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A Report on the Municipal Leadership in Education Project
Supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York

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Introduction

In most American cities and towns, education is not viewed as a municipal responsibility. But local elected officials around the country are demonstrating that local governments *can* make a positive difference in improving schools — and not necessarily by exerting greater administrative control over the educational system. The work of these elected leaders is based on their recognition that they have an important stake in the success or failure of local schools. They understand that:

- The health and well-being of our communities are undermined when schools fall short of ensuring student success.
- Successful schools contribute to community quality of life, economic development, and a strong citizenry.
- With education reforms placing schools and communities under increasing pressure to improve student performance, mayors and other local officials are uniquely positioned to strengthen community capacity and public will to address key education challenges.

Municipal Leaders Matter

A series of surveys and interviews conducted by the National League of Cities shows that municipal leaders are deeply concerned about the quality of public schools in their communities. In a 2001 survey asking municipal officials about the six critical factors affecting the future well-being of America's cities, nearly four in five respondents cited the quality of education as a “major” or “moderate” problem. Local elected leaders also identified school reform and academic achievement as the most critical issues confronting their cities as they seek to address the needs of youth and families.¹

Mayors and councilmembers also know that the public holds them at least partly accountable for student achievement in their cities and towns. A 2001 poll by the journal *Phi Delta Kappan* and Gallup showed that 45 percent of Americans believe that all levels of government have a role to play in closing the achievement gap.² More specifically, the poll showed that this responsibility was distributed fairly evenly among federal, state, and local governments — even though municipal leaders typically do not have direct control or authority over public schools.

1 National League of Cities. (2001) *The State of America's Cities: The 17th Annual Opinion Survey of Municipal Elected Officials*. (Washington, DC: National League of Cities), p. 4.

2 Lowell Rose and Alec Gallup. (2001) “33rd Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitude Towards the Public Schools,” *Phi Delta Kappan* (September) p. 53.

These findings are reinforced by the challenges accompanying the implementation of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*, as well as recent polls by the Public Education Network that show *all* elected leaders, including mayors and councilmembers, are increasingly being held accountable for the quality of public schools.³ Some local officials have moved to exert a stronger role in overseeing public schools. A far larger number are working in partnership with school and community leaders — or are ready to take that next step — to ensure that all children have a chance to succeed.

Roles for Municipal Leaders ⁴

As concerns about the quality of education have moved to the forefront of public debates in communities across the nation, mayors and councilmembers have an opportunity – and a platform – to use their leadership positions to promote a community-wide approach for improving schools. As visible, respected leaders of the community, they can:

- **Set the public’s agenda** and articulate the city’s vision to reach consensus around specific goals for school improvement.
- **Facilitate ongoing communications** with school district leaders to build trusting relationships, lay the groundwork for collaboration, and minimize “turf” issues.
- **Bring community partners together** — including business, community and faith-based organizations, libraries, museums, and others — to assess progress regarding school improvement and to leverage their resources to support schools.

- **Remove obstacles to achievement** by using city resources to help children and youth maximize their learning potential, address health and social services needs, and enhance student safety.
- **Build public will** by engaging parents and community residents, using public forums and media outreach to raise critical issues and share responsibility for shortcomings and successes.

A number of options, ideas, and tools are available for municipal leaders to play a pivotal role in strengthening and supporting the quality of education in their communities. For example, municipal leaders also can:

- **Encourage the use of data** to tell stories the public can understand and to target resources to address the greatest needs.
- **Bolster the quality of teaching** by supporting teacher recruitment efforts, including affordable housing options and other financial incentives for teachers.
- **Advocate for equitable school funding** to invest in high-quality teachers, instructional resources, and facilities.
- **Create afterschool programs** to reinforce student learning and to provide safe havens and enrichment opportunities during non-school hours.
- **Turn schools into centers of community life** by keeping schools open beyond traditional school hours, developing joint-use agreements to reduce costs, and creating learning opportunities for families and the broader community.

³ Public Education Network and Education Week. (2002) *Accountability for All: What Voters Want from Education Candidates* and (2001) *Action for All: The Public’s Responsibility for Public Education*, which can be found online at www.publiceducation.org.

⁴ More information regarding the various roles that municipal leaders can play to support students and public education in general is available in the YEF Institute’s *Improving Public Schools* Action Kit, which can be found online at http://www.nlc.org/nlc_org/site/files/reports/waterfall1.pdf

Project Overview

With the creation of the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) in 2000, the National League of Cities (NLC) strengthened its capacity to assist municipal officials in their efforts to improve the quality of public education and develop programs and initiatives that help ensure the successful development of youth. As part of these efforts, the 30-month Municipal Leadership in Education (MLE) project was launched in June 2001 with financial support from Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The MLE project set out to support and assist local communities and to illustrate the leadership roles that mayors and councilmembers can play — and are playing — to promote and support school improvement. The project also sought to identify promising practices in municipal leadership and school improvement, while developing a range of tools and resources for mayors and councilmembers who are interested in strengthening K-12 education.

Cities with a population of at least 50,000 were invited to apply to participate in the intensive, targeted technical assistance project. The following six cities were selected through a competitive process:

- Charleston, South Carolina
- Columbus, Ohio
- Fort Lauderdale, Florida
- Lansing, Michigan
- New Haven, Connecticut
- Portland, Oregon

Immediately following their selection, YEF Institute staff worked closely with team leaders to ensure that each team's composition reflected the full range of key community stakeholders, including municipal officials, school board members, school

administrators, teachers, parents, business leaders, representatives of community and faith-based organizations, and other civic leaders. YEF Institute staff then provided intensive, ongoing support to these teams as they developed and implemented action plans for strengthening K-12 education that were tailored to meet each city's specific circumstances and needs.

The participating cities chose to address a range of issues through their local initiatives, including:

- Persistent achievement gaps by race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status;
- Low achievement levels of middle-school students;
- Inequities and inadequacies in school funding;
- Problems related to teacher quality and retention; and
- Lack of public confidence and insufficient connections between communities and their public schools.

Despite being faced with leadership changes, the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, government budget deficits, and other challenges, each of the six cities in the Municipal Leadership in Education project made important strides in improving education for children and youth in their communities. The next section of this report includes six city stories that reflect the experiences of these cities during the MLE project. The final section of the report contains a series of lessons learned and recommendations derived from the city stories. These lessons are relevant for mayors and councilmembers nationwide who are committed to using their positions of leadership to achieve the best education possible for youth in their cities.

Project Activities

The YEF Institute sought to provide the six cities participating in the Municipal Leadership in Education project with a nationally sponsored framework to bring diverse segments of the local community together in a collaborative effort to improve public schools. In selecting cities, staff looked for a strong commitment from the mayor to the project, as well as a capacity within the mayor's office or related agencies to support and sustain a leadership role in education. The YEF Institute also sought significant diversity among the cities selected to participate (e.g., by region, size, and school governance structure) in order to ensure that lessons learned through the technical assistance work would be relevant to large numbers of other cities. Project activities included:

● Site Visits

YEF Institute staff conducted annual site visits with the city teams to: help assess opportunities for building local capacity and enhancing the effectiveness of municipal leaders' efforts; meet with mayors and councilmembers; facilitate team discussions about the city's vision; and plan with municipal staff and community stakeholders.

● Regular Communications and Resource Information

The YEF Institute developed regular communication mechanisms, including: a listserv designed to encourage peer-to-peer exchange and provide timely information on a range of issues to support local work; and monthly and quarterly conference calls that enabled the cities to receive regular updates and feedback from peers and to engage in dialogues with national experts.

● Annual Cross-Site Meetings

The YEF Institute convened annual meetings that brought all six cities together in Washington, D.C., to foster discussions of key education issues, city-wide approaches, and strategies for municipal leadership in education. These meetings also provided an opportunity for the city teams to hear from and interact with prominent individuals from policy and research communities.

● Access to National Education Experts

From the start, YEF Institute staff forged strong partnerships with national organizations and education experts who could provide strategic advice and resources to support the site-level work. The Institute also convened the Municipal Leadership in Education Advisory Board, which included national leaders in school reform, to guide the work of the project.

● Local and National Visibility for City Achievements

The YEF Institute assisted the cities as they sought local and national visibility and recognition for their school improvement efforts. The cities' work was highlighted in local and national media — such as *Education Week* and *Nation's Cities Weekly*, NLC's newspaper — as well as presentations at national conferences and policy forums.

● Research and Publications

Drawing on the experiences of the participating cities, as well as other resources, the YEF Institute published two action kits, *Improving Public Schools* and *Expanding Afterschool Opportunities*. The action kits highlight the many roles that mayors and councilmembers can play to enhance the quality of public education in their communities.

City Stories



Charleston, South Carolina: Reconnecting the Community to Education

Recognizing the need for greater civic involvement in public education, the City of Charleston is reconnecting the community to local schools.

Under the auspices of the YEF Institute's Municipal Leadership in Education project, the City of Charleston has embarked on a public engagement strategy to strengthen and improve the quality of elementary and secondary education and increase parent and community involvement in public schools. The effort seeks to address a fundamental "disconnect" between the community and the local public school system that impedes progress and poses a major challenge to the city's civic and economic well-being.

The city's vision for reconnecting the community was evident when Mayor Joseph Riley gave his 2001 State of the City address:

"The challenge of educating our children is the single most important issue facing our community, and this is a battle we cannot and will

not lose. We must increasingly find ways for us, the citizens of our community, to connect with our children and let them know that we know they are our most important asset."

The following statistics paint a picture of Charleston's problems:

- Forty percent of eighth grade students did not meet basic standards for math in 2002.
- One-third of eighth graders scored below basic on reading standards in 2002.
- Sixteen percent of school children repeated first, second, or third grade in 2002.
- Sixteen percent of children who were given a test before entering first grade were assessed "not ready" in the 2001-2002 school year.⁵

⁵ 2003 Charleston County Kids Count Report. South Carolina Kids Count 2003. <http://www.sckidscount.org/kc03.asp?COUNTYID=10>



About Charleston

The City of Charleston has a population of 104,108. Its public schools are part of the Charleston County School District, which has a total student population of 44,312. The district was formed in 1967 from eight smaller districts and presently consists of 78 schools – 30 of which are within the city limits of Charleston. The remaining 48 schools are located in other municipalities or in unincorporated parts of Charleston County.

School Governance

Nine-member elected school board.

School Demographics

White	38.4%
African-American.....	58.5%
Hispanic	—
Asian	—
Other	3.1%
Free/Reduced Lunch.....	54%

Source: City of Charleston and Charleston County School District

In response to these statistics and a general dissatisfaction among residents toward the educational system, the City of Charleston decided to launch a collaborative effort focused on reconnecting the community to its public schools.

A Partnership Takes Hold

Mayor Joseph Riley launched the city’s effort by enlisting Bill Youngblood, a prominent local attorney and civic leader, to join him in chairing Charleston’s Municipal Leadership in Education initiative. Together, they established a leadership team of key community stakeholders, including leaders from education, business, faith-based organizations, and neighborhoods. YEF Institute staff met with the leadership team to discuss its vision for public education, as well as the critical challenges facing public schools.

During the initial planning phase of the project, the leadership team explored a range of public engagement strategies and options. YEF Institute staff connected the team to national experts in the areas of school reform and public engagement to help in the planning work.

In the fall of 2002, the leadership team held a community forum to kick off its public engagement strategy, announcing plans for dialogue and conversations across



“We couldn’t have done this without the national experts, tools, and strategies provided by the National League of Cities. The ability to bring in new people and get their outside perspective and also the networking with the other cities involved was terrific.”

— Jacquie Kennedy, Director, Mayor’s Office of Children, Youth, and Families

community sectors and publicly unveiling the team’s vision and mission statements, as follows:

Vision: We live in a healthy community where all children develop the academic, social, and technological skills to succeed in the 21st century.

Mission: To reconnect the community with its public schools by providing and supporting initiatives that equip all children with the academic, social, and technological skills to succeed in the 21st century.

YEF Institute staff helped plan the forum and enlisted the assistance of the executive director of the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, who shared her expertise as an urban school reformer seeking to engage communities in school improvement. A presentation by YEF Institute staff followed, providing examples of successful public engagement initiatives and strategies in other cities.

Starting a Community-wide Conversation

Following the forum, the leadership team organized 14 community sector meetings over the course of several months with the business community, teachers, faith-based leaders, parents, senior citizens, service providers, volunteers, and youth. Participants in the meetings identified challenges and roadblocks that keep people from being connected to the schools. They also discussed the contributions people are willing to make to improve the quality of public education in Charleston.

“Although the information collected from the various sector meetings varied depending on the community perspective and level of involvement, there was an obvious willingness and interest among participants to be connected to the community’s schools,” said Youngblood.

Participants in the sector conversations said Charleston should build the engagement campaign around models of what is working well and work with those schools that are



“Prior to this project, the perception toward public engagement in public schools was very limited, interested groups were very isolated, and there was little cross-sector dialogue broadly addressing public engagement in non-school settings. A very good foundation and set of recommendations have been developed.”

— Terry Peterson, Education Associate, College of Charleston and Member of Charleston Leadership Team



“This project reinforced the desire and willingness of the community to reconnect to our schools in a positive and rewarding experience that works to improve public education and expand learning opportunities for our students.”

— Mayor Joseph Riley

doing a good job of helping students succeed. The strategy, participants said, should be to highlight and replicate successful models and practices throughout the district. Participants also identified a number of ways in which the community could reconnect with local schools (for example, through adopt-a-school programs; reading, tutoring, mentoring, afterschool, and Saturday activities; and added support for teachers and scholarships).

With all 14 sector meetings completed, the leadership team analyzed the feedback to determine sector priorities and to develop recommendations. As part of its technical assistance from the YEF Institute, the team was helped in this review by a national expert from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, who has extensive experience with public engagement efforts related to school reform campaigns nationwide.

Moving Forward with New Investments

The City of Charleston’s renewed commitment to school improvement was demonstrated in the summer of 2003, when budget cuts prompted the Charleston County School District to cut its summer school program. Realizing that students would not get extra help over the summer and could fall further behind, the City of Charleston (through the Mayor’s Office for Children,

Youth, and Families) and Communities in Schools organized a volunteer tutor/mentoring program called S.O.S., or “Summer of Success, Supporting Our Students.” More than 300 volunteers were recruited, trained, and placed at 18 S.O.S. school sites throughout Charleston County. Volunteer tutors were asked to commit up to six hours per week for a total of seven weeks.

The S.O.S. program was a huge success. Local businesses encouraged employees to take part in the effort and helped raise money to support it. In addition, community-based organizations and other agencies donated products and services such as books, field trips, t-shirts, snacks for students, and gift coupons for volunteers.

Explaining the success of the program, Jacquie Kennedy, director of the Mayor’s Office of Children, Youth, and Families, said, “A small effort to provide students with summer school evolved into connections across the community.”

The Summer of Success initiative was followed by the city’s participation in First Day of School America, a national celebration that helps generate widespread community support for schools and excitement about the beginning of another school year. The city sponsored a First Day Festival on the Sunday before the first day of school. Parents, students, and educators were invited

for an afternoon of entertainment, free school supplies, food, and information about student support services. Parents were encouraged to take their kids to school on the first day, and employers were asked to support the initiative by giving employees time off to participate in activities at their children's schools.

“The First Day of School Festival emulates and reinforces our goal of reconnecting the community to schools. It all ties back to raising public awareness and increasing citizen involvement in our public schools,” said Kennedy. “This ought to be something that every community does to start the school year on a good note.”

According to Kennedy, the S.O.S. program and First Day of School activities are the first in a series of initiatives that will occur on an ongoing basis to reconnect Charleston and

its schools. Planning is currently under way for a year-round S.O.S. tutoring program, mentoring, and other activities to address Charleston's high dropout rate. In addition, a new school superintendent, Dr. Maria Goodloe, has been hired, and Mayor Riley plans to meet regularly and work in partnership with her to keep the community connected to the schools and also to strengthen and replicate partnership models that support students.

“This project reinforced the desire and willingness of the community to reconnect to our schools in a positive and rewarding experience that works to improve public education and expand learning opportunities for our students,” said Mayor Riley.

Added Kennedy: “We have witnessed a major change, and the community's connection to schools has certainly strengthened.”



“There appears to be a hunger throughout the community for reconnecting to public schools. There's a broad acknowledgment that the community has been disengaged, and people really want to help out.”

— Bill Youngblood, Co-Chair, Charleston Leadership Team



“We're [the city] really the facilitator, aligning ourselves with significant agencies and organizations within the community and empowering them to lead the charge.”

— Jacquie Kennedy, Director, Mayor's Office of Children, Youth, and Families

Leadership Keys – Charleston

- **Involved business leaders to bolster credibility.** From the outset, the engagement of the business community significantly enhanced Charleston's efforts to support the city's schools. Mayor Riley's decision to invite a prominent civic and business leader to co-chair the initiative brought credibility and a greater sense of ownership within the broader community. In addition, through the Summer of Success program, the business community and others assumed an active role in shaping solutions.
- **Seized upon an immediate crisis to galvanize the community.** When the school district was forced to cut summer school, city leaders succeeded in rallying key sectors of the community to create an alternative summer school program for large numbers of students. The crisis created by the school district's budget cuts provided a riveting focal point for public attention. At the same time, however, the community response that ensued would likely have been far less successful if the city had not laid the groundwork for public engagement through the sector meetings that occurred during the preceding months. These city-led efforts enabled the community to take ownership and become part of the solution, strengthening the partnerships and collaborations with community stakeholders that served as essential elements of the S.O.S. program.
- **Sought ways to build upon early victories.** The momentum generated by the summer school program, and the outpouring of community support that was triggered by its success, has enabled Charleston to tackle longer-term challenges. Plans are under way to replicate and expand the summer tutoring initiative in 2004, and city leaders as well as other stakeholders have sought ways to work in partnership with the school district's newly-hired superintendent. The S.O.S. program demonstrated that progress is possible in Charleston when the entire community comes together on behalf of its children and its public schools. By building upon this early victory, Charleston's leaders are beginning to strip away the sense of resignation and the acceptance of poor school performance among the public that are among the most basic impediments to lasting change.



Closing the Achievement Gap in Columbus, Ohio

In Columbus, Ohio, Mayor Michael Coleman is spearheading a collaborative effort focused on closing persistent achievement gaps among students from different racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Elected in 1999, Mayor Coleman made improving education a top priority for his administration — even though the city has no governing authority over public schools. Shortly after becoming mayor, he established the city’s first Office of Education. Mayor Coleman charged this cabinet-level office with developing ways to work in partnership with the school districts in the city. He also charged it with implementing community-based strategies that enhance student learning.

At the time of Mayor Coleman’s election, the city’s central school district — Columbus Public Schools — was facing a number of challenges. The Ohio Department of Education had placed the school district on “academic emergency” status based on its failure to meet basic performance standards, and deteriorating school facilities. The city’s schools also have struggled to narrow large

gaps between the academic achievement of white and minority students. However, these struggles are not unique to the city’s central and largest school district. All 16 public school districts in the metropolitan region face sizable and persistent achievement gaps between students of different races and ethnic groups. Across the state, the percentage of white fourth-graders who demonstrate at least basic proficiency in math and reading is 1.5 to 2 times greater than the proportion of their African-American peers who demonstrate this level of proficiency.

With the selection of Columbus as a participant in the YEF Institute’s Municipal Leadership in Education (MLE) project, Mayor Coleman and other key community stakeholders set out to work in partnership to improve schools and help **all** students succeed academically.



About Columbus

Located in Franklin County, the City of Columbus has a population of 711,470. The county is home to 16 public school districts. Columbus Public Schools is the central and largest school district with 146 schools serving a student population of 64,339. About 40% of the city’s student population attends school in the suburban districts.

School Governance

Seven-member elected school board.

School Demographics

White	38%
African-American	58%
Hispanic	1.5%
Asian	2.4%
Other	0.1%
Free/Reduced Lunch	58%

Source: City of Columbus and Columbus Public Schools

“I have a moral obligation and community expectation to engage school districts,” stated Mayor Coleman. “My job is to ensure the future of our city, and the best way to do that is to ensure the education of our children.”

Adopting a Priority: High Expectations for All Students

The YEF Institute’s first site visit to Columbus set the course for the project. Institute staff met with Mayor Coleman and his Education Advisory Commission, which served as the leadership team for the MLE project. The commission, which serves as consultant and advisor to the city council on matters of public education, was established by Mayor Coleman shortly after he was elected to office. The mayor also held a meeting with Superintendent of Columbus Public Schools Gene Harris, School Board President Stephanie Hightower, and Institute staff to discuss options and next steps for moving forward.

At these initial meetings, participants discussed the various options and strategies available to Mayor Coleman in supporting



“The MLE effort has had a tremendous impact on our community. It provided greater visibility of the mayor’s role as a champion for education and helped to create a greater awareness about the achievement gaps that exist throughout Franklin County. We now have regular communication and collaborations in places it did not exist before.”

— Hannah Dillard, Director, Mayor’s Office of Education



“As a result of the mayor’s involvement, people have been willing to be a little more thoughtful about what’s happening in education. He’s helped lift the education process to a whole level of importance that it did not have before.”

— Gene Harris, Columbus Public Schools Superintendent

local school districts and the students they serve. The meetings were followed by interviews with school and community leaders, who identified pervasive achievement gaps as a key concern. With both the City of Columbus and its suburbs growing more and more diverse, it became obvious that a broad, collaborative effort was needed to ensure that all students achieve to high standards.

After embracing the goal of improving the academic achievement of all students in Franklin County, Mayor Coleman decided to organize an education summit to launch a long-term effort to close the achievement gap. This approach had already proven successful in May 2000 when Mayor Coleman convened community stakeholders to discuss afterschool programs. The result of the 2000 convening was the launch of Cap City Kids, an afterschool program developed by the City of Columbus to provide students with academic support and other activities.

Now focused on closing the achievement gap, the city held a Community Leadership Summit in May 2002, partnering with Columbus Public Schools and the Educational Council, an organization representing the 16 school district superintendents in Franklin County. The summit attracted more than 200 participants, including university faculty, superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, state and city

government administrators, and nationally recognized experts. The YEF Institute provided assistance in the development of the agenda and recruiting speakers.

“Bringing people together to examine the issue is just the beginning. When it comes to closing the achievement gaps there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Different school districts and school buildings have different needs, so different strategies must be customized to work in unique neighborhoods and settings,” stated Heather Ness, executive director of the Educational Council.

In preparing for the summit, the Mayor’s Office of Education enlisted the help of Battelle for Kids, an Ohio-based group that works to analyze, share, and use disaggregated data to improve teaching and learning. Battelle for Kids conducted an intensive assessment of local school data to show where gaps exist and how the city and its partners could begin to use the data to align resources and help close those gaps. To provide added perspective and advice, the YEF Institute secured the participation of data experts from the Education Trust, a national organization committed to helping school districts close the achievement gap.

“Even though we are from separate jurisdictions, education is everybody’s business,” Mayor Coleman told the group. “And it will take a renewed partnership between schools,

businesses, communities, and families to bridge the gaps that have developed and are continuing to grow.”

An Action Plan and Road Map

The Community Leadership Summit was an important step in Columbus’ efforts to unite behind education improvements. One of the key outcomes of the summit was an action plan and road map laying out the following objectives for the city and its schools:

- *Sharing promising practices.* Participants pledged to identify local schools that are succeeding in closing achievement gaps and to determine the common characteristics of those schools and how their success might be replicated elsewhere.
- *Developing common data collection and analysis strategies.* Participants acknowledged the vital role of data in conveying the challenges facing local schools and in focusing resources and attention on key issues. Consequently, they decided it was crucial to develop common methods and strategies for collecting and analyzing data across the 16 school districts.
- *Providing targeted professional development opportunities for teachers and other school officials.* Columbus — or any other city — cannot achieve progress in closing the

achievement gap without providing extra guidance and support for teachers. Summit participants therefore recognized the importance of aligning professional development opportunities across districts to determine what types of activities are currently offered and to assess gaps in training.

- *Increasing advocacy, as well as community understanding about the achievement gaps in Franklin County.* Recognizing that closing the gap requires the efforts of not only educators but also parents, civic leaders, business leaders, and the broader community, participants pledged to provide a better understanding of why these gaps persist. The goal is to make the community aware of what is being done — and to involve residents in what still needs to be done — by tapping into community resources and having people engaged in meaningful and productive ways.
- *Expanding out-of-school learning opportunities for youth.* The participants in the summit also agreed on the importance of ensuring that extra help is available for students, for example through academic enrichment and cultural activities that help students learn and be safe.



“The relationships between the city and the school districts have continued to be strengthened. This initiative has helped to develop structures and a foundation that will help the organizations involved continue to move forward in their efforts to close the achievement gaps.”

— Heather Ness, Executive Director, Educational Council



“Everyone at the table understands their role and responsibilities, and it has resulted in a meaningful relationship with a continuous dialogue. Mayor Coleman understands that and does not try to intercede or step into areas that are the board’s responsibility.”

— Stephanie Hightower, School Board President, Columbus Public Schools

In adopting these broad goals, the City of Columbus and its partners made a commitment to a long-term partnership. “It can’t be a one-time event,” said Superintendent Harris. “I anticipate that as long as the mayor is around, we will continue to look at these issues. But it has to be an ongoing discussion.”

Moving Forward

Nearly two years after the Community Leadership Summit, participants remain hard at work and committed to implementing the goals and objectives adopted at the summit. Understanding that the community is determined to close the achievement gap, the 16 school districts are coordinating strategies and sharing information and resources with new focus, while at the same time investing more time and money to ensure that all students have a chance to succeed.

An important accomplishment that highlighted the city’s support for educational improvement came when local voters approved a \$700 million bond proposal to rebuild the city’s schools – a proposal advanced by Columbus Public Schools with the active support of Mayor Coleman.

“The mayor was a true partner and worked hard to engage the business community in supporting and financing the bond campaign,” said Hightower, the school board president.

Building on their initial successes, the city and its partners convened a second leadership summit in May 2003. The 2003 convening provided an opportunity to take an in-depth look at disparities in academic performance among students and also to share some strategies being used nationally and in Franklin County to close achievement gaps. It also provided the chance for participants to renew their commitment to improving public schools across the board.

In another early indication that these efforts are bearing fruit, Columbus Public Schools has made sufficient progress in key areas that it has succeeded in shedding its “academic emergency” designation under the state’s assessment system.

“People continue to be engaged and to understand the importance of closing the achievement gap. And we’re making progress,” said Hightower. “We’ve been able to get out of academic emergency and increase academic achievement. But, we still have lots of work to do.”

Leadership Keys — Columbus

- **Addressed community concerns head-on regarding perceived “hidden agendas.”** Initially, some school officials and community leaders had reservations about Mayor Coleman’s motives for involvement in public school issues. However, the mayor quickly allayed those fears and made it clear that his focus was on helping every student achieve and succeed — not on taking over control of the schools. By establishing trust and building relationships, the mayor was able to secure community-wide participation and achieve consensus on how to move the initiative forward.
- **Translated solid relationships with key stakeholders into a shared agenda.** The Mayor’s strong support of the superintendent of Columbus Public Schools, combined with a good working relationship with the school board president and the Educational Council, provided the added strength required for success. The active participation of the group representing the 16 school superintendents ensured that the effort would be taken seriously at the school level. In addition, clear operating structures helped advance the initiative’s agenda and strategies. Assigning roles and tasks among participants made the initiative a true collaborative effort and demonstrated the value of broad-based action to improve students’ academic achievement.
- **Used data analyses to build consensus and focus the agenda.** The use of data was instrumental in helping to drive the Columbus achievement gap initiative. The data team analyzed school data — school by school, building by building — to determine the magnitude of the current achievement gaps, as well as to communicate those gaps to the broader community and enlist their support in addressing them. Furthermore, the data helped inform subsequent discussions of appropriate remedies and strategies.



Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Engaging the Community to Improve Education

The City of Fort Lauderdale is implementing a community-based planning and mobilization process to engage community residents in focused discussions to help improve public schools.

The City of Fort Lauderdale markets itself as a “great place to live, work, and play.” City officials and others recognize that staying true to this slogan means providing the community’s children with a high-quality education. They also know that improving education is a community-wide charge that cannot be achieved by school districts alone; everyone has a part to play.

Education has long been a top concern for the Fort Lauderdale community. In 1995, the city launched a community visioning initiative around education and other issues. Recurring themes in citizen discussions at the time were concerns about quality educational facilities, equitable funding, and student achievement gaps by race, ethnicity, and income. The issue of equity in facilities and programs is particularly sensitive in Fort

Lauderdale. In 1995, a lawsuit challenging such inequities was filed against the Broward County School District on behalf of students attending schools there; it was finally settled in 2000, with the district agreeing to adopt new policies and corrective actions to reduce funding disparities. In addition, the district is required to provide annual reports on its progress and compliance efforts.

Committed to doing its part to ensure that **all** students succeed, the City of Fort Lauderdale viewed the YEF Institute’s Municipal Leadership in Education project as an opportunity to undertake a coordinated public engagement strategy to improve education. The city’s goal: to increase citizens’ awareness about the roles they can play in assuring a high-quality education for students.



About Fort Lauderdale

The City of Fort Lauderdale is the largest city in Broward County with a population of 154,680. Its form of government (Manager-Commission) differentiates Fort Lauderdale from the other five cities in the MLE project. Its public schools are part of a county school system — Broward County Public Schools — that is the fifth largest accredited school district in the nation, with 244 schools serving more than 271,000 students. Approximately 31,000 children attend the 32 public schools located in Fort Lauderdale.

School Governance

Nine-member elected school board (7 district members and 2 at-large).

School Demographics

White	35.5%
African- American	36%
Hispanic	23.1%
Asian	3%
Other	2.4%
 Free/Reduced Lunch	 33.9%

Source: City of Fort Lauderdale and Broward County School District

“We are very clear about our need to do something,” said City Commissioner Cindi Hutchinson. “We know we must become more actively involved in, and are jointly responsible for, the education of our community’s children.”

Developing the Vision and Plan of Action

As an outgrowth of its community visioning process in the mid-1990s, the City of Fort Lauderdale established the Education Advisory Board (EAB), a panel of 20 community residents appointed by the City Commission. Acting as a conduit for the interests and concerns of parents, educators, and advocates for the public schools, EAB members have been actively involved in efforts to address educational equity and quality issues. With the Education Advisory Board in place, Fort Lauderdale saw its participation in the MLE initiative as an opportunity to go the next step in advancing its education agenda and community engagement strategy.

With assistance from the YEF Institute, the EAB set out to develop a vision and identify potential issues and challenges that needed to be addressed as the city worked to engage the public around education issues. Other community stakeholders, including school district officials and representatives of community organizations, were invited to



“We are very clear about our need to do something. We know we must become more actively involved in, and are jointly responsible for, the education of our community’s children.”

— City Commissioner Cindi Hutchinson



“From a school perspective, we are seeing more people involved in schools, and more attention at the business level through the Chamber of Commerce. It’s really brought us together in partnership with the City of Fort Lauderdale. Because we are now in the same room, we can have a common discussion.”

— Frank Till, Superintendent, Broward County Public Schools

participate in the planning process as part of the leadership team for the MLE project. The YEF Institute served as facilitator for the discussions and helped to communicate that the city’s engagement initiative was not an attack on the school system, but rather a mechanism to draw in parents and other community members to support local schools and students.

After a number of discussions and thoughtful deliberation, the Fort Lauderdale leadership team decided to organize its engagement initiative around the following three components:

1) Inform citizens through public awareness and training initiatives. The city’s engagement process aims to help Fort Lauderdale residents better understand the organization and operation of the Broward County public school system. The expectation is that increased understanding will help foster more meaningful public participation in the schools. The city distributed informational materials and hosted workshops and discussions with educators, parents, residents, school communities, business groups, and other

stakeholders. In addition, Fort Lauderdale used its Neighborhood Leadership College as a mechanism to provide information about public education and to facilitate and focus community discussions.

2) Engage residents through the use of study circles. In addition to raising public awareness, Fort Lauderdale is engaging residents in small group discussions designed to elicit their thoughts, ideas, and concerns about public schools and the roles that the city and individuals can play to ensure quality educational opportunities. Working with the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC), the city has organized a series of small groups, or study circles, within specific neighborhoods and school enrollment areas. NLC staff helped to organize a facilitator’s training session for community members interested in leading the study circles. A subsequent community forum launched the study circles component of project. Many school and community leaders attended the event, including the mayor, city commissioners, the superintendent, and school board members.

3) Mobilize the community to develop a plan of action. Because Fort Lauderdale is still working to complete the study circles process, a community plan of action has yet to be developed. While the city had hoped to convene at least 30 study circles, only a fraction have been completed due to a shortage of trained facilitators. Once the study circles are completed, the city hopes to hold a “community action forum” to prioritize issues and develop goals and an action plan.

Despite the delay in completing the study circles, the city is intent on continuing its efforts to engage the community. According to Leslie Carhart, a staff member with the city’s Department of Community and Economic Development, “While we are disappointed with our progress, we remain committed to our original project concept and approach. The project will simply require more time, effort, and resources to fully implement – and on a timetable that necessarily extends beyond the parameters of the current National League of Cities MLE initiative.”

Moving Forward

Although the City of Fort Lauderdale has yet to fully accomplish the goals established at the start of the MLE project, city leaders

believe they have built a solid foundation for municipal and community involvement in education.

“The lessons we hoped to learn through this process — such as the importance of the city becoming more involved in school-related issues — have been realized,” said John Wilkes, chair of the MLE project. “The city’s involvement in this initiative has provided a foundation for expanding that process into the future.”

Frank Till, superintendent of Broward County Public Schools, credits the project with breaking down barriers. “From a school perspective, we are seeing more people involved in schools, and more attention at the business level through the Chamber of Commerce,” he said. “It’s really brought us together in partnership with the City of Fort Lauderdale. Because we are now in the same room, we can have a common discussion.”

In a sign of the improved climate for cooperation and action on education issues in Fort Lauderdale, the Education Advisory Board has made several presentations to the City Commission on issues ranging from equity and diversity to long-term facility assessments and funding strategies. In addition, the Council of Fort Lauderdale Civic Associations has established a liaison to the



“The relationship piece gets back to familiarity. The MLE project has helped break down barriers.”

– Frank Till, Superintendent, Broward County Public Schools

Education Advisory Board and has begun to support other efforts to reconnect neighborhoods to their schools.

“Not only have we expanded our network of activists and citizens who are regularly in contact with one another in addressing specific issues and concerns, but there has also been a high degree of coordination among these groups in representing the city’s interests before the school board,” said Carhart.

Another sign of the project’s far-reaching effects came when members of Fort Lauderdale’s Citizens Volunteers Corps assisted staff members and students from Stephen Foster Elementary School in preparing the school for the new academic year. Volunteers cleaned, painted, and

planted flowers to help beautify school grounds. They also helped decorate bulletin boards, number textbooks, and arrange classroom furniture.

“Overall, I’m very excited about what we’ve started,” concluded City Manager Floyd Johnson. “The MLE project represented a real break with the local tradition of staying out of the other jurisdiction’s business. It laid the groundwork for the city’s involvement in education issues and showed that the relationship can work differently.

“It’s a new way of thinking for our city leaders,” Johnson continued. “Activities and discussions related to education issues are becoming part of day-to-day business.”



“NLC was clearly a critical partner. Obviously, with such a large agenda, the focus wasn’t always there. It helped to have an outside entity to encourage us and keep us focused.”

– City Manager Floyd Johnson

Leadership Keys – Fort Lauderdale

- **Used the new initiative to improve lines of communication with the school district.** Fort Lauderdale showed it is possible — and essential — to improve relations between city and school officials. Despite some lingering tensions, the city-school relationship in Fort Lauderdale is getting stronger. Communications and information-sharing have improved in large part because the school superintendent assigned a staff member to serve as a liaison with the city. In addition, the two school board members representing Fort Lauderdale neighborhoods are strong supporters of the city’s initiative. As one school board member said, “We cannot do all that needs to be done in isolation.”
- **Created a network of study circles to support public engagement.** Fort Lauderdale decided to use study circles to engage stakeholders in conversations about how the broader community can help serve local public schools and their students. Community residents from varying backgrounds and viewpoints were given the opportunity to participate in frank discussions about local education challenges and, in turn, used this opportunity to focus on taking action. A number of study circles have been completed. However, the process is still under way, and the city still faces the challenge of bringing the community together to reach consensus on priorities and next steps.
- **Positioned an Education Advisory Board as a catalyst for change.** Through public meetings, presentations before the city commission, media outreach, and the dissemination of information via the city website, newsletters, and public access television, the Education Advisory Board has worked diligently to keep residents informed about important education issues. As a result, city leaders, residents, and other community stakeholders are becoming more involved in education, increasingly recognizing that a quality education for all students in the city is everyone’s responsibility. Because of new links between city leaders and citizens, the Education Advisory Board and city commissioners are now better at discerning and communicating community members’ interests related to education. In addition, city leaders and community residents alike have a newfound appreciation of the importance of their active engagement in education issues and are beginning to attend and speak at school board meetings.



Lansing, Michigan: Focusing on Literacy and Middle School Reform

The City of Lansing has launched a community-wide effort to ensure the academic success of middle school students, engaging citizens and teachers as well as community and school leaders in a series of activities focused on reading.

Confronted by a growing dropout rate and low achievement among middle school students, the City of Lansing took advantage of NLC's Municipal Leadership in Education project to spearhead an initiative aimed at improving the educational outcomes of students in the middle grades. With reading as a core strategy, the Lansing initiative is specifically targeting four areas: student achievement, attendance, behavior, and parental involvement.

Leading the initiative at the outset was Mayor David Hollister, a former educator who believes strongly in the connection between student success and the city's economic and quality-of-life goals. As the headquarters for General Motors, Hollister explained, Lansing has a vital stake in ensuring that students stay in school and achieve academic success so they can become

skilled workers and help local industry succeed and grow.

"We understand that the long-term vitality of the city and the success of the schools are interrelated, and we want to emphasize the importance of education in achieving our goals of becoming a world-class city," said Hollister.

Reaching Out, Setting a Course

In launching the city's initiative to help middle school students succeed academically, Mayor Hollister established a leadership team for the project that included a broad range of community stakeholders: the school superintendent, school board president, principals, teachers, business leaders, representatives of local organizations serving youth, and members of the university community.



About Lansing

The City of Lansing is the fifth largest city in the state of Michigan with a population of 119,128. The Lansing school district is a middle-sized urban school district, with 44 schools serving a population of 17,600 students. Almost two-thirds (60%) qualify for free or reduced lunch.

School Governance

Nine-member elected school board.

School Demographics

White	38%
African-American	40%
Hispanic.....	15%
Asian	5%
American Indian.....	1%
Free/Reduced Lunch.....	60%

Source: City of Lansing and Lansing Public Schools

In the early stages of the project, the YEF Institute helped the team reach consensus and develop the following vision and mission statements to guide its work:

Vision: To become a world-class city where learners of all ages are committed

to a shared vision of excellence for the educational and social development of our youth.

Mission: To create and apply a plan to attain excellence in education.

The team also established a set of broad goals for the effort, including:

- Motivating and engaging students and community members to read;
- Increasing parents’ awareness about the importance of daily student attendance;
- Distributing literacy information to parents and encouraging them to read with their children at home; and
- Developing a clear understanding of research-based best practices on reading, as well as sharing and demonstrating best practices in the classroom.

These goals guided the work of four committees formed to address each of the priority areas for the project.

Student Achievement

The Achievement Committee’s charge was to develop strategies for improving the academic achievement of middle school students. An important focus of the committee’s work has been the expansion of professional development opportunities for teachers. During a two-day program



“The MLE project has reinforced the importance of working in active cooperation with the school district. Without that active cooperation, we’re not going to get results.”

— Linda Sanchez, chief of staff to Mayor Tony Benavides



“We understand that the long-term vitality of the city and the success of the schools are interrelated, and we want to emphasize the importance of education in achieving our goals of becoming a world-class city.”

— former Mayor David Hollister

organized by the committee, more than 600 educators — together with city council representatives, parents, business leaders, and the media — took part in discussions about the needs of young adolescents, the importance of reading, and other strategies to address the whole child. Participants also grappled with ways to address achievement gaps; the use of national and state data to identify gaps and develop strategies was also discussed. Leading several of the key sessions were experts from the Education Trust and the National Middle School Association who were identified and brought to Lansing by YEF Institute staff.

“This large gathering of school and community leaders was a remarkable event,” said Jack Davis, president of the school board. “We focused on a total community analysis of middle school issues and engaged in very important dialogue. There’s no reason why it shouldn’t be repeated and used as a prototype.”

According to Sharon Banks, superintendent of the Lansing Public Schools, the event refocused educators’ attention on the importance of reading. “Our [middle school] teachers weren’t really focused on reading,” Banks said. “When we were able to hear from national experts, our teachers began to understand that reading occurs in every

classroom, across content areas. We’re now focusing on reading in grades K-8, with special attention to students who are in the lowest 25 percent academically.”

School Attendance

With an estimated 35 percent of Lansing middle school students having 10 or more school absences a semester, the Attendance Committee established a parent notification system using volunteers to call parents whose children are absent from school. Under the system, if the phone calls are not successful and the students’ absences persist, students and their parents are then referred to truancy court, where they face a municipal judge and possible sanctions ranging from probation to incarceration of students and parents.

In other activities, the Attendance Committee conducted an assessment to determine the factors that are impeding the ability of students to attend school. The committee also launched a new program to improve attendance called CAPTURE (Community, Schools, Law Enforcement, and Parents Teaming Up to Reduce and Eliminate Truancy). The program, which provides a monthly reward for teams of students with the fewest absences, is currently being piloted at one of Lansing’s four middle schools.

According to committee chair Mark Alley, Lansing’s chief of police, truancy is down by 10 percent since the committee started its work. Equally important, he added, the work of the committee has led to a renewed commitment on the part of city and school officials to keep working together to improve attendance across the board.

Parental Involvement

The Parental Involvement Committee was formed to implement a “community literacy strategy.” The committee’s goals include: encouraging parents to read at home to their children; providing middle school parents with information about reading; and calling upon local businesses to offer incentives for students and parents who are engaged in reading. The committee also organized a literacy conference where parents and students engaged in fun activities centered on literacy and reading, including storytelling, face painting, and watching illustrators at work.

“The literacy conference built a foundation for future education and afterschool initiatives,” said Dr. Carolyn Stone, committee chair and parental involvement coordinator for Lansing Public Schools. “It has certainly raised awareness that literacy is vitally important and that the city of Lansing is making this a priority,” added Dr. Sharron

Norman, director of curriculum for the school system and co-chair of the achievement committee.

Student Behavior

Recognizing the link between behavior problems in the classroom and poor reading skills, the Behavior Committee is spearheading efforts to increase the reading skills of students as a way to reduce student behavior referrals and suspensions.

“Often, kids who are poor readers tend to miss school or act out in class; these students would rather be seen as someone with a behavior problem than as someone with a reading problem,” said Sam Davis, a middle school principal and chair of the Behavior Committee.

The launch of an afterschool program at the local YMCA focused on reading for middle grade students is one outcome of the committee’s efforts. Capital Area Transportation, the local public transit agency, is working with the YMCA and the school district to provide transportation for students participating in the program.

In other activities, the Behavior Committee is working with bookstores and libraries to bring in authors and illustrators to promote reading.



“The dialogue between city and school officials has become much more informed. We now have more of an interchange based on common experience.”

— Jack Davis, School Board President



“Having the National League of Cities behind the project fostered a great relationship between the city and teachers. It brought a level of enthusiasm within the city and school district, fostered the relationship, and built trust. It wasn’t the city telling them what to do, but engaging them.”

– Dave Weiner, Executive Assistant to Mayor Tony Benavides

The Community That Reads Together

Under a new mayor, Tony Benavides, the city partnered with Lansing Public Schools to launch a new literacy campaign — *One Book, One Community* — designed to promote reading among middle school students, as well as the rest of Lansing.

Mayor Benavides, formerly the president of the Lansing City Council, assumed the office in January 2003 when Mayor Hollister was appointed by the newly elected governor of Michigan to head the state’s office of economic development.

“The *One Book, One Community* campaign involved students, parents, and teachers and made learning to read a team effort,” said Mayor Benavides. “Community support really allowed the campaign to flourish.”

One Book, One Community operates in all five middle schools of the Lansing school district. The first book selected for the campaign was *Seedfolk* by Paul Fleishman; it tells the story of how a community converts a vacant lot into a centerpiece of community life. Teachers developed themes, concepts,

and activities around the book as a fun and creative way to help improve student literacy levels and overall achievement. Furthermore, the City of Lansing and Lansing Public Schools shared the cost of purchasing hundreds of copies of *Seedfolk* to ensure that students and teachers could use the book in the classroom setting.

In addition to involving teachers and middle school students, Mayor Benavides engaged the entire community by holding a press conference and appearing on radio and TV talk shows to draw attention to the importance of reading, while encouraging parents and other community residents to read *Seedfolk*. These activities were followed by a city-sponsored conference for parents on the importance of reading.

The response in the community has been significant and continues to show promise:

- Bookstores displayed *Seedfolk* prominently in their windows;
- Businesses promoted the reading effort among their employees and customers;

- Local libraries organized forums and reading groups on Seedfolk;
- Police and fire stations offered the book free of charge; and
- The utility company adopted a school and created a community garden with the help of middle schoolers.

“*Seedfolk’s* theme of doing something positive in the community has really resonated locally,” said Superintendent Banks.

Building on the success of the *One Book, One Community* effort, the city is supporting the school district’s “On the Road for Reading Program,” which provides reading tips for parents as well as books, videotapes, and

other incentives in an effort to have students reading fluently by the third grade.

Community members, including municipal officials, have also been invited to participate in “Rocking and Reading,” a reading program sponsored by the school district in which caring adults are invited to read a story that is aired on the school district’s public access TV channel.

In other activities, the city department of parks and recreation is in conversations with the school district about how to turn schools into centers of community life. The city has also committed \$30,000 to initiate a new mentoring program in which the coaches of a city-wide football program will check on students’ development, behavior, and attendance throughout the year.



“Our [middle school] teachers weren’t really focused on reading. When we were able to hear from national experts, our teachers began to understand that reading occurs in every classroom, across content areas. We’re now focusing on reading in grades K-8, with special attention to students who are in the lower 25 percent academically.”

— Sharon Banks, Superintendent

Leadership Keys – Lansing

- **Focused on a high priority but “do-able” agenda.** Early on, the city and its community stakeholders decided to target middle school students and then narrowed their focus to improving literacy in the middle grades and throughout the community. The city’s ability to convene community partners, reach consensus on a strategic focus, and get buy-in from the community resulted in a coordinated effort across four target areas: student achievement, attendance, behavior, and parental involvement. Across all subject areas, there now is a new focus on reading in the classroom. Residents have a better understanding about the importance of reading and have rallied in support of this broad effort to make a difference in the lives of young adolescents. These specific gains also provide a foundation for future community involvement in and support for school improvement efforts.
- **Built upon prior education initiatives and leadership by the mayor.** Previous education initiatives by the city provided a foundation for success. The groundwork had been laid by Mayor Hollister when he appointed two Blue Ribbon Commissions in 1997 focused on improving Lansing’s Public Schools; a subsequent commission — Ready to Succeed — was appointed to look at the status of Lansing’s youngest children to ensure they are entering school ready to learn. These efforts brought together top leadership from education, business, labor, government, and the community to develop plans for improving education. The result has been stronger relationships to bolster future initiatives and investments in education.
- **Weathered mayoral transition due to the strength of a broad-based coalition.** Because of the broad-based coalition that is in place in Lansing, the community was vested in the effort to address the achievement of middle school students. The strength of the coalition played a key role in ensuring continued municipal support for the initiative when Tony Benavides succeeded David Hollister as mayor. This smooth transition and widespread support for the middle school agenda has been reflected in a variety of ways, including the *One Book, One Community* literacy initiative launched under Mayor Benavides’ leadership.



New Haven, Connecticut: Raising Student Achievement through Shared Accountability

The City of New Haven is using a district-wide accountability plan to engage the broader community, build public confidence, and connect key stakeholders in improving public schools.

When the City of New Haven was selected to participate in the Municipal Leadership in Education project, the community was facing a major challenge: 10 of the 28 schools identified by Connecticut as most in need of improvement were located in New Haven. The local leadership team decided to focus its work on engaging the broader community in efforts to improve public schools.

The vehicle for this engagement strategy was a district-wide accountability plan adopted by the New Haven Board of Education in 2002. The plan defines roles and responsibilities for the entire community in contributing to the success of every child entering New Haven Public Schools. A model of shared accountability, it was developed by a 27-member committee appointed by Mayor John DeStefano, Jr., and co-chaired by Dr. Reginald Mayo, superintendent of New Haven Public Schools, and Dr. James Comer,

founder and president of the Child Development Institute at Yale University.

“Accountability is an important issue for our community. By creating a partnership, both the schools and the community can take responsibility for the academic and social development of children,” said Mayor DeStefano.

DeStefano and other members of the local leadership team have used the MLE project to explore how the city and school district can ensure that all students have equitable resources and educational opportunities, as well as what key stakeholders can do to support education.

“Urban educators get so beat up and accused of negligence when students don’t succeed, but the whole community, the whole village, has to be responsible for the education of our children,” stated Superintendent Mayo.



About New Haven

The City of New Haven, with a population of 130,474, is different from the other five cities participating in the project in an important respect: the mayor is a member of the school board and appoints all school board members. New Haven Public Schools is comprised of 44 schools and has a total student population of 19,385 students.

School Governance

Eight-member appointed school board; Mayor of New Haven sits on the school board and appoints the other seven members.

School Demographics

White	12%
African-American.....	58%
Hispanic.....	27%
Asian	2%
Free/Reduced Lunch.....	56%

Source: City of New Haven and New Haven Public Schools

Framing the Mission

The local leadership team began its work with the YEF Institute by establishing a mission and vision to guide the project:

Mission: The City of New Haven, in collaboration with the New Haven Public Schools, key municipal leaders, and other stakeholders, will support opportunities that will enable our children to develop academic, social, and technology skills that best prepare them as premier citizens in the 21st century.

Vision for Accountability:

- Every child deserves a quality pre-school and school experience.
- Every child will attend state-of-the-art, safe schools.
- Every child will have access to all educational opportunities.
- Every child will be taught by the best staff with the best resources.
- Every child will be prepared for access to post-secondary education.
- Every member of the greater educational community will be responsible for ensuring the success of all our children.



“The many positive accomplishments in our schools are not always printed in the newspaper and do not reach the general public. We need to find a way to get the word out to parents and the larger community about what we do and how they can help.”

— Mayor John DeStefano, Jr.



“At the beginning, people would say, ‘Why does the mayor have us here?’ The atmosphere has now changed. Mayor John DeStefano forces collaboration. He’s created an environment and the meeting time for bringing us together.”

— Reginald Mayo, Superintendent

In order to achieve the mission and vision, New Haven took advantage of a YEF Institute site visit, as well as cross-site meetings with the other MLE project cities, to develop strategies for engaging the community. The engagement effort is based on the accountability plan and its premise that schools are not solely responsible for the success of students.

Shared Accountability through a District-Wide Plan

The New Haven accountability plan⁶ lays out a clear set of principles for improving education:

- Set clear expectations for performance and apply them consistently;
- Focus on student growth in addition to point-in-time performance;
- Use multiple valid and reliable indicators in all accountability decisions;
- Recognize our shared responsibility for student success; and
- Reward and recognize success in addition to imposing sanctions for failure.

The plan recognizes that different individuals within the school district and community have an impact on student success, and, as a result, it places an emphasis on shared accountability. Responsibilities and performance expectations are outlined across six stakeholder groups: the central office and district; individual schools; principals and school leaders; teachers and instructional staff; students; and parents. The plan also outlines expectations for the community and identifies various ways in which the New Haven community can enhance student growth and development.

The school stakeholders are responsible for establishing high academic standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning by providing an intellectually challenging curriculum and ongoing professional development opportunities, among other activities. However, educators are not expected to shoulder the full responsibility for student learning. Students also have to contribute by attending class regularly, completing assignments, and behaving respectfully in the classroom setting. Similarly, parents have a responsibility to be fully engaged in their children’s education.

⁶ Information about the New Haven Public School’s accountability plan is from the document, “Greater Achievement through Shared Accountability,” by Mayor John DeStefano, Jr., Dr. Reginald Mayo, Dr. James Comer, and the 27-member appointed committee.



“The benefit of the project has been to bring people together in a planned way to see that they should be working together and that there are things they can do.”

— Dr. James Comer, Founder and President, Child Development Institute, Yale University

The accountability plan also acknowledges the role of the larger community in helping students achieve academic success. Community involvement in the schools can range from individual tutoring and afterschool enrichment to high-quality day care and preschool services. Businesses are encouraged to offer internships and provide release time and flexible scheduling to ensure that parents can participate in the schools.

Engaging the Broader Community

With the accountability plan as the basis for action, the New Haven leadership team set out to broaden public awareness of the school district’s successes and achievements, while at the same time working to secure additional community resources to enhance student achievement. This outreach effort included focus groups with parents, businesses, community residents, and educators to get their feedback on the accountability plan. It also included the development of outreach tools that define how each stakeholder group can support student success. As part of these efforts, New Haven launched a major campaign to bring parents into the schools. One result: more than 7,000 parents signed pledge cards, committing to set aside time to help their kids complete homework assignments.

In other pursuits, Mayor DeStefano convened an education summit where

members of the business community pledged to sponsor internships, mentoring programs, scholarships, and other activities. The YEF Institute was instrumental in arranging a presentation at the summit by a national expert from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University who shared strategies about how the business community can become involved in helping to improve education outcomes.

“The summit was an opportunity to gather the financial community and business leaders to talk about what they can do to support schools and students – and what will be gained by the community if it engages with the schools,” said Dr. Comer.

Examples of the types of mentoring and school-to-career programs that the city would like businesses to support currently exist, but more are needed. For example, employees from a local pharmaceutical company, Bayer, currently mentor students in science and help them prepare for the school science fair. Another example is an emergency medical technician program for high school students, sponsored by the New Haven Fire Department. Students who complete the program can either go directly to work or pursue a college degree.

Building on the education summit, New Haven is working to broaden engagement beyond the business community by uniting people from a diverse range of sectors in

support of public education. In an example of this expanded spirit of collaboration, the school superintendent and chief of police now meet on a regular basis to discuss school safety issues.

“At the beginning, people would say, ‘Why does the mayor have us here?’ The atmosphere has now changed,” said Superintendent Mayo. Mayo went on to point out that New Haven Public Schools has become a key player among community groups, and invitations to school officials to speak at the meetings of various community groups have increased significantly.

“The benefit of the project has been to bring people together in a planned way to see that they should be working together and that there are things they can do,” said Dr. Comer. “Now it’s time to have larger segments involved and to create mechanisms to keep people involved in doing specific things to support education.”

“We have a community that’s interested, but we’ve never had a way to involve the community in a systematic way,” Comer added.

Leadership Keys – New Haven

- **Utilized governance roles to ensure city-school coordination.** Because the mayor of New Haven serves on the school board and appoints the other members of the board — and the school superintendent is a member of the mayor’s cabinet — there is close coordination between the city and its school district. This provides easy access between school leaders and administrators and city agency heads to work in partnership and determine how city services can be applied to support student success.

- **Worked intensively to build awareness among key partners/stakeholders.** Creating a sense of ownership for education issues in all parts of the community is vital to the success of schools and students. By involving business leaders, members of the faith-based community, and other community leaders, New Haven challenged these stakeholders to share accountability for the education of all children. In doing so, business leaders have started to think

about ways in which they contribute, and faith leaders have begun to publicly recognize the special achievements of students during Sunday services.

- **Engaged university-based experts from the city and region to inform debates.** New Haven capitalized on the resources of Yale University and Brown University, drawing upon national experts in child development, school reform, and public engagement to provide leadership, best practices, and credibility in the development of the accountability plan and in having the broader community take ownership of the plan. As a result, the community saw that the city and school district were committed and serious about advancing a school improvement agenda and using the resources of these institutions to support the school district. For many community members, the involvement of such prominent education leaders helped secure buy-in and participation.



Portland, Oregon: Responding to a Crisis in School Funding

The City of Portland rallied community leaders to address a crisis in school finance, passing a county tax measure that provides additional funding for public schools throughout Multnomah County.

Through the Municipal Leadership in Education project, the City of Portland initially set out to capitalize on NLC's national network and resources to enhance local efforts to close the achievement gap and build public confidence in the public school system. However, a funding crisis caused Portland leaders to shift their attention — as well as the focus of the project — to ensuring the fiscal stability of Portland Public Schools.

An Initial Focus on Closing the Achievement Gap by Improving Reading

Work on the MLE project began with a YEF Institute site visit to determine the attitudes and beliefs of various stakeholders toward K-12 education in Portland. Interviews were conducted with close to 100 diverse stakeholders, including the mayor, city and county commissioners, parents, students, school

board members, superintendents, and other community leaders. The YEF Institute's written analysis and feedback confirmed several core challenges facing Portland schools.

Chief among these is a persistent achievement gap among students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. It is a challenge that had prompted city and school officials to launch the "Connecting for Kids" reading initiative in 2001. The goal: to ensure that 93 percent of third graders read at grade level by 2008, up from 79 percent in 2000.

Connecting for Kids is a partnership between the City of Portland; the Multnomah Commission on Children, Families, and Community; and the Leaders Roundtable, a coalition of individuals representing the city, schools, business, and other sectors of the community. The initiative's activities have



About Portland

The City of Portland, located in Multnomah County, is the largest city in the State of Oregon, with a population of 660,486. The city is home to five public school districts. The largest district is Portland Public Schools (PPS), which is comprised of 107 schools serving a student population of 54,427.

School Governance

Seven-member elected school board.

School Demographics

White	62.4%
African-American.....	16.6%
Hispanic.....	9.2%
Asian	9.5%
Indian	2.4%
Free/Reduced Lunch.....	38%

Source: City of Portland and Portland Public Schools

included: enhancing teaching expertise of primary teachers; educating parents and child care providers to support early literacy; and mobilizing volunteer literacy tutors to work with students who are not reading at grade level. The City of Portland’s main contribution to the effort has been to enlist city employees and others as literacy volunteers.

The City of Portland had intended to use the technical assistance provided by the YEF Institute to support Connecting for Kids and achieve progress in closing persistent achievement gaps. However, shortly after the start of the project, it became clear that a major shortfall in state funding threatened the financial solvency of Portland Public Schools.

Said Mayor Katz, “We thought our focus would be on closing the achievement gap, but our focus got diverted due to the funding issue. Once we have resolved the funding issue, we can go back to addressing the achievement gap.”



“I worked with Mayor Katz throughout this period and know of no political leader with more knowledge and passion. She has provided great leadership and advocacy in state funding and has identified policies for the city to support schools. She listens to the best thinkers, she sizes up political opportunities, and she is bold.”

— Duncan Wyse, President of the Oregon Business Council



“The project brought the city and schools closer together and established new partnerships. Prior to this tax initiative, the school board called us bullies. Actually, we are bullies! We linked business, citizens, and schools.”

— Mayor Vera Katz

A Financial Crisis for Portland Public Schools

Portland’s education funding problems date back to 1990, when citizens, by a slim majority, passed a statewide measure that capped local property taxes at 1.5 percent of valuation, severely cutting real and potential revenues for local school districts throughout Oregon. Another measure passed in 1997 further limited property tax revenue, making the state increasingly reliant on the income tax. Also during that decade, a school funding equity initiative was implemented across the state through redistribution of existing dollars, resulting in difficult choices for all districts and serious funding reductions for some of Portland’s districts. In response to this crisis, Mayor Katz helped initiate the Coalition for School Funding Now!, a statewide, non-partisan advocacy group of parents, business/community leaders, and educators who work for equitable, adequate, and stable school funding.

The revenue restrictions have been exacerbated by the fact that all funding for public schools in Oregon passes through the state. As a result, when the state experiences serious budget shortfalls, school districts suffer. In 2001, state income tax revenues dropped because of the recession, and Oregon had no sales tax or rainy day fund

revenues to fill the gap. By the spring of 2003, Portland Public Schools were confronting a \$57 million deficit at the same time that they faced a strike by the teacher’s union over health benefits.

In response to these problems, the Portland leadership team used YEF Institute resources to help think through a set of options for addressing the funding crisis facing local schools. YEF Institute staff reached out to national experts from the Council of the Great City Schools who offered some ideas for action, such as:

- State legislation allowing the city to pursue its own local solution;
- Legislation to amend the city charter to allow local funds to flow to the schools;
- A new car license tax or highway tax; and
- A new regional tax.

YEF Institute staff also conducted research to learn about communities that had adopted tax measures with a built-in accountability framework. The Institute shared with Portland leaders the story of how Colorado’s Jefferson County School District secured voter support for a measure to increase funding for schools. In return, the school district was held accountable for an increase in student test scores.

Armed with the new information and options to consider, the mayor's education advocate convened a broad coalition to develop a local school financing strategy and plan. The coalition included the leadership team, school district leaders, city commissioners, the Oregon Business Council, and the Portland Business Alliance. As this group weighed its options, the city initiated several polls of residents in a tri-county area. The polls revealed that voters understood there was a real financial crisis and they wanted to support their local school districts. However, only residents in Multnomah County, where Portland is located, supported an increased tax.

While these longer-term options were being explored, the community was facing the immediate crisis in the winter of 2003 of a threatened teacher's strike and an impending cut of 24 school days for Portland Public Schools (PPS). The strike was averted by a combination of efforts. The teachers volunteered to work ten days without pay, and the City of Portland imposed a temporary surcharge on Business License Fees to provide assistance to city school districts. Acknowledging how critical education is to the health and well-being of business and industry, Mayor Katz consulted with the Portland Business Alliance and received its support to increase the fee, which provided

\$14 million in additional revenues to PPS. Thus, the 24 jeopardized school days were saved from cuts by the efforts of teachers and the business community together.

With the immediate crisis resolved, attention could turn to the upcoming years. Based on the polling results, the coalition decided to place on the ballot a county-wide tax measure to fund schools, public safety and human services. Supporting the measure were parent activists, the Portland Business Alliance, unions, religious leaders, and a coalition of city, county, and school leaders. As a result of this broad-based effort, the measure received the support of 58 percent of voters. It will generate \$90 million annually in personal income tax revenues over three years for the eight school districts in Multnomah County, including Portland Public Schools.

"Providing our schools with adequate funding was really important to our citizens – it shows in the fact that they were willing to tax themselves during a recession," said Portland City Commissioner Jim Francesconi.

"It was a desperate fiscal situation. We had made some cuts and were looking at a teacher's strike," added Jim Scherzinger, superintendent of the Portland Public Schools. "Fortunately, parent groups, school



"Mayor Katz, in partnership with Commissioner Jim Francesconi and the other city commissioners and the county commission, helped to create a local tax that provides basic stability and support for Portland Public Schools and other local school districts."

— Cynthia Guyer, President, Portland Schools Foundation



“The sharing of information about what’s happening in other cities has been valuable. It has affirmed that cities have a role in finding opportunities to support schools and also in leveraging city resources and the resources of the business community.”

— Kevin Jeans-Gail, chief of staff to Commissioner Francesconi

board members, the business community, and city and county leaders started looking at alternative funding options and were instrumental in reaching an agreement and getting the measure passed. It’s a very good example of how city, county, and school district leaders can work together.”

The new revenues from the tax measure have helped to offset Portland Public Schools’ \$57 million deficit, avert a teacher strike, and restore 24 instructional days that the district was about to cut due to the budget crisis. Among other priorities, Portland Public Schools earmarked the funds for programs aimed at preventing the loss of teachers, reducing class sizes, and strengthening college and workforce preparation.

“I think Portland is now seen across Oregon as a city that cares enough about educating its youngest citizens that it is willing to put money where its mouth is to fund stability and meaningful change,” said Barbara Rommel, superintendent of the David Douglas School District on the east side of the city of Portland.

To ensure that the new monies are well spent, the new tax measure requires school districts to communicate with local residents about student achievement and the use of the new public funds. A new School

Efficiency and Quality Advisory Council, appointed by Mayor Katz and the County Chair in consultation with the City Council and Board of County Commissioners, will review expenditures and monitor the district’s progress on student achievement and cost containment. The Advisory Council includes parents, educators, taxpayers, and business, union, and government leaders.

Looking ahead, the city’s leadership team, in partnership with the Coalition for School Funding Now!, has turned its attention to ensuring a new commitment from the state to support education. Mayor Katz has pledged to meet with the newly-elected governor to ensure that education is front and center on his statewide agenda — and that Portland’s solution to the funding crisis, albeit temporary, opens the door to a more wide-ranging discussion of how to strengthen and protect public schools.

“Other cities can now look to Portland and say, ‘If they can do it so can we!’ We took advantage of the opportunities and feel that Portland became a model for other communities. Besides, I was not going to allow *Doonesbury* to be right about Portland losing 24 days of school,” added Mayor Katz, referring to Portland’s depiction in the national comic strip.

Leadership Keys – Portland

- **Sought broad input and responded quickly to changing circumstances.**

Interviews with a broad cross-section of the community confirmed perceptions about what is working well with the schools, identified the critical challenges, and in turn, made the community want to be part of the solution to help all students achieve success. As a result, when the school funding crisis erupted, it was easier to rally the community and secure the passage of the tax measure.

- **Forged alliances between city and county commissioners.** Having a solid partnership in place between the city and county was instrumental. The City of Portland and Multnomah County were able to strengthen and build upon their existing partnership and work together in new ways. More specifically, education was not a county priority. However, because the school funding crisis could have had a devastating impact on the city and county, new alliances around education were forged to resolve these issues. When the school district was about to cut school days, municipal and county leaders

stepped in, convened the teacher’s union and the school district, averted a strike, and forced both parties to reach an agreement that ultimately put the days back on the school calendar. In addition, the city and county played vital roles in developing and passing the tax measure that provided additional dollars for schools.

- **Increased public support for key investments via the mayor’s “bully pulpit.”**

The mayor’s bully pulpit provided a means to convene and engage the public to support schools. Mayor Katz helped sharpen the focus on the seriousness of the financial crisis and used her leadership capacity to bring together key stakeholders to forge solutions, helping to create the civic capacity necessary to pass the tax measure despite the bleak economic climate. Mayor Katz’s involvement with the Portland Business Alliance and the Leaders Roundtable enabled her to secure their support for the tax measure and increase the business license fee to provide additional dollars for schools.



“Participating in the MLE project formalized our commitment to education. It has really strengthened the city’s connection to public education.”

— Carol Turner, Education Advocate for the Mayor

Lessons Learned



LESSONS LEARNED

In the course of their participation in the Municipal Leadership in Education project, elected officials and their local leadership teams in the project's six cities learned a great deal about what works — and what does not — to strengthen and support public schools. The following “lessons learned” are drawn from extensive interviews by staff of NLC’s Institute for Youth, Education, and Families with mayors and team leaders in each of these cities. While these observations have been reviewed by and discussed with these city leaders, the YEF Institute alone is responsible for the conclusions and opinions expressed herein.

1. Vigorous and sustained mayoral leadership yields big dividends.

Mayors are in a unique position to use their leadership mandate and political clout to define and shape a citywide agenda for improving public schools by focusing on student achievement and critical city resources to support student learning. They can also bring diverse stakeholders to the table to agree on key education goals and encourage community partners to use their resources to enhance the school district’s efforts. A mayor’s stature and visibility can serve to galvanize the community, command public attention, and spotlight successful gains, and at the same time, confront critical challenges. Mayors are well positioned to put a structure in place that outlives the short tenure of the average superintendent, and that can also survive transitions to new mayoral leadership when that occurs. The goal: to build on the assets of the community in a way that supports the collaboration of unlikely partners by helping them reach consensus around a vision and shared goals while leveraging their resources

to support lasting change. When mayors assume these leadership roles, more significant and long-term gains can be achieved.

In the MLE project, the greatest progress occurred in those cities in which the mayor was personally engaged in and committed to the effort and willing to lead in a variety of ways. Local teams that lacked this vigorous and sustained mayoral leadership were more likely to lose focus or falter in their efforts to forge action plans, engage key stakeholders, and implement changes that have the potential to raise student achievement.

The central lesson is not that mayors are always effective in these leadership roles or accurate in their assessments of needed changes to improve public schools. Rather, what is clear is that the personal involvement of mayors creates a sense of urgency and opens up opportunities for change that are otherwise lost. YEF Institute staff have heard repeatedly from school and community leaders in several cities that the mayor’s involvement contributed significantly to their ability to raise the bar in terms of focusing the larger community on the challenges facing schools and encouraging

key stakeholders to become part of the solution. As one school superintendent put it, “Our partnership works so well because of the mayor. I’ve never seen another mayor [in this community] articulate the critical relationship that exists between school districts and the municipality.”

2. Contentious debates or fears regarding changes in school governance can quickly derail school improvement efforts.

While mayoral leadership in education can be the catalyst for community-wide school improvement efforts, it is not always greeted with enthusiasm. Because education often is not viewed as a “city” responsibility, a mayor’s interest in the issue can arouse suspicion or even alarm among school board members, school district officials, and community leaders. Fears of mayoral intervention are fueled in part by decisions in a number of large cities — including Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and New York City — to transfer control of school districts from elected school boards to mayors. Similar proposals are being considered in Fresno, California, and Washington, D.C.

Against this backdrop of mayoral control or “takeovers,” city leaders need to be clear from the outset about how and why they are getting involved in an issue that has not typically been part of municipal governance. For mayors who do not intend to seek governing control of schools, addressing governance issues at the onset can allay community concerns and help to counter the impression that the city is intent on running the schools. By communicating with the public and the district about the city’s intentions and goals, mayors and city councilmembers can be clear about the added value they bring to local conversations about school improvement.

When Columbus Mayor Coleman made education his highest priority, for example, there was concern that he was seeking governing authority over the public schools. By making clear that it was not his intention to take over the schools, and by working in partnership with school district leaders and community stakeholders, the mayor began to build trust. In contrast, the failure of a school bond issue in another MLE city was blamed by some community leaders on what they saw as the mayor’s “excessive” involvement in school affairs. In the absence of efforts to address questions of school governance at the outset of the campaign, some community members misinterpreted the mayor’s agenda as part of an effort to take over the schools.

When “takeover” is off the table, mayors and city councilmembers can focus on a sense of shared accountability by using their leadership roles and bully pulpit to convene community stakeholders and build coalitions around a common vision and goal. Mayors and city councilmembers also can work to apply city agency resources — health and social services, recreation, and public safety — to support student achievement and build stronger, safer schools.

3. Strong city-school district partnerships depend on both personal relationships and institutional capacity.

Tensions between local elected officials and school district leaders are a fact of life in many cities and towns. Regular communication between city and school leaders can go a long way toward improving and strengthening relations. Greater cooperation, communication, and collaboration with local school districts foster working relationships that overcome turf battles, identify problems before they become unmanageable, and open the door to

coordinated efforts that respond to the needs of schools and their students.

Each of the cities participating in the MLE project has found ways to ease city-school tensions and break down barriers to collaboration and partnerships:

- In New Haven, the mayor and superintendent meet on a regular basis and find opportunities to make public appearances in support of schools. In addition, the mayor and superintendent jointly conducted a major campaign to involve parents in the schools, speaking together in public forums to parent audiences.
- In Portland, the mayor's education advocate meets regularly with school board members and other district administrators – a practice that has led to greatly improved relations and an easing of tensions over the schools' settlement with the teacher's union.
- In Lansing, the mayor is part of the superintendent's "kitchen cabinet", which meets on a regular basis to discuss key issues in the community. In addition, the mayor and superintendent meet for lunch on a monthly basis, and the school board and city council have dinner meetings twice a year.
- In Charleston, at the request of the Mayor, the superintendent assigned a senior staff person as school liaison to the Mayor's Office and City of Charleston. The Mayor meets with the superintendent, speaks on education issues and concerns at School Board meetings, and meets with principals and associate superintendents to discuss concerns and issues the City may be able to address.
- In Columbus, the school district and the city have been working collaboratively on school construction plans resulting from a \$700 million bond to improve school facilities. The city is working to expedite

building permits for the effort, and plans are underway for joint use of land and shared programs that benefit the schools and the residents of Columbus.

- In Fort Lauderdale, the school superintendent designated a staff liaison between the Broward County Public Schools and the City of Fort Lauderdale. This has helped to strengthen relations between the city and schools, as well as to ensure effective implementation of Fort Lauderdale's Municipal Leadership in Education efforts.

These efforts to promote improved city-school relations are enhanced when the mayor is able to dedicate staff who can work primarily, if not exclusively, on education issues. These education advisors play key roles within city hall and across diverse segments of the community, helping the mayor identify how the city can contribute to school improvement initiatives while bridging the gap between city hall, elected school boards, school administrators, and other community stakeholders.

Mayors in two MLE cities — Columbus and Portland — have appointed senior-level education advisors to carry out these responsibilities. The Mayor of Columbus has given cabinet-level status to his education advisor and created an Office of Education to advance the city's education agenda. Other cities have senior staff in the mayor's office whose time is split between education and other children and family issues. In contrast, inadequate staff capacity to support city efforts has appeared to be a substantial impediment to progress in some cities.

However, even in cities that have strong working relationships between municipal government and schools, tensions can still exist. While many promising efforts around collaboration between school districts and city hall are coming to light, no magic solution has yet emerged, apart from the

obvious strategy of keeping the focus squarely on children and youth

4. A commitment of city resources towards education builds trust and goodwill and enables schools to overcome barriers to student achievement.

Cities are in a position to contribute valuable resources that can build capacity to improve public schools. These resources range from human to financial. In Charleston, for example, the city raised the funds for a summer tutorial program after the school district was forced to eliminate summer school as a result of major budget cuts. The City successfully started the First Day of School Initiative bringing thousands of parents with their children to the first day of school.

The city contribution to school improvement also can include the leadership that is essential to convene diverse stakeholders to support the community's education agenda. The municipal leaders in each of the six cities successfully engaged representatives from diverse sectors to lend their expertise and resources to local efforts — from faith-based leaders to the business community, as well as community-based organizations that provide a wide variety of services to support student achievement.

Whether the city's contribution is in money or people, however, municipal officials need to have a full understanding of the long-term commitment and resources that are needed to help school districts succeed. Mayors and city councilmembers also must be fully aware of the heightened expectations that their leadership on education issues may generate. Once the city is involved, the expectation is often that an infusion of city dollars will follow. Cities must therefore decide early in the process what they are willing to invest; if it is

not money, they must consider how to leverage other resources — such as access to state, federal and private dollars; transportation; shared facilities; or other city services.

Although the majority of cities across the nation do not control school budgets, they can coordinate the resources of agencies and other community resources and help fund programs and services that support student success. Local leaders need to help the public understand that the city by itself is not going to solve the problem, but that it is ready and willing to work with other partners and apply the appropriate resources toward collaborative solutions.

5. Well-focused data analyses build consensus and support to ensure that all children — regardless of their racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds — have a chance to succeed.

Data about local schools and education outcomes for students can be an invaluable tool in focusing the community's attention on unmet needs. The use of data and its analysis are essential and powerful tools that can help community stakeholders take a fresh look at what is working well in schools, and what challenges remain. With good data in hand, the community can make informed decisions based on objective information and use it to reach consensus around a shared vision. In addition to using district, census, and other existing data, elected leaders can seek local resident input by holding public forums, conducting surveys, and convening focus groups aimed at building a citywide consensus around school improvement.

Good data give cities an objective tool to bring people together and develop a common understanding of the challenges facing the school system. City officials also

can use school data to focus resources and establish benchmarks by which to measure future progress.

Carefully analyzed and disaggregated data can be particularly valuable in providing a clearer view of disparities in resources and achievement levels across schools and among groups of students from different racial, ethnic, income, and language backgrounds.

- In Columbus, the leadership team conducted a major data collection effort to identify achievement gaps within each district, creating a database that breaks down data school-by-school, building-by-building, and across income levels, gender, race, and ethnicity.
- Similarly, in Lansing, school officials used disaggregated data on education outcomes to obtain a clearer picture of the gaps in achievement levels of middle school students. These analyses resulted in the school district taking a focused approach to literacy for students in the middle grades.

Issues of equity and opportunity force cities and towns to take a hard look at disparities in funding, teacher quality, and facilities. It is never an easy task, as officials must take on the often-volatile task of assessing educational resources in high-poverty communities versus middle-class and wealthy communities. But having reliable data about education outcomes for all groups is critical to starting the conversation and making progress.

6. The involvement of business, faith-based, and other community leaders can enhance the credibility and the effectiveness of joint city-school district initiatives.

Providing a high-quality education for every child is a community-wide responsibility. Business leaders and

other community stakeholders are natural partners in efforts to improve education and help students develop to their full potential. The presence of business and other leaders brings credibility, political clout, and resources that help support city-school district efforts and build public confidence.

Business and community leaders can assume a range of roles in local efforts, from leading a task force that addresses key challenges to mentoring to providing the financial resources and capacity-building necessary to support student learning. When business and other community leaders are involved in being part of the solution, they gain a deeper appreciation of their vested interests in student success.

- The business community in Lansing contributed to the establishment of HOPE Scholarships to ensure that needy students have the financial resources to pay for college. Furthermore, the Capital Area Youth Alliance, a local community-based coalition, has been instrumental in the citywide education agenda.
- In Columbus, a local research organization called Battelle for Kids conducted data analyses on schools, while the United Way, Children's Defense Fund of Ohio, and KidsOhio.org are partners in the effort to close the achievement gap.
- In Fort Lauderdale, the North Broward Hospital District agreed to print the MLE Study Circle Discussion Guides to facilitate conversations about education. In addition, a local bookstore hosted some study circle meetings, and several civic association representatives helped to organize various events.

Not only do these types of community partners offer important untapped resources, they also bring an array of knowledge and expertise to the table about what works to engage the community and achieve results.

Sometimes, the secret to getting these potential partners involved is simply to ask. In New Haven, for example, Mayor DeStefano hosted a public forum where he invited business leaders to do more to support local schools, asking them to expand internships and mentorships, offer scholarships, and adopt schools by supporting school programs and activities.

7. Ongoing public engagement is essential to the sustainability of school improvement efforts.

City and town officials cannot single-handedly work to improve public schools. Strengthening education requires close cooperation with school officials, business and community leaders, and other stakeholders. Equally important, it requires strong support from the public — parents, students, and other residents who all must be convinced that the schools need improving, and that better schools will benefit the entire community.

Mayors and councilmembers are uniquely positioned to engage the public on these issues by virtue of the bully pulpit afforded them as leaders of local government. Through speeches, media appearances, interviews, summits, public forums, and other activities, municipal officials can focus their communities' attention on student achievement and other education priorities, highlight successes, and raise challenges for the future.

The six cities in the Municipal Leadership in Education project have engaged the public in a variety of ways. In Lansing, city officials focused the community's attention on raising the literacy levels of middle school students. In Columbus, the mayor has played an essential role in raising awareness of achievement gaps and the importance of equity in education. Portland involved city residents by utilizing polling data to reveal

community support for a tax measure. And, in other cities — such as Charleston, New Haven, and Fort Lauderdale — local officials joined with others in wide-ranging campaigns to reconnect residents to their public schools.

The common element across all of these approaches is a determination to build support for solutions — and a recognition that improving schools is a job for everyone.

8. There is no substitute for a community-wide plan that defines clear goals and holds city leaders, school officials, and other key stakeholders accountable for results.

Municipal leaders can promote a sense of shared accountability by creating a common vision among residents for the education of the community's youth and by developing a school improvement plan that is publicly embraced by all key stakeholders. As chief executives of their cities, mayors can bring together leaders from diverse sectors and work in partnership with school district officials to advance community-wide progress for schools. This is the linchpin and essential starting point for lasting and substantial progress.

However, there are no quick fixes for lasting change. Reaching consensus around a shared vision for schools can be a difficult process. Progress often requires the involvement of municipal leaders who can marshal political capital and community assets to help all students reach their full potential. As the six MLE cities demonstrate, educators and municipal officials must work together to support the academic success of students, with municipal leaders playing a pivotal role in crafting and implementing broader accountability, including the civic capacity to sustain the effort over time.

Municipal Leadership in Education

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Collaborating Organizations

The following organizations were partners with NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families in providing information, resources, and in some cases, on-site technical assistance to the participating cities of the Municipal Leadership in Education project.

Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Brown University, Box 1985

Providence, RI 02912

Ph: (401) 863-7990

Website: <http://www.annenberginstitute.org>

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University develops, shares, and acts on knowledge that improves the conditions and outcomes of schooling in America, especially in urban communities and in schools serving disadvantaged children.

Coalition for Community Schools

1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20036

Ph: (202) 822-8405

Website: <http://www.communityschools.org>

The Coalition for Community Schools mobilizes the resources and capacities of multiple sectors and institutions to create a united movement for community schools.

Council of the Great City Schools

1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 702

Washington, DC 20004

Ph: (202) 393-2427

Website: <http://www.cgcs.org>

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of nearly 60 of the nation's largest urban public school systems and serves as the national voice for urban educators, providing ways to share promising practices and address common concerns.

Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform

407 South Dearborn Street, Suite 1500

Chicago, IL 60605

Ph: (312) 322- 4880

Website: <http://www.crosscity.org>

The Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform is a national network of school reform leaders from nine cities that promotes the systemic transformation of urban public schools, resulting in improved quality and equity. The nine cities include Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia and Seattle.

Education Trust

1725 K Street, Suite 200

Washington, DC 20006

Ph: (202) 293-1217

Website: <http://www.edtrust.org>

The Education Trust is an organization dedicated to raising the achievement of poor and minority students.

Institute for Educational Leadership

1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 310

Washington, DC 20036

Ph: (202) 822-8405

Website: <http://www.iel.org>

The Institute for Educational Leadership is a non-profit, nonpartisan organization committed to building the capacity of individuals and organizations in education and related fields to work together across policies, programs, and sectors.

National Association for Bilingual Education

1030 15th Street, NW
Suite 470
Washington, DC 20005
Ph: (202) 898-1829
Website: <http://www.nabe.org>

The National Association for Bilingual Education—representing over 5,000 educators and parents, and affiliate organizations in 28 states—is the only professional organization at the national level wholly devoted to representing both English language learners and bilingual education professionals.

National Middle School Association

4151 Executive Parkway, Suite 300
Westerville, Ohio 43081
Tel: (614) 895-4730
<http://www.nmsa.org>

The National Middle School Association is the only national education association dedicated exclusively to the growth of middle level education. It is dedicated to improving the educational experiences and developmental needs of young adolescents by providing vision, knowledge, and resources to all who serve them in order to develop healthy, productive, and ethical citizens.

National School Boards Association

1680 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
Ph: (703) 838-6722
Website: <http://www.nsba.org>

The National School Boards Association is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States. Its mission is to foster excellence and equity in public education through school board leadership.

Public Education Network

601 13th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005
Ph: (202) 628-7460
Website: <http://www.publiceducation.org>

PEN is the nation's largest network of independent, community-based school reform organizations. Dedicated to increasing student achievement in public schools and building broad-based support for quality public education, PEN works to educate the nation about the relationship between school quality and the quality of community and public life.

Study Circles Resource Center

697 Pomfret Street, Box 203
Pomfret, CT 06528
Ph: (860) 928-2616
Website: <http://www.studycircle.org>

The Study Circles Resource Center promotes the use of study circles — small-group, democratic, highly participatory discussions that give everyday people opportunities to make a difference on critical social and political issues in their communities.

U.S. Department of Education

400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-0498
Ph: (800) 872-5327
Website: <http://www.ed.gov>

The U.S. Department of Education produces hundreds of publications annually on education topics. Regional Educational Laboratories are technical assistance resources available from the Department; for more information visit <http://www.nwrel.org/national>.

Resources

- 1 *2003 National Poll: Demanding Quality Public Education in Tough Times*. Public Education Network, Washington, D.C. http://www.publiceducation.org/pdf/national_poll/2003_poll_report.pdf
- 2 *Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools*. Clarence Stone, Jeffrey Henig, Bryan Jones, and Carol Pierannunzi. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001.
- 3 *City Schools & City Politics: Institutions and Leadership in Pittsburgh, Boston, and St. Louis*. John Portz, Lana Stein, and Robin Jones. Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999.
- 4 *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education*. Jeffrey Henig, Richard Hula, Marion Orr, and Desiree Pedescleaux. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- 5 *Communities Working for Better Schools*. Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 1999. <http://www.crosscity.org/pdfs/community.pdf>
- 6 *The District Role in Building Capacity: Four Strategies*. The Consortium for Policy Research in Education Policy Briefs, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania, September 2000. <http://www.cpre.org/Publications/rb32.pdf>
- 7 *Do School District Takeovers Work?* Kenneth Wong and Francis Shen. http://www.nasbe.org/Standard/9_Spring2002/Takeover.pdf
- 8 *Engaging the Public in Its Schools*. *InfoBrief*, No. 30, July 2002. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/infobrief/issue30.html>
- 9 *Improving Public Schools: An Action Kit for Municipal Leaders*. National League of Cities, Washington, D.C. http://www.nlc.org/nlc_org/site/files/reports/waterfall1.pdf
- 10 *It Takes a City: Getting Serious about Urban School Reform*. Paul Hill, Christine Campbell, and James Harvey. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2000.
- 11 *Mayoral Influence, New Regimes and Public School Governance*. Michael Kirst. Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education, 2002. <http://www.cpre.org/Publications/rr49.pdf>
- 12 *No Child Left Behind: A Desktop Reference 2002*. U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., September 2002. <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/nclbreference/page.html>
- 13 *No Child Left Behind: Guide for Community and Parent Leaders*. Public Education Network, Washington, D.C. <http://www.publiceducation.org/pdf/NCLBBook.pdf>
- 14 *Powerful Reforms with Shallow Roots: Improving America's Urban Schools*. Larry Cuban and Michael Usdan, editors. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2003.
- 15 "Powerful Reforms With Shallow Roots." Larry Cuban and Michael Usdan. *Education Week*, February 27, 2002, pp. 37, 40. <http://www.edweek.org/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=24usdan.h21>
- 16 *Public Deliberation: A Tool for Connecting School Reform and Diversity*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1999. <http://www.se dl.org/pubs/lc06/contents.html>
- 17 *Reasons for Hope, Voices for Change*. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 1998. <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/resources/community.html>
- 18 *Restructuring School District Leadership*. Institute for Educational Leadership, Washington, D.C. <http://www.iel.org/programs/21st/reports/district.pdf>
- 19 *Rethinking Accountability: The View From City Hall*. Audrey M. Hutchinson, Voices in Urban Education, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Spring 2003. <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/VUE/spring03/index.html>
- 20 "Taking Charge: urban mayors are becoming more involved than ever in school governance, but are their efforts helping to improve education in their cities?" Glenn Cook. *American School Board Journal*, December 2002. <http://www.asbj.com/specialreports/2002pdf/1202pdf/1202ASBJ1.pdf>