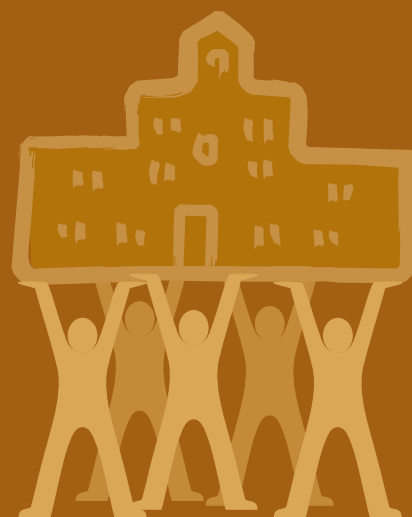


EDUCATION POLICY FOR ACTION SERIES

EDUCATION CHALLENGES FACING NEW YORK CITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building Local Leadership for Change: A National Scan of Parent Leadership Training Programs



Anne T. Henderson

*in collaboration with
Annenberg Institute research staff*



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School Reform

AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

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About the Annenberg Institute for School Reform

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform is a national policy-research and reform-support organization, affiliated with Brown University, that focuses on improving conditions and outcomes for all students in urban public schools, especially those serving disadvantaged children. The Institute's vision is the transformation of traditional school systems into "smart education systems" that develop and integrate high-quality learning opportunities in all areas of students' lives – at school, at home, and in the community.

The Institute conducts research; works with a variety of partners committed to educational improvement to build capacity in school districts and communities; and shares its work through print and Web publications. Rather than providing a specific reform design or model to be implemented, the Institute's approach is to offer an array of tools and strategies to help districts and communities strengthen their local capacity to provide and sustain high-quality education for all students.

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About the Author

Anne T. Henderson is a senior consultant for the Community Organizing and Engagement program at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Recently, she has worked with the Institute to develop a series of tools to help local communities prepare more students for college and a career. *Putting Kids on the Pathway to College* is based on a study of New York City high schools that are “beating the odds” in bringing low-performing ninth-graders to timely graduation and college entrance. The tools include a framework of effective strategies for improving college access, a rubric for evaluating current practices, and survey and *focus group tools* for gathering data from students and families. They are designed for a wide audience, including school districts, community and parent organizations, researchers, and policy-makers.

Henderson also recently worked with the institute to create a series of research-based workshops that focus on community organizing strategies in four communities. These “jigsaw” reading-and-discussion activities help participants understand the organizing efforts of one community, explore the implications those efforts may have on their own community, and identify next steps they want to take. The workshops are based on an Annenberg study of the impact of community organizing on student, school, and district outcomes entitled *Organized Communities, Smaller Schools*.

Henderson’s research interests focus on the relationship between families and schools. Her most recent book, *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* (written with Karen Mapp, Don Davies, and Vivian Johnson), was published by The New

Press in 2007. Her publications also include the *Evidence* series, which reviews the research on parent involvement and student achievement. The latest edition, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, written with Karen Mapp, was published by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in 2002.

About the Series

Education Policy for Action: Education Challenges Facing New York City is a series of research and policy analyses by scholars in fields such as education, economics, public policy, and child welfare in collaboration with staff from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and members of a broadly defined education community. Papers in this series are the product of research based on the Institute's large library of local and national public education databases; work with the Institute's data analysis team; and questions raised and conclusions drawn during a public presentation and conversation with university and public school students, teachers, foundation representatives, policy advocates, education reporters, news analysts, parents, youth, and community leaders.

Among the issues that the series addresses are several pressing topics that have emerged from the Institute's research and organizing efforts. Some of the topics covered in the series are:

- Confronting the impending graduation crisis
- The small schools experiment in New York City
- Positive behavior and student social and emotional support
- Modes of new teacher and principal induction and evaluation

Many thanks to the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation for its support of the public conversations from which this report and the other publications in the series grew.

For a downloadable version of this report and more information about the series, please visit www.annenberginstitute.org/WeDo/NYC_Conversations.php.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the research team: Deinya Phenix, Tara Bahl, Ivonne Garcia, Christina Mokhtar, and Courtney Hardwick. I would also like to thank all the people who came to the policy conversation on December 14, 2009, in New York City, as well as the other panelists, Zakiyah Ansari and Kim Sweet, and the directors of the four example programs who provided such complete and detailed information – Beverly Raimondo of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence; David Valladolid and Patti Mayer of the Parent Institute for Quality Education; Andrew Lachman of the Connecticut Commission on Children; and Anne Thompson of the Parent Academy.

This Executive Summary briefly describes the findings presented in the full report *Building Local Leadership for Change: A National Scan of Parent Leadership Training Programs*. Data from the study and more detailed findings are provided in the full report. For more information about the study and to download the full report or the Executive Summary, please visit www.annenberginstitute.org/Products/Henderson.php.

Introduction

New York Senate Bill 6107 authorizes City University of New York (CUNY) to operate a Parent Training Center for public school parents in all five boroughs. Priority must go to “high-needs” schools and districts with low student achievement, high density of English language learners (ELLs) and low-income families, and a lack of effective parent associations. This report describes parent leadership training programs around the country; examines their structure, curriculum, and evaluation results; and discerns lessons for New York City.

The Parent Training Center has four major mandates:

- Conduct training and support programs for parents to increase their capacity to participate in local, district, and citywide school governance and participatory structures.
- Conduct outreach and recruitment to increase diversity in these governance and participatory structures.
- Implement programs to enhance parents’ ability to support students’ educational success.
- Assist parents and students in interacting with school district staff and understanding the function, structure, and operations of the New York City Department of Education.

The bill also requires the Center to encourage student-based college counseling initiatives, such as Student Success Centers, to increase the rate of college enrollment and to train youth leaders. Funding for the Center is limited, about \$800,000 per year from the state, to be matched by the New York City school district. This implies a total of \$1.6 million dollars in

funding for the centers, of which \$600,000 is to be dedicated to Student Success Centers, leaving \$1 million for the parent center.

Types of Programs and Examples

To provide examples of best practices, a research team from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University examined parent leadership training programs around the country that have goals, functions, or mandates similar to the proposed New York City Parent Training Center. Selection criteria included a mission to support family engagement in improving student outcomes, a sustained formal program and curriculum delivered by trained facilitators, and reliable data on participant outcomes.

Among the several programs meeting our criteria, we identified four major types and linked them to the mandates in the Training Center bill, as shown in Figure 1 on the next page.

All four programs are offered free to participants, have requirements for graduation, and award certificates of completion. In addition, all are offered in a variety of settings, in places and at times that are convenient to their participants. Program evaluations found positive effects on participants’ attitudes, expectations, and behaviors linked to improved student achievement. In particular, studies of the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE)

¹ On December 14, 2009, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform convened a Policy Conversation at the CUNY Professional Staff Congress about the Parent Training Center. The two panelists, Zakiyah Ansari and Kim Sweet, as well as many participants, offered several excellent ideas about how the Parent Training Center should be developed. These ideas are incorporated into this publication, particularly the recommendations section.

Figure 1.
Types and examples of parent training programs, by mandate

Mandate	Type and Example of Parent Training Program
Develop leadership structures	Parent leadership training programs Example: Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL), Kentucky
Support immigrant families	Parent training programs aimed at immigrant parents Example: Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), California
Support children’s learning	Parent academies or universities Example: The Parent Academy (TPA), Miami-Dade County, Florida
Understand and navigate the system	Parent leadership training to understand/influence the system Example: Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (Parents SEE), Connecticut

found that participants’ children had significantly higher grades and fewer absences, higher enrollment in college-prep courses, and higher graduation rates than students in comparison groups.

Type 1: Leadership Training – Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership, Kentucky

Our aim is to create an army of self-confident and well-informed parents to focus on improved student achievement for all Kentucky students.

— Robert Sexton, Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

Held regionally across the state, each Institute is limited to thirty people and consists of three two-day sessions spaced about a month apart. After graduating, participants in the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) work with their local Prichard Committee coordinator to carry out projects in their

schools. About 1,500 people have completed the program. CIPL’s notable features include:

- a detailed explanation of how the state education reform system works and ways to use leverage points in the law;
- demonstrating how to access, analyze, and use state assessment data, starting with their own school’s report card;
- requiring projects designed to improve achievement at their schools, engage more parents, and have a lasting impact (the program provides a mini-grant to implement the project);
- follow-up from community support coordinators for two years;
- recruiting parents in teams from schools and districts to create “critical mass.”

Type 2: Immigrant Families – Parent Institute for Quality Education, California

There is no force on earth more powerful than the love of a mother for her children.

— Vahac Mardirosian, PIQE founder

Offered in nine weekly, two-hour sessions, Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) classes are limited to twenty-five people. After an introductory session, the next six sessions cover the curriculum (creating a positive home learning environment, understanding the K–12 system, supporting the child's development, communicating with teachers and tracking child's progress, and preparing in advance for college). The final session is the graduation. Almost 500,000 parents have graduated since 1985. PIQE's notable features include:

- a powerful focus on high school graduation and college attendance;
- instructors with backgrounds that match the participants', but who have "made it";
- partnerships with twenty-three campuses in the California State college system to offer PIQE in feeder communities, and with the federal GEAR-UP program to offer PIQE in middle schools;
- a four-month Parent Coach follow-up program to reinforce what parents have learned and report issues and concerns to principals;
- recruiters (all PIQE graduates) paid according to numbers of people who sign up.

Type 3: Support Children's Learning – Parent Academy, Miami-Dade County

"Demand parents" understand that their children deserve a good education and that it's their responsibility to make sure they get it.

— Rudy Crew, former superintendent, Miami-Dade County Public Schools

In its first three years, the Parent Academy (TPA) served over 100,000 parents through 3,000 events spread throughout the community. TPA's offerings are organized around three areas: supporting children's learning and development, navigating the education system, and workforce development. Workshops are developed and taught by school district staff and community partners. TPA's notable features include:

- an extensive "listening" phase across the community before offering the program;
- the concept of "the campus is the community";
- integrating TPA into the district school reform initiative;
- linking TPA to adult and career education;
- developing a partnership with local colleges to offer credits to families.

Type 4: Understanding and Navigating the System — Parents Supporting Educational Excellence, Connecticut

Parent leadership is the capacity for parents to interact in society with purpose and positive outcomes for children. Parents, children, and communities all benefit from parent involvement.

— Connecticut Commission on Children,
The Values and Results of Parent Involvement

Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (Parents SEE) is a twelve-week parent leadership development program founded by the Connecticut Commission on Children and the Connecticut Center for School Change. About 300 parents have graduated since 2006. After a five-hour Saturday retreat, participants attend twelve weekly three-hour sessions offered in the evening. Each class has about twenty participants. Parents SEE's notable features include:

- a design team of local stakeholders that reflects the community responsible for putting on the program;
- a focus on parents as advocates for change and partners in school improvement, rather than parents as helpers at home;
- cultivating relationships with the school districts, requiring their support and buy-in to the program;
- devoting one class to attending a school board meeting and talking with members and the superintendent afterwards.

Recommendations

The research team offers these recommendations:

- Assure that the Parent Training Center has the authority and credibility to offer programs that will command respect from public officials across the city and state, as well as the New York City school district, public school parents, and the city's parent activist and advocacy community.
- Situate the Parent Training Center within the New York City education context and incorporate, build on, and enhance the parent training work already under way.
- Set clear priorities for the limited funding currently available and develop an expanded fundraising strategy.
- Follow the guidelines for program design that have been used by effective programs.

Although funding for the Parent Training Center is small, the potential for its impact on families, students, and schools is huge. The program examples in this paper show that a small amount of start-up funding and a dedicated core of committed advocates can attract partners and leverage resources into a powerhouse program.

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