performing schools and provided financial incentives for experienced teachers to teach in those schools.

LEFs and the Politics of Data

LEFs are well situated to do the often sensitive, sometimes political work of gathering, analyzing, and disseminating data on public school performance. They are independent of the school district, they are representative of the entire community, they have good school and community relationships, they have a clear and consistent commitment to public education, and they have the ability to provide objective information based on school and civic data.

In gathering and analyzing data, LEFs must navigate the politics of data, steering clear of special interest agendas by looking at multiple indicators and trends over time, and getting multiple sectors of the community to respond to the data. In working their way through this process, LEFs are able to deepen their understanding of data, learn how to use it as a diagnostic rather than a punitive tool, and earn the respect of those inside the system while gaining credibility with the public.

LEFs use data frameworks to collect and analyze school-based data and civic data, and they then help their communities understand what the data means. By using a combination of data generated by the school system and data generated during a public engagement process, LEFs help their communities develop a better, more nuanced understanding of education issues. Civic data generated in public forums, focus groups, and interviews brings public concerns out into the open and helps build relationships between individuals and groups in the community.

While meeting with established stakeholder groups, parents, and community residents, the Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment (LFEE) in Pennsylvania discovered that the public was especially concerned about the state of children's mental health and their behavior. LFEE and its community agency partners used this information to strengthen their collaboration and move forward on a Family Resource Center initiative to provide school-based mental health services for children and families.

CREDIBILITY

“PEN’s theory of action promotes extensive outreach, especially to constituencies previously overlooked or disenfranchised...”

The Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools (FLPS) in Nebraska conducted a feasibility study that included focus groups and interviews with more than 125 school, community, and faith leaders to determine the level of community support for locating community learning centers (CLCs) in Lincoln schools. The overwhelmingly positive response to this survey encouraged FLPS and its community partners to move ahead. Thanks to support from a local community foundation and community service agencies, there are now 15 CLCs operating in Lincoln.

Reaching Out to the Community

Data is used throughout the course of the initiative; additional data needs arise as the public becomes engaged, constituencies become more diversified, and strategic planning begins. Initial success in data collection and analysis strengthens succeeding stages of constituency building and strategic planning.

PEN’s theory of action promotes extensive outreach, especially to constituencies previously overlooked or disenfranchised, as a way to expand advocacy for policy change (see chapter 3). Data gathering and priority setting are replicated and expanded as new constituencies become engaged. The data collection process underscores the importance of sharing data with diverse constituencies.

In West Virginia, counties are isolated from one another by geography and tradition. To engage the public in these diverse communities, The Education Alliance held structured conversations throughout the state to ascertain public perceptions of quality teaching and to see whether the public felt there was a need for change in state and local policy.

ORGANIZATION

Creating Common Language for Public Education Reform Partners

The Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership (PA PEP), a consortium of three local education funds, began its standards and accountability work by creating a framework for the supports children need to meet high standards of learning. PA PEP based its work on the following five opportunity-to-learn (OTL) factors: school readiness, challenging curriculum, high-quality teachers, safe and modernized schools, and engaged parents and communities.

Early on, PA PEP researched best practice areas that support these OTLs and compared the research to the situation in Pennsylvania. PA PEP presented the data in an easy-to-read, three-page flyer and distributed the flyer throughout their respective communities. Those communities encompass almost 250,000 students in 28 rural, suburban, and urban school districts, including Philadelphia, the largest school district in the state. PA PEP also used the analysis in discussions with state lawmakers.

The OTL framework was used to spotlight inadequacies in what data is and is not available at the state

level. Once the data collection was underway, PA PEP realized the data was not uniform across communities. The OTL framework nonetheless served an alternative but equally important function of giving people a common way to talk about the issues.

The OTL framework also helped focus the education advocacy efforts taking place in the state by providing “a common language and a method of building relationships within the LEF consortium and with other partners,” says Jackie Foor of the Mon Valley Education Consortium.

In building a common language, the consortium was able to create a groundswell of public interest in policy analysis and in NCLB. A series of local town hearings culminated in a state hearing with public testimony that will help policymakers identify public attitudes about the law: key areas where there is support, areas where there are concerns, and mid-course corrections that may be needed to ensure that all children in Pennsylvania can achieve.

LEF: Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership (Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment, Mon Valley Education Consortium, Philadelphia Education Fund)

Focus: Standards and Accountability

Building Momentum for Community Learning Centers

During the 1990s, Lincoln, NE, experienced a 1,000 percent increase in the number of English language learners in its school system. By 2000, the student population in Lincoln's 51 public schools spoke more than 32 languages. Using these and other data points, the Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools (FLPS) brought the needs of this new group of students to the community's attention.

An illustration depicting the nonacademic "baggage" that Lincoln's diverse student population brings into the school—poverty, hunger, homelessness, cultural adaptation, language proficiency—was used to make the point that, until these problems are addressed, these students will be blocked from academic achievement and social success.

At the same time, data from a community survey indicated overwhelming public support for programs and services that could help these students succeed. "We would not have been able to move ahead with community learning centers (CLCs) without the data," says Barbara Bartle, executive director of FLPS. "It gave us the leverage we needed to launch a pilot program."

The mayor's support for community learning centers gave credibility to the effort. When the *Lincoln Journal Star* reported a huge discrepancy in reading scores in Lincoln schools, the data caught the mayor's attention. "He helped rally support for CLCs based on the achievement gap," says Bartle. The mayor expressed

his support for CLCs as a key strategy in closing the gap whenever he spoke to community groups or worked with the superintendent and the FLPS board.

Bartle recalls thinking "How are we going to do this?" when FLPS and other community groups first sat down to design a CLC. But in doing research, they discovered that Kansas City, MO, was a role model for CLCs and planned a trip to that city for Lincoln community leaders. That trip "brought the concept to life for us, it gave people a vision of what a CLC could be," says Bartle. The group came away with ideas on how to involve parents in CLCs and how to administer and govern a citywide CLC initiative.

Today, 15 Lincoln CLCs bring community-based organizations into the city's public schools, providing cradle-to-grave health and human services as well as academic supports for students, their families, and neighborhood residents. Employees of community-based agencies supervise each CLC site and work with school principals and a neighborhood advisory committee to ensure that services meet the needs of children and families. A broad-based community leadership team collectively manages the CLCs. Recent data shows that students in CLCs have improved self-confidence, greater motivation, and greater ability to achieve academically.

LEF: Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools, Lincoln, NE

Focus: Schools and Community

It takes an entire community to bring about genuine reform in education.

Reaching Diverse Communities

The faith community can be a vital ally in public school reform.

Constituency building changes communities and organizations.



IN 2000, DURHAM PUBLIC EDUCATION NETWORK (DPEN) IN DURHAM, NC, BEGAN TO TACKLE THE STARK ACHIEVEMENT GAP THAT EXISTED BETWEEN WHITE AND MINORITY STUDENTS.

To do so, DPEN felt it was necessary to bridge historic divisions and bring together the entire community—African American, Latino, and white—to craft solutions for closing the gap.

Over a two-year period, DPEN convened a series of meetings to create opportunities for community dialogue. Thanks in large part to this outreach effort, the Durham community formalized its commitment to quality public education through a “Covenant for Education” signed by more than 300 community members. The signers committed themselves and their organizations to work in partnership and share resources for the benefit of all Durham public school students.

DPEN realized that, if the covenant’s promise was to be realized, a wide range of residents and community leaders had to be involved in the process and committed to the outcomes. “We asked people who haven’t always been asked to participate in conversations about the achievement gap,” explains Donna Rewalt, director of community engagement for DPEN.

Members of Durham’s faith community—a community sector that, typically, does not get involved in decisions regarding public education—signed the covenant and are actively supporting the public schools. The Reverend Michael Page, chair of the Durham Public Schools Board of Education and an African-American minister, has organized congregations to work on closing the achievement gap and supporting children’s academic success. Carrissa Dixon, a DPEN staff member, works on a regional church team committed to forging more direct and supportive relationships with individual public schools.

Latino organizations are also signatories to the covenant. DPEN has created opportunities for Latino parents to learn more about education issues, and to learn how to communicate with school staff and become better advocates for their children. DPEN is also working with public housing communities, where graduation rates tend to be abysmally low, to get families involved in their children’s education and develop support programs to meet the students’ academic needs.

Engaging the community to focus on closing the achievement gap has become the core of DPEN’s work. It has moved beyond a program or a project to become the essence of the organization. As a result, the composition of DPEN’s board and staff has changed to reflect the diversity of the community. As Kay James, DPEN’s executive director, puts it, “We recognize that this is a long-term endeavor, and engaging the grassroots has to be our priority if we are going to make a difference.”

“PEN’s theory of action...proposes
a shift in power relationships...”

PEN’s commitment to grassroots engagement centers on issues of equity and social justice as they relate to race, class, and culture. The public education system in the United States does not serve all students equally well, and students from the most disadvantaged communities are often the least well served. Many of these students are people of color, minorities, or children of recent immigrants or refugees. Opportunities for success for these children are severely limited when public schools fail them.

PEN believes all community residents—not just educators or policymakers—are responsible for ensuring that all students receive a quality public education. PEN’s theory of action is based on the premise that local and state policies must change in order to equalize the opportunities available to students in the public schools, irrespective of race, class, and culture. The theory proposes a shift in power relationships away from the current concentration of power in a few constituencies into a shared power among many constituencies so that public schools can serve all children well.

School districts, like other political jurisdictions, include many constituencies. There is not one “public”; instead, there are many “publics,” each defined by a set of beliefs, values, and cultures. Too often, public school districts are pulled in different directions by community sectors advocating for their specialized interests and mobilizing to influence the system to support those interests. In reacting to these tensions, school districts make little effort to find common ground among the competing interests and, therefore, tend to operate in a fragmented way. Broad-based public engagement, working across sectors, helps communities develop a common vision about important issues. “The goal is a system that operates for all of the various groups,” says Warren Simmons, executive director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and senior standards and accountability advisor.

While most of the LEFs participating in the policy initiative had done some degree of public engagement, the engagement tended to be directed at the grasstops—elected officials, business leaders, and public and nonprofit organizations—that constitute the traditional decision-making power base of the community. But developing strong public support for change requires consistent, intensive constituency building of the grassroots, namely, those individuals and groups typically left out of the decision-making process.

There is an unfortunate misperception that low-income communities lack assets and capacity. But every community has social capital and human resources. Constituency building brings these assets into the decision-making process, and engagement strengthens relationships between community sectors. And engagement that results in a shared community vision is a vital step toward policy change.

PEN encouraged LEFs to develop community-organizing strategies and recommended that they work with established groups such as the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) on this kind of outreach. For many LEFs, this has been a very challenging undertaking. Some board and staff members equated community organizing with confrontation and were reluctant to take it on. Some LEFs had no links to the diverse neighborhoods they wanted to reach. Therefore, each LEF had to find ways to connect with the grassroots, and many of them turned to strategies that they see as falling under the broader term of “constituency building.” At the midpoint of the initiative, however, many LEFs are discovering that these strategies, while useful, fall short of the goal of authentic community representation and are now turning to groups like ACORN for assistance.

Committing to Diversity

In 1999, PEN conducted a series of conversations on education and race in eight LEF communities. Discussions were held on the types of communities people would like to have, the kind of education they want their children to have, and the changes they would support. These conversations helped PEN gain valuable information that was used to position LEFs as leaders able to bridge boundaries of race and class in their communities. The constituency-building aspect of the policy initiative deepens this role and reveals the ability of LEFs to engage broad constituencies and expand the community power base.

Aligning Constituency Building to Community Assets

In Seattle, WA, the Alliance for Education trained a cadre of facilitators to work in neighborhoods of diverse languages and ethnic backgrounds where many residents were new immigrants. Facilitators found that they needed to focus their initial outreach to neighborhood residents by discussing the role of public education in the US and teaching them how to interact with the local school system.

In Providence, RI, the Education Partnership surveyed assets in the Olneyville neighborhood and found a wealth of organizations. Rather than asking residents to come to a new set of meetings on public schools, the LEF staff went to the community organizations and asked for time on their agendas to discuss the need for a community school. The Olneyville Collaborative, a group of neighborhood organizations, became the steering committee for the community school approach.

In Durham, NC, several LEFs teamed up with experienced outreach workers. One outreach worker, who had worked in communities for the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, organized study groups, called “community teams,” in public housing communities to get people talking about issues important to them. As a result of this outreach, the Durham Public Education Network established an after-school program in a public housing community and works to include residents in community events.

LEFs began their constituency-building work with data collection. As they collected data about various conditions in the public schools in their communities, LEFs made connections with residents of diverse neighborhoods, engaging them around the need for quality education for all children. While the community context for this work varied, most of the communities have diverse populations that include large numbers of recent immigrant families who speak little or no English. Seattle's Alliance for Education works in a school district where 190 languages are spoken. The Education Partnership in Providence, RI, began its work in a low-income Latino community in a medium-sized urban district. The Paterson Education Fund in New Jersey serves a high-poverty urban school district with 26,000 students speaking 25 languages.

The shift to working across sectors, neighborhoods, and classes required LEFs, whose board and staff members are mostly white and middle class, to tap skills they had not previously used. Some staff members were hesitant to venture into tough neighborhoods and were not comfortable discussing issues of race and class. Some community leaders were uncomfortable with LEFs taking a leadership role given their close ties to school district officials and business and organization leaders. LEF leaders were perceived as being more aligned with the elites than with the grassroots. Some informal community leaders believed that they should be the ones to define the issues and set the priorities, rather than participate in a process to develop an agenda with other stakeholders. It took time, patience, and diplomacy to develop the level of mutual trust and respect needed to move the process forward.

Engaging the Faith Community

Several participating LEFs are working closely with churches and faith-based organizations. Communities of faith share a natural affinity with LEFs: Both work to support those who are vulnerable and both have a special concern for educating and developing young people. Many congregations are eager to form strategic partnerships when LEFs make the effort to reach out to them.

In Durham, NC, the school district and DPEN sponsored a conference to help faith communities build their capacity to help all children achieve. In Seattle, neighborhood churches scheduled meetings after Sunday services so LEF-trained facilitators could lead discussions on quality teaching. In Olneyville, a primarily Latino neighborhood in Providence, RI, the Education Partnership hired a Spanish-speaking organizer, who also worked for the local parish church, to reach out to residents and talk with them about their hopes and concerns. This outreach has now expanded to other Providence congregations.

Despite the natural affinity between LEFs and the faith community, finding a common agenda can be elusive. In Paterson, NJ, the Paterson Education Fund (PEF) worked with the Gamaliel Foundation's New Jersey Initiative—Jubilee Interfaith Organization (JIO)—as they rolled out their faith-based community organizing strategy last year. PEF worked with the Gamaliel organizers to bring them up to speed on various education issues to include community schools. The Gamaliel leadership team, however, decided not to pursue education issues until JIO is more mature and has more political clout.



Improving Civic Capacity Through Constituency Building

LEFs help communities build broad constituencies by bridging the gap between individuals and organizations in power and those typically left out of the decision-making process. In building these constituencies, LEFs and other education stakeholders increase public support for public education and generate more opportunities to influence change in local and state policy.

Constituency building enhances leadership capacity. LEFs support and empower emerging civic leaders, including youth leaders, by helping them attain additional knowledge and understanding of education reform issues, as well as providing them with opportunities to demonstrate their leadership abilities. In West Virginia, the Education Alliance organized forums in rural communities to discuss concerns about the quality of teaching. Each forum included the county superintendent of schools, school administrators, teachers, parents, and high school students. In some communities, students led the forum discussions, using guides developed by the alliance.

Constituency building increases community power. In a frigid January in Providence, RI, the boiler at the public school in the Olneyville neighborhood failed. Students had to either wear their coats while in school or go home and miss class. Parents were worried that their children would get sick attending school in these harsh conditions. The Education Partnership mobilized community leaders and got parents and residents to call the city and demand replacement of the failing heating system. City officials moved the heating system repairs to the top of their list of priorities and residents promised to hold them accountable for following through. The city repaired the boiler, and parents are now pressuring the city to replace it.

Constituency building increases social capital. The presence of social capital is an important precondition for developing a common vision for change. LEFs help communities build social capital, described by Robert Putnam in *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* as “social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and trustworthiness.” Building social capital is relational, deliberate work that involves connecting individuals and organizations across constituencies to provide opportunities for common learning, reflection, and action.

In Alabama, the Mobile Area Education Foundation sponsored small group meetings in 48 communities, in addition to several larger countywide meetings, to ensure broad-based engagement across sprawling Mobile County. When the strategic plan that incorporated findings from these meetings was presented to the board of education, many individuals showed up wearing nametags that included the names of their communities. Board members, seeing such broad-based support for the plan, unanimously approved it.



Learning from Constituency Building

Constituency building raises issues of race, culture, class, and power. The process helps LEFs gain a deeper understanding of the individual and cultural assets in their communities, and become more representative of their communities and better able to voice a broad community perspective.

Many of the LEFs participating in the policy initiative have revisited their scope of work and changed the composition of their boards and staffs. They have learned that a one-size-fits-all approach to community engagement does not work in linguistically and culturally diverse communities. When LEFs develop approaches with diversity in mind—such as training a cadre of facilitators to conduct multiple meetings in multiple languages—they are better able to connect with and engage all members of the community; better able to understand their concerns and priorities; better able to honor the values and opinions of those constituents; and better able to work with all sectors to build a shared vision for policy change.

LEFs extend their outreach across multiple sectors by working with community networks, housing agencies, churches, university extension services, and local school and business leaders. They reach out to established groups such as Family Resource Networks in West Virginia, the faith community in Durham, NC, and local nonprofit organizations in Providence, RI. Given the value these entities place on equity, social justice, and community capacity, they are natural partners for LEFs engaging in constituency building.

LEFs had also planned to work with local chapters of national community organizing groups, but in some instances those groups either had no presence in the LEF communities or had priorities other than education. In the end, each LEF has had to devise an approach to constituency building that reflects the unique assets of its community.

Effective Constituency-Building Strategies

- Train community organizations to facilitate dialogue and mobilize their members (New Visions for Public Schools, New York, NY)
- Seek time on meeting agendas of stakeholder groups (The Education Partnership, Providence, RI)
- Build on existing relationships of LEF staff members and partners to contact hard-to-reach groups (Durham Public Education Network, Durham, NC)
- Train a cadre of dialogue facilitators from the community (Alliance for Education, Seattle, WA)
- Hire a community organizer to work on the staff of the LEF or a partner organization (The Education Partnership, Providence, RI)
- Partner with or support existing community-organizing efforts conducted by local organizations or by affiliates of national networks such as Gamaliel or ACORN (DC VOICE, Washington, DC)

PROCESS

Building Capacity for Dialogue in Diverse Communities

Seattle—a city of 563,000 people and 190 languages—boasts a wide range of races, incomes, languages, and cultural backgrounds. This diversity, however, along with differing levels of knowledge about education issues, makes it challenging to organize dialogue and take action on issues of teacher quality.

The Alliance for Education met that challenge with a creative, sustained approach to public engagement. In the first phase of a discussion on why Seattle schools need to change, the alliance trained approximately 100 city residents to lead open, respectful conversations and then teamed them with organizations that would host conversations with their members.

Finding these volunteers and host organizations required outreach, vigilance, and relationships. “We contacted churches, Kiwanis clubs, chambers of commerce, a Chinese monastery, even groups of African-American grandmothers—anywhere people

congregated,” recalls Gayle Johnson, former community relations director for the alliance. “We asked them to use their regularly scheduled meetings for discussions on school change and teaching quality. The alliance provided facilitators, food, transportation, daycare, and anything else needed for a productive discussion.”

In three years, the alliance reached almost 10,000 Seattle residents. “Change is happening in a lot of different ways,” says Johnson, who trained six instructional assistants, each of whom spoke a different language—from Somali to Vietnamese to Aromo—to create dialogues that would work in those cultures. The dialogues are “about pulling people together and building the trust needed to make change happen in neighborhoods, schools, and the city.” The alliance is confident that dialogues help community members build the knowledge, trust, and relationships needed to transform their high schools and to hold school officials accountable for quality teaching.

LEF: Alliance for Education, Seattle, WA

Focus: Teacher Quality

Meeting the Community on Its Own Terms

At the heart of the Education Partnership's schools and community initiative is the William D'Abate Elementary School in the Olneyville neighborhood of Providence, RI. The school, a vibrant center of this predominantly Latino community, is a true neighborhood school: All sectors of the community were involved in creating it and community residents help to operate it.

Abe Hernandez, a Spanish-speaking community organizer who resides in the community, listens to residents' concerns about safety, their children's education, and the quality of life in the neighborhood. "He can present education issues in a way that makes sense to his neighbors," says Meg O'Leary, schools and community project coordinator for the Education Partnership. "If residents are complaining about rats and the state of the neighborhood, he helps them connect those needs to school and education issues."

O'Leary and other initiative staff reached out to the neighborhood by attending community meetings to ask about neighborhood strengths and needs and to explore the concept of a community school. Meeting with groups on their own terms is "hard when you have your own sense of urgency," says O'Leary. "But in the long run, it pays off. Now we have incredible relationships with parents and neighborhood stakeholders. They understand what we're trying to do," she says. Six months into the community school effort,

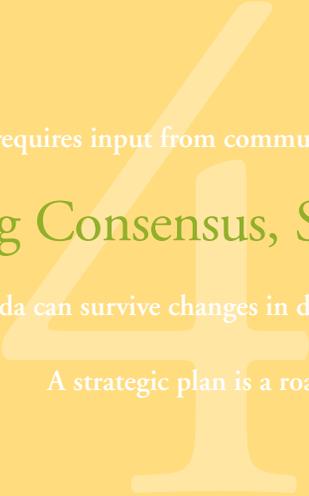
when O'Leary needed additional community feedback, she was able to pick up where she left off because of the strength of the relationships she had built in the community.

Thanks to community input, the school provides as many programs for parents—including GED, literacy, computer proficiency, and English-language programs—as it does for students. The Olneyville Collaborative, a network of nonprofit organizations in the community, advises the school and makes sure it is an integral part of the larger goals for neighborhood revitalization. And school principal Lucille Furia, who often felt alone and bombarded with school and neighborhood issues, now feels so supported by the collaborative that she regularly turns to them for help—just one indication of the degree to which the neighborhood has taken on responsibility for the success of the William D'Abate Elementary School.

As a result of its work in Olneyville, Mayor David Cicilline, a strong advocate of community schools, has asked the Education Partnership to manage and administer funds for all out-of-school-time activities and supports in the Providence school system. The mayor has budgeted \$3 million in the 2004–2005 school year so that the partnership can begin the necessary coordinating efforts, staff training, and long-term planning.

LEF: The Education Partnership, Providence, RI

Focus: Schools and Community



Effective engagement requires input from community grassroots and grassroots.

Developing Consensus, Setting Priorities

A community-owned agenda can survive changes in district leadership.

A strategic plan is a road map for policy change.



**IN 2001, VOTERS IN MOBILE, AL,
APPROVED THE “YES, WE CAN”
INITIATIVE, A TAX INCREASE FOR PUBLIC
SCHOOLS—THE FIRST SUCCESSFUL TAX
OVERRIDE IN 40 YEARS.**

Schools in Alabama are chronically underfunded due to constitutional limits on the state’s ability to levy taxes, so “Yes, We Can” was a significant victory for local education activists. However, the vote was “Yes, but... we expect things to change because we are not happy with the way things are,” says Carolyn Akers, executive director of the Mobile Area Education Foundation (MAEF). The community was concerned about both the quality of its public schools and the lack of accountability on the part of school district leaders. MAEF sought to develop a strategic plan that would address both issues and drive change in the district.

“This plan had to be developed, not sold,” says Akers, who faced a daunting challenge: The Mobile County School District encompasses an area of about 1,644 square miles, with an enrollment of 65,000 students in more than 100 schools. MAEF wanted to conduct an authentic community engagement process to build a constituency that shared a common vision for change and that would hold the board of education and the superintendent accountable for results.

Akers turned to the Harwood Institute in Bethesda, MD, to help MAEF design an engagement process for the diverse communities in Mobile County. To build common ground, MAEF involved leaders from those communities in planning an engagement process that would culminate in a strategic plan. The process began in February 2002 and unfolded in three phases.

In phase one, trained facilitators held 48 intimate “kitchen table” conversations in homes, churches, and community centers as well as five larger conversations, one in each school board district, that were open to the public-at-large. Additional conversations were held with teachers, principals, and members of the superintendent’s student advisory committee. Participants discussed assets unique to the Mobile community along with their hopes for public education. In phase two, 40 individuals representing diverse demographics discussed what Akers calls “the realm of the possible” for what schools and communities could achieve based on issues identified in the phase-one conversations. In phase three, the MAEF Community Advisory Team drafted *Passport to Excellence*, a strategic plan for the district and the community that lays out priority goals for student achievement, quality leadership, communications, parental and community involvement, governance, and equity.

This community-wide strategic plan created by diverse stakeholders is at the heart of MAEF’s policy initiative work. Thanks to MAEF’s structured approach to public engagement and strategic planning, diverse sectors of the community were able to develop a shared vision and are now positioned to drive action and policy change.

Their hard work is already bearing fruit. The Mobile school board recently agreed to give highly qualified teachers a bonus of up to \$16,000 for voluntarily moving to any of five low-performing schools in the school district. Officials estimate they will spend \$1.8 million in federal funds on the bonuses. Another \$3.4 million will be used to buy textbooks and other supplies, extra training for teachers, and other means of support for these troubled schools.

“The more stakeholders involved in the change process, the greater the leverage to hold the system accountable for results.”

LEFs engage community stakeholders throughout the policy initiative by helping them understand school-based data and generate civic data, thus broadening the base of those involved in developing a community-wide strategic plan. This deliberate, intentional process moves the community toward the outcomes prescribed in PEN’s theory of action—school reform, policy change, and increased public responsibility for public education. The more stakeholders involved in the change process, the greater the leverage to hold the system accountable for results.

Community-Wide Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is designed to bring together multiple constituencies to include community leaders who constitute the grassstops and grassroots constituencies previously overlooked. Unlike the strategic planning approaches used in business, community-wide strategic planning tends to be less formal and less linear; it has, nonetheless, proven to be successful in producing a shared community vision of public schools and in identifying the steps needed to attain that vision.

LEFs conducting statewide initiative efforts had to define stakeholders differently and had to pursue a different planning process than did LEFs involved in community strategic planning. In West Virginia, board members and staff of the Education Alliance interviewed key state policymakers, including the governor and stakeholders responsible for teacher training, recruitment, and retention processes. The board then combined that information with their own vision and values to create a concrete strategic plan for building a statewide policy agenda on teacher quality.

Results of the Strategic Planning Process

In the 14 initiative sites, of which 3 are statewide, approximately 200,000 people participated in a wide variety of engagement activities, ranging from town forums to small group discussions to personal interviews and online surveys. The vision, ideas, and suggestions of these residents formed the basis for community-wide strategic plans to improve public schools.

Strategic planning expands the circle. Strategic planning provides an additional opportunity to go beyond the usual suspects by keeping diverse community voices engaged and reenergizing the grassstops. Representatives of 62 organizations signed Durham’s “Covenant for Education,” committing themselves to closing the achievement gap in their community.

Strategic planning builds momentum. Strategic planning creates opportunities to build a sense of urgency for change through public participation. When MAEF presented its strategic plan to the Mobile board of education, hundreds of community residents who had attended small group meetings came before the board in a show of support for the plan.

Identifying Stakeholders, Building Capacity

Standards and accountability (S&A) sites. Because of the emphasis on building civic capacity, the S&A sites engaged large numbers of people in a process that lasted several months. These stakeholders, under LEF leadership, developed broad public agreements that set goals, defined roles, and assigned accountability for outcomes. Agreements such as Durham’s “Covenant for Education” set the stage for additional planning and for working with the school systems, which helped them maintain a focus on curriculum and instruction to close the achievement gap while other stakeholders followed through on related commitments.

Schools and community (S&C) sites. S&C sites work to build the community capacity needed to support young people and their families so all children can achieve. Since the S&C sites had been working with community organizations and the school district prior to the outset of the initiative, they were able to agree quickly on the priorities of needs and on ways to address those needs. But PEN’s mandate for community-wide planning sometimes ran parallel or conflicted with other community planning priorities and processes that were already in place. LEFs addressed this issue by finding points of commonality among the various plans and processes.

Teacher quality (TQ) sites. The TQ sites focused on the capacity of the district to put a quality teacher in every classroom. Because TQ issues tend to be more technical and internal to school districts, community members were involved in defining quality, while district staff and higher education representatives were generally responsible for developing the strategic plan. Community members, however, remain involved in the process by holding organizational stakeholders accountable for achieving outcomes. In Hamilton County, TN, the Public Education Foundation publishes an annual school report card that includes key indicators of teacher quality.

EXPECTATIONS



Strategic planning creates accountability. Built into the structure of strategic planning are goals, outcomes, and measurable benchmarks for progress. In addition, strategic planning gives direction for system change and establishes mechanisms for transparency by making information open and readily available, and by clearly describing the actions to be taken.

Strategic planning sets targets for policy change. Strategic planning can bridge community engagement and policy change. Portland's inclusive strategic planning process enabled the community to remain focused on the characteristics of a high-performing school district even when the school board and staff ignored the strategic plan.

Strategic planning sets the stage for action. Strategic planning is time and energy intensive; momentum can easily be lost once the plan is complete. To maintain progress, several sites immediately initiated specific action strategies. In Pennsylvania, the Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment received commitments from community organizations to provide family support and mental health services through the family resource centers established in three schools.

Providing for Children's Success

When Vicki Phillips became Lancaster's superintendent of schools in 1998, she brought "a clear vision for academic reform...and the importance of getting the community involved in schools," recalls Laura Olin, executive director of the Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment (LFEE). In laying out a strategic plan, Phillips envisioned the community and school district working together to provide what children needed to succeed in and out of school.

Before Phillips arrived, "people hadn't really focused on how and why the community should provide nonacademic supports for Lancaster students," says Olin. In this diverse district of 11,400 students, almost one-half of Lancaster students are Hispanic and almost one-quarter are African American. Under Phillips' leadership, the groundwork was laid for providing student supports in the district's strategic plan. But the work of making her vision a reality needed the support of the community, and, to get that, a community-wide visioning process had to take place.

LFEE joined forces with a loose coalition of community service providers, later formalized as the Network for Safe and Healthy Children. They met with a wide range of community organizations and public officials to determine the kind of support—quality education, opportunities for youth development, healthy families and communities—that students need to be successful. The community identified providing comprehensive mental health services for children and families as a top priority.

That priority guided a broad-based leadership team in developing a community-wide strategic plan with two specific goals: to strengthen partnerships between community agencies and schools, and to develop policies and programs that promote a safe learning community and healthy children through family and youth resource centers. These centers bring community organizations into schools to provide family counseling services and coordinate the health and human services provided in the community. By January 2004, four resource centers had been established in Lancaster schools, each staffed by counselors and support staff provided by community-based mental health organizations.

Although Vicki Phillips is no longer superintendent of the Lancaster school district, LFEE and its partners have been able to maintain momentum and support for the family and youth resource centers. A leadership team comprising school district staff, mental health providers, parents, students, representatives of faith-based groups, medical professionals, criminal justice professionals, and community leaders oversees the implementation of the strategic plan. The team uses the plan as a road map to "set direction, guide our conversations, seek funding, talk from the same page, and stay focused on what's next," says Olin.

LEF: Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment, Lancaster, PA

Focus: Schools and Community

Creating a Community Vision for Schools

In 1999, the Portland Schools Foundation (PSF) began a process that brought together community, business, and civic leaders as well as teachers and parents to articulate a vision for the largest public school system in the Northwest.

At the outset, many people, especially teachers and community leaders, were cynical about the possibility of change. They had to be convinced the process had value. “We had to instill a shared sense of responsibility, hope, and possibility,” recalls Cynthia Guyer, executive director of PSF. More than 1,200 parents, teachers, principals, community organizations, business leaders, representatives from higher education, and religious leaders participated in forums and town hall meetings. A broad-based group of 250 formed seven action teams to study specific strategies for creating a high-performing school district.

Using that research, residents and educators developed a vision for a high-performing system of schools in Portland that encompasses greater decision-making power for schools regarding resources, professional development, and staffing; an intense focus on closing the achievement gap; and state-of-the-art leadership development for principals and teachers. A community-wide blueprint for closing the achievement gap that grew out of this vision was adopted by the school board in June 2000. But once adopted, there was “little evidence that the school board or the central administration was willing to implement the essential strategies in the plan,” says Guyer.

The strategic vision and the blueprint resurfaced during the 2003 school board election. Early in the campaign, community advocates were able to dissuade four incumbents from running for office. In a campaign that became what Guyer calls a “large community conversation,” 22 people ran for the four open seats—a historic level of participation in Portland school board elections.

The community held up the vision articulated four years earlier as the North Star of the school board campaign. They asked candidates what they knew about the plan and how, if elected, they would implement it. Such steadfast attention by such a large and diverse city, says Guyer, “is testimony to the strength of the engagement process” that was used to create the vision in 1999.

The newly elected school board has wholeheartedly embraced the strategic plan and its vision for a high-performing school district. The board is taking action based on the plan, and Vicki Phillips, former superintendent of the Lancaster, PA, school district and former Pennsylvania state superintendent of schools, has been appointed superintendent of the Portland school system. Guyer reflects on the importance of engagement and leadership in making a community vision a reality: “Engagement matters: When people are engaged in creating a vision, they keep it alive. And leadership matters: It is essential for implementing the vision.”

LEF: Portland Schools Foundation, Portland, OR

Focus: Standards and Accountability



The policy process is a continuum.

Influencing Policy Change

Variable policy environments require nimble leadership.

Policy shocks can be policy opportunities.



**AS A STATEWIDE EDUCATION FUND,
THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE SEEKS TO
INFLUENCE STATE POLICY ON THE
QUALITY OF TEACHING IN SCHOOLS
THROUGHOUT WEST VIRGINIA.**

In a bottom-up process, the alliance is working with a grassroots network to organize dialogues in the state's 55 counties, which cover 24,000 square miles. The dialogues are designed to give community members, public officials, civic leaders, and students an opportunity to discuss what they believe is important to ensure quality teaching in every classroom.

By the completion of the dialogues, each county will have set three local goals and will suggest three ways state policy can support teaching quality. The dialogues "help develop local ownership in a state where decisions are usually top down," says Hazel Palmer, president and CEO of the Education Alliance. The dialogues help build trust and, eventually, will lead to action. In many counties, school district and civic leaders initially were skeptical of the value of engaging community members. But as the dialogues progressed, and the public's genuine care and concern regarding education issues came to light, the skeptics came to see community involvement as essential to achieving county and school district goals. Those who were skeptical beforehand saw "how they could win by working together," says Palmer.

The top three policy goals will be named at a statewide education summit to be held in 2005. Early indicators of policy goals are converging around the following topics: teacher salaries and benefits, teacher preparation, support for new teachers, and availability of staff development. Data generated during the dialogues, along with research on educational best practices,

will form the basis of a report to be presented at the education summit, at which time stakeholders, policy-makers, and community members who participated in the dialogues will develop a state policy agenda.

Communities are already setting local goals. One county has set a goal of creating more meaningful professional development for teachers and is already making progress toward that goal. A local college is seeking funding for professional development, and the county superintendent has introduced a new professional development schedule in which the county pays high school teachers for an additional day at the start of the school year to attend professional development for block scheduling. The county has also implemented a new literacy program at one of its high schools that includes peer visits in classrooms to identify the needs for professional development relative to that program.

This has been a lengthy, difficult process. Education bias runs deep in many West Virginia counties, and some stakeholders would like to return to a top-down decision-making process. The alliance continues to meet these issues head-on, most recently with its publication of "Student Voice: West Virginia Students Speak Out About the Achievement Gap," an in-depth look at African-American students and their low-income socioeconomic white counterparts. The *Charleston Daily Mail*, West Virginia's largest newspaper, ran a story on the study, thus bringing the issues covered in the report to the attention of a statewide audience.



OPPORTUNITY

Initial Policy Targets

As LEF initiative sites work to engage the public, they identify specific barriers to improving public schools—barriers such as inadequate or inequitable funding, a lack of services and supports for children and their families, a need to hire and keep better-qualified teachers.

In determining what changes are needed to overcome these barriers, LEFs are, in effect, setting initial policy targets. The greater difficulty is identifying which policies from which government agencies need to be changed. School boards, regulatory agencies, and the state and federal governments each have responsibility for specific areas of public policy that affect public schools, and the various agencies that serve children and families. LEFs must untangle who is responsible for what before they can begin working for change.

Changes in local practice can have the effect of policy change when they are implemented on a scale that affects a critical mass of schools and/or students. The Mobile County Public School System in Alabama and the Mobile Area Education Foundation are working to increase district accountability for student outcomes. Using the Baldrige approach to improving quality, the district has posted “dashboards” in the entryway of each of its 100 schools to track school and district progress toward improving student outcomes. Although the dashboards were implemented without a formal district policy, they are an important step toward improving districtwide accountability.

Challenges to Policy Change

Because change agendas tend to challenge the status quo, the change process can be difficult, messy, and time-consuming. Since the launch of the PEN policy initiative in 2000, the ensuing period has been an especially challenging time for those advocating for policy change.

Nearly all states are struggling with budget cuts, and foundation and corporate giving have shrunk due to changes in the economy. State budget reductions become school district reductions, with cuts in staffing and services the end result. Budget cuts at the local level are especially divisive: Superintendents and school boards wrestle with difficult choices among programs and staff, and organizations compete to hold on to programs that serve their interests.

Given the ballooning federal deficit, there will be no increase in funding for domestic programs in the foreseeable future. Although federal funding for education has increased, the increase has not been sufficient to cover the new requirements mandated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Furthermore, education has to compete with other priorities, both domestic and international, in this period of limited spending.

“...many NCLB goals are consistent with the emphasis on public accountability for public schools in PEN’s policy initiative.”

However, policy “shocks” such as these can also spur innovation by turning adversity into opportunity. Often, it is during tough times that innovative organizations find creative solutions for continuing their essential work and develop new strategies for future activities. For example, many LEFs are taking leadership roles in fiscal equity cases, now before the courts in 40 states, to help their communities benefit from an equitable redistribution of existing funds. Other LEFs use tough times to build stronger constituencies, develop new partnerships, and increase collaboration on change agendas. LEFs in Durham, NC; Mobile, AL; and Portland, OR, all played a key role in building support for local tax increases to benefit the public schools in those communities.

NCLB: Policy Shock/Policy Opportunity

The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 establishes an increased federal role in education policy. Under NCLB, schools must track the learning levels of all students and disaggregate student performance by ethnicity, fluency in English, poverty levels, and special education needs. For local and state policymakers and education agencies, this was a significant policy shock. The law required many rapid changes at state and local levels but provided little time and few resources for implementation. State legislators and local school boards lacked both guidance on how to implement the law and the resources to move ahead with the mandated changes. Although the federal government has since modified some NCLB requirements, many state education agencies and local school districts are struggling to implement the law.

NCLB has also been a shock to many communities. Some schools with good reputations are now being labeled as “failing” under NCLB. The law requires school districts to communicate complicated aspects of the law in ways that parents can understand. While NCLB mandates parental and community involvement, many individuals are just now becoming aware of the role they can play in eliminating the achievement gap in their public schools.

Despite these challenges, NCLB nonetheless presents LEFs with an opportunity to build on the momentum generated by state and local efforts to implement the law, especially since many NCLB goals are consistent with the emphasis on public accountability for public schools in PEN’s policy initiative:

- Strengthening the classroom: the need for quality teachers for every student
- Building a committed community: the need for good information and active involvement
- Testing and accountability: the need to identify and respond to low-performing schools

In 2004, PEN held hearings in eight states to gather public input on the effect NCLB has had on community constituencies across the country and will present recommendations for changes to NCLB when the 109th Congress convenes in January 2005.

“...LEFs perform a vital community service by bringing community voices, backed by data, into the policy process.”

LEF Leadership in Policy Change

In periods of political instability, LEF leadership can keep policy issues “on the table” by continuing to gather information, expanding the circle of those involved, and maintaining momentum until better opportunities for policy change arise.

The policy process can be frustrating and time-consuming, but it is necessary in order to institutionalize change. LEFs often play the watchdog role in the policy process. In New Jersey, the Paterson Education Fund is part of a statewide network that monitors and ensures full compliance with the *Abbott* court decision to bring additional resources to low-income school districts despite state efforts to reduce funding for supplemental services.

LEFs can help build consensus on education issues in that they represent a broad range of community interests, bring together multiple constituencies, and build on existing relationships to form alliances. Their inclusive, comprehensive approach makes them credible advocates for policy change. Since much policy is drafted with little information about its impact, LEFs perform a vital service by bringing community voices, backed by data, into the policy process.

LEFs often uncover the need for new policies or for policy change through their data collection and analysis efforts, which, in turn, inform their advocacy efforts. The Durham Public Education Network’s advocacy of new funding for school facilities was directly related to their firsthand knowledge of existing conditions in the schools.

Mobilizing Voters Gets Results

Citizens are turning out to vote on education funding measures. More than \$200 million in taxes and bond measures have been leveraged for public education:

- In May 2001, voters in Mobile County, AL, approved a combination of property and sales taxes to support the Mobile County Public School System. The first school funding measure to pass in the county in more than 40 years, it now generates approximately \$29 million annually for the school district.
- In November 2003, voters approved a bond issue totaling \$124 million to support healthcare, recreational facilities, libraries, museums, and school facilities in Durham County, NC. The largest bond, \$105 million, will be used to build and improve public school facilities.
- In June 2003, voters in Multnomah County, OR, approved a three-year increase in personal income tax. The measure, which won by roughly 57 percent of the votes, will raise at least \$89 million per year for Multnomah school districts, including Portland, the county’s largest district.

Nimble Advocates in a Tough Policy Environment

In 2001, the Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership (PA PEP), a consortium of three LEFs, began to monitor and advocate for state-level policies to ensure fair opportunities to learn for all students.

PA PEP helped frame the conversation on education in the 2002 gubernatorial race. The consortium produced and distributed voter guides that highlighted the candidates' positions on school funding, NCLB implementation, and ways to address the achievement gap. The guides were influential in electing a governor committed to quality public education, leading the consortium to be optimistic about future state education policy.

But shortly after Governor Rendell began his term, he and the legislature began a yearlong fight over funding for education and social services. In response, PA PEP and its partners embarked on targeted advocacy work for equitable school funding. They mobilized individuals to attend rallies at the state capitol and write letters to legislators, and they met with legislators at the capital and in their home districts. But their attempts

to engage policymakers fell on deaf ears. The fight was about politics, not about the issues. "We could make all the noise we wanted about fair education funding," says Laura Olin, executive director of the Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment, "but it was difficult to be heard because of the power play between the governor and the legislature."

Given the realities of the contentious political environment, PA PEP shifted its focus to NCLB. "Even if the legislature ignores citizens' voices," says Jackie Foor of the Mon Valley Education Consortium, "it has to pay attention to NCLB." PA PEP has become actively involved with Good Schools Pennsylvania in organizing town meetings in key legislative districts so that individuals can discuss aspects of NCLB. PA PEP is also participating in a statewide study by the Pennsylvania School Reform Network to detail the costs of implementing NCLB in Pennsylvania. Olin sits on the advisory committee for the study, which is a reflection of the consortium's status as a respected advocacy partner.

LEF: Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership (Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment, Mon Valley Education Consortium, Philadelphia Education Fund)

Focus: Standards and Accountability



Working Across the Policy Change Continuum

ANALYZE

Analyze existing policies.

The Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership (PA PEP) consortium includes three LEFs—Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment, Mon Valley Education Consortium, and Philadelphia Education Fund—and several policy and advocacy organizations, including the statewide Education Policy and Leadership Center. PA PEP partners developed a new definition of opportunities to learn and reviewed existing state data to determine how well state policies provide those opportunities.

MODIFY

Modify existing legislative, regulatory, administrative, and normative policies.

Modification often does not require formal policy change. For example, the Lincoln, NE, school district is allocating Title I funds to coordinate community learning centers, even though the centers are run by a community partnership, not by the district. This policy modification allows the district to leverage government funds and community resources.

FORMULATE

Formulate new policies.

In the nation's capital, DC VOICE gathered data on teacher turnover, focusing on conditions that cause new teachers to leave the school system. Presented with the data, the school district approved an induction program for new teachers and asked DC VOICE to help develop the program. In West Virginia, the Education Alliance is using a bottom-up approach to formulate teacher quality policy. The alliance convened local forums, giving residents an opportunity to recommend changes to state policy. The most feasible recommendations will be forwarded to the state board of education.

Policy change is complex and slow; the visible “win” of a local bond issue or new funding-equity legislation is often preceded by years of challenging work. Midway through their initiative work, many LEFs are just now determining how to enter the policy process.

“LEFs are now becoming engaged across the continuum of policy change.”

LEADERSHIP

ADVOCATE

Advocate for new policies.

In Durham, NC, the municipal government initiated a referendum to increase property taxes and build new school facilities. The Durham Public Education Network (DPEN) advocated for approval of the measure. When it passed, the mayor gave credit to DPEN's advocacy. In Oregon, state budget cuts threatened to reduce funding for public schools so drastically that the school year would have to be shortened. The Portland Schools Foundation persuasively advocated for a new income tax measure that will fund schools and community services for three years.

IMPLEMENT

Implement new policies to ensure quality.

The Paterson Education Fund (PEF) has taken an active role in implementing the supplemental service provisions of New Jersey's *Abbott* decision, which mandates state support for supplemental programs needed to wipe out student disadvantages. PEF is educating New Jersey communities about community schools and providing information to architects and contractors so they can design and build new schools that will serve as centers of communities and models for other new schools.

MONITOR

Monitor policy implementation.

The Portland Schools Foundation (PSF) led the community in an 18-month process to develop a strategic plan that lays out a vision for a high-performing school district. Although the board of education adopted the plan, it was not fully embraced by the board and has yet to be implemented. PSF nonetheless is staunchly committed to the plan, aligning its work to the plan's guiding principles and holding the school board, district staff, and community accountable for the plan's implementation.

ASSESS

Assess the outcomes of policy change.

One of the goals set forth in the strategic plan developed by the Public Education Foundation (PEF) in Chattanooga is to build public support for quality teaching. To that end, PEF developed and distributed a teacher quality report to all the parents in Hamilton County's 80 schools to inform them about the fundamental connection between teacher quality and student performance.

Policy work requires careful attention to the entire policy process, from the initial scanning of policy opportunities through the monitoring of implementation. LEFs are now becoming engaged across the continuum of policy change.

Changing Policy in the Face of Chaos

The District of Columbia public school system (DCPS) has been making headlines for all the wrong reasons. One is the rapid turnover in superintendents—five in the past decade, with the latest hired after a highly charged yearlong search in which two leading candidates withdrew from consideration. The turnover rate, a contentious bid by the mayor to take over the schools, and a federally mandated voucher plan have distracted public attention from the fundamental education issue of ensuring that all students have quality teachers. Despite the chaos, DC VOICE has been successful in getting the district to implement a new policy on teacher induction.

The Supports for Quality Teaching (SQT) framework, created by a task force of DC VOICE staffers and collaborators, is the central organizing structure of the organization. It has been used in multiple venues—from teacher training to community town hall meetings—to generate discussion and gather data for subsequent analysis. Through this process, DC VOICE identified teacher induction as one solution to the high teacher turnover rates in the city's schools. They met with school board members and administrators to discuss induction practices, while simultaneously educating the public about high turnover rates and engaging them around a set of solutions that could stem the loss of teachers. They also performed extensive research on the best induction practices to deepen their understanding of what a state-of-the-art program requires.

In winter 2004, morale within the school district and in the larger community hit an all-time low after publication of a blistering report by the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) that said DCPS needed a complete overhaul, from its administrative policies to teaching practices in the classroom. DC VOICE saw the report as an opportunity to mobilize DC residents for change. In partnership with DC ACORN, they held three public meetings to talk about the recommendations in the CGCS report. They are now developing a school system report card to publicly measure progress and to help focus community attention on academic achievement and the conditions necessary for real improvement.

In March 2004, the DC Board of Education approved two significant and related policies: a comprehensive teacher induction policy—with DC VOICE invited to co-chair the ad hoc committee charged with developing an induction implementation plan—and a “declaration of intent” policy to facilitate earlier hiring of teachers. DC VOICE also formed a joint SQT task force with the Washington Teachers Union to examine union policies, practices, and contract provisions in light of the SQT framework.

“We can’t stop now,” says Carmella Mazzotta, DC VOICE executive director. “The teachers, families, and children need us to keep an eye on the district to make sure it keeps its promise to improve the quality of teaching in every DCPS classroom.”

LEF: DC VOICE, Washington, DC

Focus: Teacher Quality

RESPONSIBILITY

Advocating for Equitable Funding

In the landmark *Abbott v. Burke*, the New Jersey Supreme Court ordered a comprehensive set of reforms—fair funding, standards-based education, whole-school reform, supplemental programs, improved school facilities—for the state’s 30 most disadvantaged school districts. The process of implementing *Abbott* has been a massive undertaking: The court has laid out reforms in a series of 10 decisions over 20 years, and state officials have been continually struggling with the court over implementation.

The Paterson School District is an *Abbott* district. The Paterson Education Fund (PEF) is taking an active role in monitoring policy and funding decisions on *Abbott* and interpreting those decisions for Paterson and other *Abbott* communities across the state. Irene Sterling, executive director of PEF, explains her focus on helping these communities become effective advocates for *Abbott* reforms: “Our job is to educate them in a way they can take action that is in their self-interest.”

In 2003, the proposed state education budget contained funding cuts that would make it impossible for *Abbott* communities to implement the reforms. In addition, the state department of education directed school districts to disregard a major reform area: supplemental programs that enhance academic instruction and help meet students’ health and social services needs.

The consequences of the 2003 state funding cuts for Paterson’s school budget were severe. But the impact

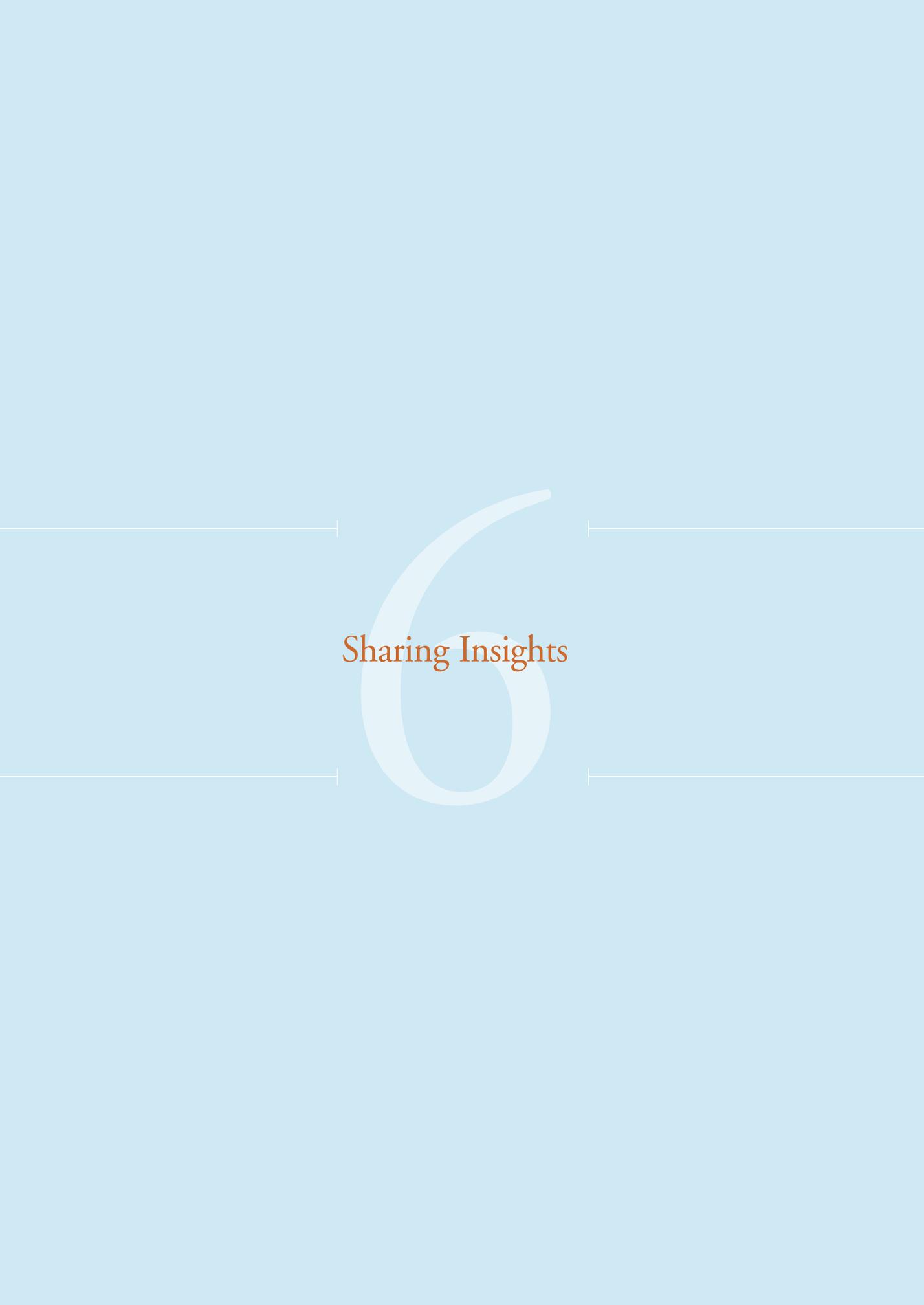
was not immediately clear since the five-inch-thick local budget report was not readily digestible. PEF translated the cumbersome document into an easy-to-understand flyer that explained how the proposed budget would negatively affect specific programs and schools. PEF created a format that other districts could use to show the budget’s consequences in their communities. PEF testified before the state legislature, using data to demonstrate just how detrimental state funding cuts were to local school budgets. Local data was also used to show state lawmakers exactly how schools in their home districts would be affected.

New understanding of what PEF terms “the promise of *Abbott*” is mobilizing Paterson. Paterson residents are now taking ownership for how *Abbott* affects them. Community entities have “new motivation to talk together and work together,” says Sterling.

For the first time, the Paterson city council and school board met together in an effort to capitalize on their common interest in using *Abbott* to improve funding of healthcare systems in the city. Even the Paterson chapter of Habitat for Humanity shifted its stance and acknowledged the connection between improving low-income housing and improving public schools. Habitat now provides information to Paterson homeowners on ways to get involved in activities to improve the public schools, and Habitat families can earn credit toward their homes by participating in these activities.

LEF: Paterson Education Fund, Paterson, NJ

Focus: Standards and Accountability



6

Sharing Insights

“The PEN initiative...is designed to bring public education issues out of the realm of the so-called "experts" and into the public arena...”

Insight is the ability to make meaning by reflecting on experience. It can emerge from events that unfold according to plan, as well as from those that go awry. Midway through the policy initiative, it is timely to ask what PEN, its LEF members, and their communities have learned. Their insights can provide inspiration and direction for future LEF work and that of other community-based organizations, and can serve as guidance for philanthropists, national organizations, and consultants who want to effect change in education, organizations, and communities.

Public engagement is the core mechanism, the core framework, of PEN’s policy initiative. It is what sets PEN’s initiative apart from other school reform efforts and it is the primary reason why LEFs have been able to influence education policy, change practice, and build local capacity to address the challenges confronting school systems and communities.

The policy initiative offers some important lessons for those who are considering engagement strategies to improve educational outcomes. In prescribing a theory of action by which LEFs engage policymakers, stakeholders, and the public-at-large in constituency building, strategic planning, and advocacy, PEN has garnered the following insights on what it takes to develop broad-based engagement, sustain meaningful engagement, and create conditions for continual learning.

Developing Broad-Based Engagement

Engagement does not happen by chance. It results from a planned series of structured processes that include gathering, analyzing, and using data; convening a broad range of constituencies; and engaging community stakeholders in strategic planning. In communities where such structured opportunities are lacking, conversations or public relations activities pass for meaningful engagement and frequently take place without a clear purpose or goal. The PEN initiative, in contrast, is designed to bring public education issues out of the realm of the so-called "experts" and into the public arena by providing open, neutral, yet structured opportunities for people to come together. This engagement process strengthens the commitment to work toward a common goal.

People are willing to contribute, so create opportunities and a rationale for them to get involved. Polling by PEN/*Education Week* indicates that Americans care deeply about public education and are willing to become involved in efforts to improve it. The policy initiative has confirmed these poll findings and produced tangible evidence of the public’s willingness to become involved in public education. In Durham, NC, more than 300 community members signed a “Covenant for Education,” pledging to close the achievement gap (see chapter 3). In Mobile County, AL, more than 1,400 people participated in 53 community conversations that formed the basis of an agreement on what the community wants for its public schools (see chapter 4).

These examples give insight into how successful engagement efforts can be structured. If the *prima facie* assumption is that community members care about and are willing to get involved, then organizations can shift their focus to structuring opportunities and providing a rationale for getting people involved. This perspective has important implications for organizing and implementing future engagement efforts.



Authentic engagement is based on building relationships within a broad base of constituencies and across those constituencies. Meaningful engagement is relational. It is grounded in how people see themselves in relation to other individuals; how individuals see themselves in relation to the organizations they work for; how those organizations relate to one another; how the public relates to public institutions; how public institutions and public officials relate to individuals; and how the public, private, and nonprofit sectors relate to one another. The policy initiative is created and sustained through understanding and managing these relationships.

Traditional engagement efforts typically involve only civic leaders. Now, because of the growing diversity in communities, legitimacy and authenticity require that people from all sectors of the community become engaged. LEFs in the policy initiative are learning that to sustain attention and focus on long-term outcomes—and to create understanding not only of the demand for change but what it will take to get to systemic improvement—they must work with a broad base of constituencies that span racial and socioeconomic boundaries. By getting community leaders, political officeholders, educators, the faith-based community, parents, taxpayers with no children in school, students, and others involved in the engagement process, community members have the opportunity to discover what they have in common with people from differing neighborhoods, backgrounds, and beliefs. When they can see a common purpose, people can look beyond differences and come to an understanding of what they share.

In many communities, two sets of conversations take place, in what Warren Simmons, senior advisor to PEN’s policy initiative, refers to as a dialogue among “little tables” and the “big table.” Representatives of a specific community sector—parents, for example, or business people, or Latinos, or the faith-based community—come together to discuss specific interests. Once these individual interests have been defined, representatives from these small groups come together to reach consensus on a collective community vision. Without authentic representation from all community sectors, the vision will be incomplete and will lack the power to move the community to action.

The shape of engagement determines the outcome; effective engagement is strategic, systemic, and structured.

Events in policy initiative communities shed light on the important role that engagement plays in efforts to improve civic and district capacity. The community must focus on things that will improve student achievement. Without this focus, special interests are likely to dominate. So how engagement activities are implemented has distinct implications for effectiveness:

- **Engagement must be strategic.** As described in chapter 1, who is engaged, how they are engaged, when they are engaged, and the content around which they are engaged all matter. Having hundreds of people in a community talk about education outcomes will not, in itself, lead to improvement. But by focusing on specific reform mechanisms—standards and accountability, teacher quality, and the links between schools and their communities—that increase opportunities for all students to achieve, the stage is set for targeted engagement. This focus on specific education content gives participants a sense of efficacy, and holds out the promise that what they are doing will lead to change. Hence, engagement and planning efforts must not only reflect community values, they must also be grounded in proven reform practices in order to give resultant strategies staying power. People need to know their values have been taken into account and that the proposed education reform efforts align with the values expressed by the community.



- **Engagement must be systemic.** The issues that hamper improvement tend to be systemic; thus, the whole of the school system must be examined, not just the individual parts. The challenges often go beyond the school system, so the engagement process must help people understand the local, municipal, state, and federal governance relationships that affect the school system. Getting a handle on the interconnectedness of these complex relationships is challenging; even the nomenclature is daunting. Engagement helps communities understand how the school system interacts with other systems, how one piece of legislation can influence others, and why the work of public agencies must be aligned.
- **Engagement must be structured.** If engagement is not structured around a clear target, it will be difficult for people to see a purpose to their efforts, making it less likely that they will stay involved. Community-created documents, such as a strategic plan or a community covenant, that specify a particular course of action help maintain focus and attention to purpose. Such documents become a proxy for accountability. When engagement is not structured, participants cannot know whom to hold accountable or what to hold them accountable for. Structure also creates momentum. Smart management of energy and pace allows the engagement process to pick up steam as indicators of success become more apparent.

Sustaining Meaningful Engagement

Midway through the policy initiative, LEFs have changed their perception of their activities— from work on discrete education programs to work that is integrated into community life. This change in perception has changed the way LEFs view sustainability; they now realize that sustaining the community’s attention over the long haul will require a different set of strategies and skills.

Engagement should outlive initial planning. LEFs have discovered that the theory of action, even if closely modeled, does not automatically confer long-term success. School districts are fragile systems that resist change; even if they want to change, they often lack the capacity to do so. The community voice manifested during initial engagement activities is a powerful source of pressure and support for change in policy and practice. But unless the engagement process encompasses the full continuum of engagement—planning, implementation, monitoring—the school system infrastructure is unlikely to change and improvement in education outcomes for all children is unlikely to occur.

Engagement sustains pressure for policy and practice change, particularly when school systems lack the capacity for reform. The single most limiting factor in LEF success has been the lack of school system capacity to deliver needed change. Districts are fragile systems; their lack of capacity in leadership, in the number of quality teachers, and in resources often stymies reform. LEFs and their partners can nonetheless continue to pressure for change by identifying outside expertise to build district capacity, by rallying the community to action, and by providing data on schools and on system performance.

It takes an independent organization to champion engagement and lead the process. Meaningful engagement cannot happen without a “champion” organization that provides leadership, creates opportunities for public

“Champion organizations connect various community sectors to one another, bridging the divide between mainstream and disenfranchised populations.”

involvement, facilitates strategic direction, and monitors district and community accountability. Champion organizations connect various community sectors to one another, bridging the divide between mainstream and disenfranchised populations. They function as trusted translators, interpreting what the community wants and serving as watchdogs for school system performance. See chapter 7 for details on the role of LEFs and the challenges they face in building and sustaining civic capacity.

Creating Conditions for Continual Learning

In addition to developing a theory of action, which is being tested in the policy initiative, PEN set out to provide individual assistance, foster a supportive learning environment across the 14 participating sites, and find venues for disseminating lessons learned to the larger education reform community. The many ways in which PEN has structured and supported these efforts are instructive for those designing, funding, and evaluating long-term education reform efforts.

Adaptive, continual, and provocative assistance deepens learning. There is a natural tension in funder/recipient relationships between the funder’s expectations of what should be done and the tempering of those expectations by the realities that those doing the work grapple with. Recognizing the push/pull dynamic inherent in this relationship, PEN designed its assistance to exploit this tension—coaching, provoking, reflecting, sharing, some times adjusting, other times insisting—but always with the goal of fostering the individual site learning and the collective learning environment that have been fundamental to the success of the policy initiative. Coaches, consultants, and assistance teams helped the sites build the capacity to manage change by sharing expertise and experiences in ways that helped the sites understand the situations they are facing, by asking questions that helped them diagnose their circumstances and determine next steps, and by providing information and resources to help them reach their goals.

Changing attitudes and beliefs requires time and opportunity for learning. The policy initiative was initially viewed as a three-year endeavor, but its true results will not be visible for several years to come. Many LEFs have found that reaching their objectives has taken much longer than expected. A significant part of the first two years was spent building relationships and creating the mechanisms and structures that bring people together. District-community relationships were, in fact, either nonexistent or dysfunctional. Churn in key school leadership and administrative positions generated a steep learning curve and lengthened the improvement timeline. Capacity issues in the school district and in other organizations created unforeseen complications and pitfalls.

It may seem obvious to state that having expectations for deep shifts in behavior or in policy in the short term are unrealistic. Yet, in initiative after initiative, philanthropists and organizations agree to short-term timelines for long-term work. It may be reasonable to expect that classroom interventions will lead to tangible results in instructional practice, study habits, or even student test scores in two to three years. But expecting to develop a community infrastructure that supports change—and a broad-based community constituency willing to use the infrastructure to identify, articulate, negotiate, achieve, and monitor changes in policy and practice—takes much longer. People

“...address deeply rooted cultural and historical patterns...
to change beliefs and behavior, to change the way people relate
to one another, and to create new ways of working together.”

doing this long-term work must address deeply rooted cultural and historical patterns in order to change beliefs and behavior, to change the way people relate to one another, and to create new ways of working together.

Working collaboratively is as important as creating a comprehensive approach. While the idea of a partnership may be appealing, managing a partner relationship can be difficult. The premise of collaboration is simple: Better outcomes result from working with others than by working alone. The policy initiative stipulated collaboration on a number of levels: between school districts and communities, between constituencies within communities, and between LEFs and other community organizations. In addition, PEN's national office contracted with a number of consultants to provide strategic advice, evaluation, and documentation. They, too, were expected to collaborate.

Those involved in the initiative have learned that collaboration is much more difficult than expected. When the purpose of collaboration is not clear to all partners, participation can be withheld. When individuals are affected by decisions they have not been involved in making, they question the legitimacy of the outcomes. Even when they are working in partnership with other organizations, individuals tend to support their own organization's interests above those of the collective. This is particularly true in tight budget times when it may seem irresponsible to pool resources rather than protect them.

Habits and patterns of doing business are hard to break. Issues of trust are exacerbated if a partner does not deliver as promised. When this happens, people are inclined to retrench, pulling back into their own organization and ignoring the new collective focus. Even when things go well, sharing credit for outcomes and products is new behavior for some organizations, and they struggle to find appropriate mechanisms.

LEFs in the policy initiative, in their role as partners and through their responsibility for coordinating multiple partners, learned some important lessons about collaboration. The community vision needs to be clear to all partners, and each partner needs to understand not only its role in carrying out the vision but how it could be affected organizationally. Collaborative efforts that engage partners around specific interests or strategies are more cost and time efficient. Not every organization, civic leader, or key individual needs to be involved in every activity. Partners can participate at those times that allow them to focus their contributions on the tasks and/or products in which they have expertise.

7

It Takes an LEF

“...LEFs sit between policymakers and practitioners and effect change in the roles and practices of both.”

The PEN policy initiative validates the need for a fundamental change in the way our society tries to resolve the problems confronting public education. These complex problems require adaptive solutions that change attitudes, values, and behaviors. And, because public institutions have been either unwilling or unable to transform themselves, they require an organization outside the institution to manage and guide the process of adaptive change.

Building Civic Capacity

Most school reform initiatives have not been concerned with what Clarence Stone, professor emeritus at the University of Maryland's Department of Government and Politics, refers to as “civic capacity”—the ability to act in concert about matters that are important to the whole community.

Typically, school reform efforts have focused more on the “business” of schooling and less on teaching and learning, with community relegated to a minor role. In contrast, PEN's policy initiative puts the community front and center in the school reform process and gives the intermediary organization a leading role as the primary driver for creating and advancing a community vision for education improvement.

In *It Takes a City*, professor Paul Hill of the University of Washington's Center for Reinventing Education concludes that “leadership must come, strongly, and for a long time, from outside the system. Superintendents are good sources of day-to-day leadership, but given their short tenures, their efforts are not enough. Leadership must come from a longer-lasting source and one that is both more deeply rooted in the community than a superintendent and less protective of the status quo than a school board or district central office.”

LEFs as Intermediaries

LEFs act as a fulcrum, balancing district-community relationships. University of Maryland researcher Meredith Honig, co-director of the Center for Education Policy and Leadership, asserts that the primary function of intermediary organizations is operating *in between* other organizations and mediating or managing change for the parties involved. Intermediary organizations depend on those parties to perform their essential functions, leaving the intermediary free to operate independently and “provide distinct value...beyond what the parties alone would be able to develop or to amass.” In the policy initiative, LEFs sit between policymakers and practitioners and effect change in the roles and practices of both.

Studies conducted by Research for Action, a research consultancy based in Philadelphia, identify three primary intermediary functions:

- They broker between organizations and constituencies.
- They add value to the organizations with which they collaborate.
- They act as a credible and nimble vehicle for action.

Why LEFs Make a Difference

At the time of this writing, the policy initiative is not yet complete. The sites focusing on standards and accountability will have completed their initiative work in the summer of 2004, with the schools and community and teacher quality efforts slated to end in the summer of 2005. With the policy initiative underway, several characteristics of LEFs' ability to support the community in addressing the complex and difficult questions of education reform have become apparent.

LEFs represent the entire community, not a single constituency. LEFs participating in the initiative have long-standing, deeply rooted relationships and credibility in their communities. They are able to serve as civic leaders because of their relational, strategic, systemic, and political influence. LEFs strive to provide what the community wants in addition to what the school system needs. As Dan Challener, executive director of the Public Education Foundation in Chattanooga, TN, puts it, "We are external to the school system but not external to the community."

LEFs see themselves and school districts as accountable to the larger community, not just to their own boards. LEFs play a catalyst role by mobilizing the community around school reform, and by helping the community agree upon outcomes and the shared responsibility for achieving those outcomes. "Our core mission is mobilizing public opinion to improve public schools," says Cynthia Guyer, executive director of the Portland Schools Foundation. "The mission is our North Star; it's vital to the organization. Public engagement is not a group of activities added to our work; it is our work."

LEFs serve as intermediaries to multiple organizations. The policy initiative demonstrates that a single organization acting alone cannot develop and sustain an infrastructure that supports change. LEFs work collaboratively, guided by a community vision that shapes relationships and activities. They connect community organizations and stakeholders, coordinate services, and organize partners and funding streams toward the goal of producing shared outcomes that benefit multiple constituents.

LEFs, especially those located in large urban communities, have to engage multiple partners, some of whom also function as intermediaries, to create an environment in which a variety of community organizations can make effective contributions toward a common goal. In New York City, New Visions for Public Schools has successfully convened multiple constituencies from the city's diverse communities; New Visions currently works with more than 200 local organizations on its teacher quality initiative. Based on the belief that all children can learn, New Visions has been able to "create a safe place where all stakeholders come together, even at times when these stakeholders take opposing public positions," says New Visions President Bob Hughes.

LEFs need to manage the delicate balance of politics and relationships to be effective in their work. They must always be cognizant of where they stand—and how and when they must shift—while maintaining their organizational objectives. As one LEF director said, "LEFs operate on community fault lines. We may have to slide with them, but we try to direct the slide."

LEFs are catalysts for sustainable change. LEFs create innovative approaches to sustaining change by connecting sectors and bridging the traditional power base and disenfranchised populations. LEFs create and protect civic and district space where important dialogue can occur. They create opportunities for the public to participate in engagement efforts, and they join civic leaders in developing strategies. They keep the community focused on the big picture, and they articulate the community's expectations to those charged with implementing the desired improvements in policy and practice.

LEFs provide citizens, practitioners, and policymakers with the data, information, and context that, in turn, yield knowledge, capacity, insight, and a deeper understanding of education reform. LEFs synthesize and organize information for community deliberation and action. They provide a forum for community decision making and help the community understand what it will take to make the changes they want. In addition, LEFs hold the district and community accountable by gauging the progress that has been made toward education goals, reporting fairly and accurately on school system performance.

Because LEFs are committed to the success of all children, and because they have built strong relationships with many community sectors, they have earned the respect of their communities and enhanced their credibility. The Mobile Area Education Foundation (MAEF) works with a wide range of community members—from urban business leaders to rural community residents—to achieve equity and accountability in the sprawling Mobile County Public School System. Recognizing that the district lacked the capacity to make the needed changes, MAEF drew upon the energy generated during the “Yes, We Can” engagement campaign to “pressure and support the district to make the shift to a more accountable, more equitable system,” says Carolyn Akers, MAEF’s executive director.

LEFs’ effectiveness as change agents depends to some degree on the capacity of the school system to change. But pressure and support from an independent external organization is an important long-term lever and catalyst, even for the most entrenched school district.

LEFs are entrepreneurial in nature. LEFs can react with speed, responsiveness, and flexibility—the hallmarks of entrepreneurial organizations—and are able to seize opportunities as they present themselves. They know that performance is the key to developing trust and influence, and they understand the need to stay abreast of education trends.

LEFs speak the language of school districts and of communities in promoting policy and practice, process and results. They are comfortable in boardrooms, in schoolrooms, in low-income neighborhoods, and in the halls of power and influence.



As LEFs develop greater understanding of the reasons behind the achievement gap in their communities, and as they build stronger connections to diverse groups, the LEFs themselves are changing. The board of the Durham Public Education Network became more representative of the community with the growing recognition that student achievement is an issue of race and class, and that African-American male leadership is essential to closing the achievement gap. “Now that our board is more diverse,” says Executive Director Kay James, “we discuss issues much more openly and the board is more likely to hear and consider issues from different perspectives.”

LEFs are politically astute. LEFs know that achieving common goals requires the support of and intervention from private- and public-sector leaders. LEFs act as the glue that keeps these leaders working together and the reform process moving forward. They use common issues and values to move people and organizations from individual agendas and positions to collective agendas and positions.

In Paterson, NJ, the Paterson Education Fund has been able to bridge ethnic and ideological differences in a fragmented community. The LEF has gained the trust of the community by staying focused on school issues, steering clear of competing ideologies, and maintaining grassroots community connections. LEFs such as Paterson are helping communities untangle issues of power, authority, and voice by engaging a broad cross-section of the community.

As their work continues, LEFs must sustain the many relationships they have developed in order to align the current political structure and belief systems with dramatically changing societal demographics. As Kay James says, “We are in a place and time comparable to other pivotal times in our history, such as the change between the industrial and information ages. The complexity of this work demands a deft hand at authentic relationships and a large dose of political savvy.”

LEF Profile

- Tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the IRS Code
- Independent of any school district
- Focused on improving and reforming the local public education system
- Serving a significant population of disadvantaged students
- Run by professional staff and a board of directors reflective of the community
- Committed to the mission and values of Public Education Network



Afterword



June 2004

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Carolyn R. Akers

Wendy D. Puriefoy
Public Education Network
601 Thirteenth Street NW
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Wendy,

I wanted to put down some thoughts on the sustainability of the initiative work we have been doing here in Mobile for the past three years. In thinking through our next steps, I recognize that we are building this airplane as we fly it!

In our initial proposal to PEN, we recognized that sustained improvement would take more than three years. We knew we had to build the capacity of the Mobile County Public School System and of the community-at-large to engage in fact-based decision making. We knew we had to inform and engage the entire Mobile community around high academic standards, and to develop an accountability structure to ensure implementation of our plan. We have made significant, real progress in performance-based teacher incentives, in the reconstitution and reallocation of existing funding to the lowest-performing schools, and in the development of a long-range, results-based strategic plan.

Continuous improvement requires continuous public engagement. Throughout our initiative we have been creating a “prescription” for success. Phase one was about collecting the voice of the people, facilitating agreement, connecting to an action framework for delivery (Baldrige), and communicating for genuine public ownership. Our next phase of public engagement is about deployment and will include empowering action through the development of a civic brigade that represents key sectors of the community. We will be tracking progress and creating short-term wins, mapping organizations and aligning targeted actions for impact, and using the civic brigade to mobilize the political will of the community to fund a high-performing public education system.

This is where I believe our work stands out. Most improvement efforts get to a plan of action but then fall short on deploying strategies that translate goals into practice. We believe we have the right prescription to move all of our children to progress. One thing is certain: we can’t stop where we are now.

The PEN grant has truly changed the Mobile Area Education Foundation and positioned us to be a vehicle for state change as well. For MAEF, the grant was more than a catalyst—it is the nucleus of who we are today and serves as the lifeblood of our organization. This has been an incredible journey for us. I am truly appreciative of the opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carolyn R. Akers".

Carolyn R. Akers



Appendices

APPENDIX I

Fair Opportunities-to-Learn Framework: Standards and Accountability

Data collected in the standards and accountability initiative addresses existing school district policies and the policies of other public agencies, such as public libraries and early childhood education programs, that provide opportunities for learning. LEFs also collect data to document and describe the achievement gap—the difference in achievement between white and Asian students and their African-American and Latino counterparts that exists in nearly every community in the United States.

Standards and accountability sites tap into a community's civic values—uncovering what individuals think, know, believe, and value—to ensure that all children have equitable opportunities to learn. Once the standards and accountability sites made their communities aware of the achievement gap, their work took on a sense of urgency. Way in advance of NCLB data requirements, which do not become fully effective until 2005–2006, the standards and accountability sites were already collecting data disaggregated by ethnicity, fluency in English, and income level—data not readily available from many districts. Since districts and states began implementing NCLB data requirements, the standards and accountability sites have been able to obtain better data and connect their work to district efforts.

Several standards and accountability sites worked with The Education Trust to help the public understand the technical aspects of their data and to identify the most important community needs. Since the standards and accountability data framework specifies information on existing policies, these sites were prepared to focus their work on changing local and state policies.

The standards and accountability sites focused on five policy areas to ensure fair opportunities to learn.

Every child enters school ready to learn.

Young children, especially those who do not have learning-enriched home or daycare environments, need prekindergarten and full-day kindergarten to build important early literacy, socialization, and other skills that are the foundation for a lifetime of learning.

Every child has access to a rich curriculum aligned to standards.

To meet the demands of a rich, rigorous curriculum, students need adequate instructional resources and up-to-date technology, access to high-level courses, and opportunities to demonstrate their progress on tests and other assessments that are aligned to standards and curricula.

Every child has high-quality instruction.

To get the instruction they need to meet high standards, students need well-qualified teachers and principals who are effective instructional leaders. They need smaller classes that offer opportunities for more personalized and creative instruction as well as varied forms of instruction and additional learning time.

Every child is in a school environment conducive to learning.

Students need school facilities that are not overcrowded, are in good repair, and are inviting. Code of conduct policies help set parameters for safe school environments that are free from violence and that free children from fear of harassment and threatening situations.

Every child has access to community services that support and enhance learning.

Students need schools that either coordinate access to or house health and social services. They need access to before- and after-school programs and summer programs that support their personal development and academic learning.

APPENDIX II

Community Assessment Framework: Schools and Community

Indicators in the schools and communities framework point to factors that reduce nonacademic barriers to learning. The framework helps LEFs identify community assets, gaps, and needs; assess community capacity and community resources; and develop information about organizations and their relationships with one another.

The provision of services and supports for children, youth, and families is divided among many organizations, each with its own policies and policymaking bodies. With such diffuse responsibility, LEFs must first identify policy targets shared by multiple institutions and then advocate for improvement in the delivery of services and supports. The schools and community sites focus on coordinating the work of schools and the many service agencies.

The framework is based on the five core elements for full-service community schools developed by the Coalition for Community Schools.

Quality Education

Outcome: With a rigorous curriculum and instruction—along with early learning and postsecondary supports—all children can meet challenging academic standards and participate in productive employment or go on to higher education after leaving high school.

Indicators

- Early learning programs and opportunities
- Early childhood programs
- High-quality instruction and leadership
- Safe, supportive learning environments
- Supports for post-high school opportunities

Family Supports

Outcome: All families in the community have easy access to health and social services.

Indicators

- Access to childcare and before- or after-school programs
- Access to basic and preventive care, such as health, mental health, and social services, for all family members including teens
- Access to childcare and before- or after-school programs
- Access to housing, transportation, and income supports
- Access to family life supports

Child and Youth Development

Outcome: Young people develop assets and talents, form positive relationships with peers and adults, and serve as resources to their communities.

Indicators

- Opportunities to build positive relationships with peers and adults
- Opportunities to develop skills and talents
- Opportunities to participate in the broader community (youth as resource)
- Opportunities to make key decisions within key organizations/sectors in the community

Family and Community Engagement

Outcome: Family members, other residents, stakeholders, and community institutions work together and actively participate in designing, supporting, monitoring, and advocating quality programs and activities that link schools and community.

Indicators

- Opportunities for public conversation and deliberation
- Grassroots community/parent organizing efforts
- Supports for parent participation
- Collaborative ventures to address students' in- and out-of-school needs

Community Development

Outcome: District officials, municipal leaders, stakeholders, service providers, parents, teachers, and others focus on strengthening the social networks, economic viability, and physical infrastructure of the surrounding community.

Indicators

- Development of infrastructure and physical capital
- Access to and use of technology
- Opportunities for training and education for upward mobility
- Increased level of private and public investment

APPENDIX III

Teacher Quality Data Framework

The teacher quality data framework helps communities assemble information about teachers, district policies and practices, and community factors that affect the quality of teaching. The framework incorporates five “views” of teacher quality. It includes basic data about teacher characteristics, plus information on teacher distribution within the system and teacher flow—entering, exiting, and moving within the system. The framework also uses data on existing policies and practices that could keep teachers from reaching their full potential. Together, the five views create a complete story on *what* the state of teacher quality is and *why* things are the way they are.

Teacher quality is the most technical of the three initiative focus areas and the one that presents LEFs with the most challenges in terms of generating a sense of public ownership and urgency. Given that teacher quality is typically viewed as an issue solely within the school district’s purview, the teacher quality sites often had difficulty in getting the public to take ownership of the issue, and difficulty in determining the public’s role in changing policies to improve teacher quality.

VIEW ONE: **The Big Picture**

What are the teacher characteristics in the district as a whole?

Indicators

- Scores on state licensing exams and tests of verbal ability
- Completion of a major and a minor
- Possession of national board certification, or other certifications
- Value-added contributions to student academic gains
- Gender, age, race, and years of experience
- Salary

VIEW TWO: **Distribution**

How are these characteristics distributed across different kinds of schools, students, and programs?

Indicators

- Teachers at schools with differing levels of performance on official assessments
- Teachers at schools within each of the four quartiles of proportion of minority students
- Teachers at schools within each of the four quartiles of proportion of students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch

VIEW THREE: **Flow**

What are the characteristics of teachers entering, leaving, and moving within the system?

Indicators

- Applicants accept teaching jobs
- Teachers leave the school system voluntarily
- Teachers leave the school system due to termination/dismissal
- Teachers move from one school to another within the district

VIEW FOUR: **Structure and Process**

How do state/district policies and practices affect teaching quality?

Indicators

- State licensure/certification requirements and categories
- Type and use of support services available for teachers
- Methods used by the district to recruit new teachers
- Method by which new teachers are assigned to schools
- Nature of induction programs and percentage of new teachers who participate
- Components of district salary schedule
- Types of professional development available
- Level of control teachers have over resources, and access to resources for professional needs

VIEW FIVE: **Community**

What impact do those outside the schools have on teaching quality?

Indicators

- Public support/advocacy by the school board for the school system
- Terms of state/district agreements with teacher unions
- Number of graduates from area college and university preparation programs each year, number of graduates in those programs who accept jobs in the district each year
- Satisfaction with parental involvement/support as expressed by teachers
- Number of community organizations adopting teacher quality as part of their organizational agendas

APPENDIX IV

Participating LEF Sites

Teacher Quality Sites

Alliance for Education is engaging broad segments of the community in dialogue about the quality of teaching in the Seattle school district. The teacher quality initiative, which is embedded in a multimillion-dollar initiative to transform Seattle's high schools, has developed and is implementing a research-based strategic plan to improve teacher quality, educate and organize the community around relevant teacher quality issues in relation to transformed high schools, and advocate for local and state policies needed to improve teaching.

Alliance for Education

Seattle, WA
www.alliance4ed.org

DC VOICE is leading a collaborative of teachers, parents and guardians, students, community members, and other residents concerned about the quality of public education in the District of Columbia. Its mission is to strengthen the public voice to support the DC school system, and to hold the school system and the city accountable for the education of its youth. Citywide coalitions to support quality teaching and learning are currently in development and are using national and local research to inform and organize the public.

DC VOICE

Washington, DC
www.dcvoice.org

Education Alliance, West Virginia's statewide education fund, is conducting community dialogues throughout West Virginia to engage individuals in identifying critical education issues and developing local community education plans. The results of these meetings, in conjunction with the results of an in-depth research process, will be used to produce a statewide education plan and a legislative policy agenda based upon community needs and interests.

Education Alliance

Charleston, WV
www.educationalliance.org

New Visions for Public Schools is spearheading a process to improve teacher quality by engaging college and university schools of education and other education stakeholders in the New Century High School Initiative, a major reform effort aimed at creating and transforming the city's high schools. The process also will revamp teacher preparation policies and practices to reflect the skills and knowledge teachers need to teach in these new high schools. In launching these new century high schools, the community partners are looking to public engagement on the qualities of an effective teacher as a key element in the process. The goal: to develop programs and policies consistent with the core principles of effective schools in order to prepare and support teachers to serve students with the greatest needs.

New Visions for Public Schools

New York, NY
www.newvisions.org

Public Education Foundation (PEF) is utilizing extensive research and comprehensive community engagement to create public demand for putting a quality teacher in every classroom in Hamilton County. Through research, PEF has identified approximately 100 highly effective teachers in Hamilton County schools and is using this network of instructional leaders to learn about effective practices and effective student approaches. PEF also used a series of public forums to develop a strategic plan that includes policy recommendations in three key areas: teaching skills, work environment, and compensation.

Public Education Foundation
Chattanooga, TN
www.pefchattanooga.org

Standards and Accountability Sites

Durham Public Education Network (DPEN), in concert with its community partners, helped develop Durham’s “Covenant for Education,” which outlines the community’s commitment to working in partnership and sharing resources for the benefit of all Durham public school students. More than 300 individuals representing 62 organizations—including many that had not been previously involved in any sort of education reform efforts—signed the covenant and are now working on behalf of Durham’s students. In addition, DPEN helped get out the vote for a successful \$124 million bond referendum to support school capital improvements.

Durham Public Education Network
Durham, NC
www.dpen.com

Mobile Area Education Foundation conducted a strategic planning process that produced a *PASSPort to Excellence*, a community agreement to ensure high standards and achievement for every child in the county. In three years, community pressure on the school system has led to delivery of a transformation plan that has already increased reading and writing scores. With district staff and community members holding one another to shared accountability, the Mobile County Public School system is transforming every part of the system to align with the community’s long-range strategic plan. Schools get an equitable allocation of resources and instructional interventions based on student achievement gaps. The five lowest-performing schools are being reconstituted, one of the five goals in the agreed-upon community plan. Redesign of central office functions is also underway.

Mobile Area Education Foundation
Mobile, AL
www.maef.net

New Jersey LEF Coalition, a consortium of local education funds, is building capacity in communities throughout the state and developing a statewide consortium to influence state policy. **Paterson Education Fund (PEF)**, the lead education fund in the coalition, is providing training, facilitating collaboration, and sharing information about opportunities for advocacy. PEF's community engagement strategies include the Right Question Project, statewide conferences, and partnerships with faith-based organizing groups.

Paterson Education Fund

Paterson, NJ
www.paterson-education.org

Pennsylvania Public Education Partnership (PA PEP) is a consortium of Pennsylvania local education funds—Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment, Mon Valley Education Consortium, Philadelphia Education Fund—involved in state-level advocacy to create better outcomes for all students in Pennsylvania. PA PEP helped create a common language for state education advocates, thus helping them push for policy change on a specific set of opportunity-to-learn issues and raise awareness of opportunity-to-learn issues during the 2002 gubernatorial election. PA PEP recently turned its advocacy efforts toward helping Pennsylvania residents monitor and respond to implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment

Lancaster, PA
www.lfee.org

Mon Valley Education Consortium

McKeesport, PA
www.mvec.org

Philadelphia Education Fund

Philadelphia, PA
www.philaedfund.org

Portland Schools Foundation is focusing its attention on a five-year plan to create high-performing public schools. The foundation is making progress toward the goals of the plan by improving three key school district capacities: the use of data, support for successful schools, and school and district leadership. Faced with a state budget crisis in 2003, the foundation successfully mobilized community support for a 1 percent increase in personal income taxes to support schools and social services.

Portland Schools Foundation

Portland, OR
www.portlandschoolsfoundation.org

Schools and Community Sites

The Education Partnership has engaged stakeholder groups and residents to create and operate a full service community school in the predominately Latino neighborhood of Olneyville. Literacy and English instruction is available for families, and out-of-school learning activities help enhance student performance and awareness about the community's history and institutions. A community collaborative coordinates school-based services and out-of-school programs and oversees efforts to create a safer neighborhood.

The Education Partnership

Providence, RI
www.edpartnership.org

Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment, in collaboration with community agencies and the school district, established family and youth resource centers to serve predominantly low-income and disadvantaged students. These centers provide a range of health and social services for children, youth, and families and a variety of before- and after-school programs and activities for elementary and middle school students.

Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment

Lancaster, PA
www.lfee.org

Lincoln Public Schools Foundation collaborates with community partners to develop and operate a district-wide network of community learning centers (CLCs). Youth-serving agencies staff the CLCs at school sites, providing a range of health services, recreation programs, and opportunities for extended learning linked to the academic goals of the school and the nonacademic needs of families. Parents and community members are involved in shaping individual CLCs, while a broad-based leadership team guides their development and long-term funding.

Lincoln Public Schools Foundation

Lincoln, NE
www.foundationforlps.org

Paterson Education Fund (PEF) is creating new partnerships between public schools and their community to lower barriers to student success. By facilitating conversations and opportunities to learn about community schools, PEF is helping the community redesign existing schools and design new schools to be centers of the community. In addition, community agencies and schools now coordinate their efforts more closely in order to serve Paterson's most disadvantaged students.

Paterson Education Fund

Paterson, NJ
www.paterson-education.org

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Public Education Network

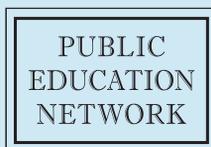
Public Education Network (PEN) is a national organization of local education funds (LEFs) and individuals working to improve public schools and build citizen support for quality public education in low-income communities across the nation. PEN believes an active, vocal constituency is the key to ensuring that every child, in every community, benefits from a quality public education. PEN and its members are building public demand and mobilizing resources for quality public education on behalf of 11.5 million children in more than 1,600 school districts in 33 states and the District of Columbia. In 2004, PEN welcomed its first international member, which serves almost 300,000 children in the Philippines.

Our Vision

Every day, in every community, every child in America benefits from a quality public education.

Our Mission

To build public demand and mobilize resources for quality public education for *all* children through a national constituency of local education funds and individuals.



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