



Engaging Cities

*How Municipal Leaders Can
Mobilize Communities
to Improve Public Schools*



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Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University
in cooperation with the Institute for Youth, Education, and
Families of the National League of Cities

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- 1 Building Public Support for Schools in Five Cities
- 6 Mobilizing the Denver Community around Latino Academic Achievement
- 18 A City–School Board Partnership to Rebuild the Akron Public Schools
- 30 A “Seamless” Education System within the Long Beach City Limits
- 40 Restoring Public Confidence in the Nashville Public Schools
- 52 Developing Community Leadership around Education Reform: A Bronx Tale
- 65 Engaging the Public in Education Reform: What Mayors Can Do
- 73 Resources for Municipal Leaders

Contents

Building Public Support for Schools
in Five Cities

If our nation is to make good on its declared goal of ensuring educational success for all students, we must mobilize the entire education capacity of our cities and towns. The teachers, principals, and central office administrators of local schools are an essential part of – but not the only players in – such efforts. Indeed, municipal leaders and agencies, as well as public libraries, grassroots organizers, after-school providers, business, higher education, and the general public, in alliance with educators, must work together to provide more and better learning opportunities for young people – before, during, and after the regular school day.

More than at any time in our nation's history, mayors are playing an active role in mobilizing these local community and civic interests to act collectively on behalf of children and youth. These leaders see a vital

link between their cities' capacity to prepare young people for successful adulthood and long-term civic vitality. More than any other single leader or organization, mayors can bring together these sometimes-competing groups to engage and mobilize around a compelling common interest – the future of the city's children.

How Mayors Are Engaging Their Communities in Public Schools

This report looks at five cities where mayors are responding to the challenge of improving local public schools by seeking new and more effective ways to engage key segments of their communities. The stories of Denver, Akron, Long Beach, Nashville, and New York help us identify and describe practical, high-yield engagement strategies and solutions mayors are using and



resources they have found or created. In many instances, these mayors are making a difference without the aid of much formal authority over the school system's budget, personnel, or school board.

Mayors are in a unique position to mobilize a community's diverse stakeholders in support of public education. The visibility and authority of their office provide opportunities to place public education high on the city's list of priorities, work toward ensuring adequate funding and resources, forge partnerships that enrich and sustain schools, and build public will and support to improve outcomes for the city's children and youth.

While the long-term effects of these efforts are not yet clear, it is evident that without strong connections between communities and schools our young people will likely fall short of their dreams for a brighter future. The tasks are too complex, the gaps too large, and the promise too nearly realized for schools and educators to do it alone.

The following chapters tell the stories of five cities whose mayors used the leverage and standing of their offices to make real those connections and relationships. These mayors have mobilized their communities to invest in young people – and in the future of their cities.

About the Case Studies

These case studies were completed by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University in cooperation with the Mayors' Education Policy Advisors Network (see sidebar) of the National League of Cities (NLC). Institute staff conducted the research for the city cases and wrote this report.

The cities featured in the report were selected from a larger list of cities (assembled by Annenberg Institute staff) whose mayors have been particularly effective in mobilizing a range of constituencies to support local schools. We made the final selection in consultation with colleagues at the NLC and other organizations whose work involves public engagement for high-quality schools.

Institute staff then worked directly with a local education policy advisor or other liaison in each city, who supplied us with background information and handled logistics and scheduling for a two- to three-day site visit. Prior to each visit, we reviewed official documents, newspaper archives, and Web-based resources.

During each site visit, Institute staff interviewed school officials, municipal leaders, and community representatives and toured schools and their neighborhoods. Following the site visit, we conducted

The Mayors' Education Policy Advisors Network

These studies of mayoral leadership in five cities grew out of the Mayors' Education Policy Advisors Network (EPAN), created in 2003 by the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families of the National League of Cities with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Presently, EPAN includes mayors' senior policy advisors from approximately sixty-five U.S. cities.

EPAN provides members with access to the network's collective expertise and to technical support from education reform organizations such as the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. The Institute serves as a resource to EPAN on public engagement strategies by publishing a monthly e-newsletter and providing direct technical support to several cities.

phone interviews with the advisors or other individuals as needed, then prepared drafts of the case studies and asked each local liaison to review the draft of the city's case study for accuracy and completeness. Final content editing was completed jointly by Institute and NLC staff.

This report is intended to provide municipal leaders with resources for successful public engagement to support education reform. In each city chapter, specific strategies that could serve as models for other cities, as well as useful resources, have been highlighted in pull-outs and sidebars. The final chapter offers an annotated list of additional print and Web resources for municipal leaders on engaging the public to support children and youth.

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Several colleagues from IYEF were instrumental in developing and shaping the case studies featured in this report. Executive director Clifford Johnson, program director for education and after-school initiatives Audrey Hutchinson, research associate Lucinda Dugger, and former senior program associates Rob Wexler and Jennifer Riccards helped develop the concept of “engaging cities,” sought out the interest of cities, helped us select the featured cities, brokered connections with local advisors, and reviewed and provided guidance on drafts at all stages of the study.

We also thank the local education policy advisors and our other liaisons in the



featured cities – Maria Guajardo Lucero, executive director, and Maxine Quintana, director of student programs, of the Mayor’s Office for Education and Children in Denver; Laraine Duncan, deputy mayor for intergovernmental relations in Akron; Marc Hill, director of the Mayor’s Office of Children and Youth in Nashville; Diane Jacobus, senior advisor to the mayor in Long Beach; and Eric Zachary, coordinator of CC9 and a senior project director of the Community Involvement Program at New York University. These dedicated civic leaders made major contributions to the study by arranging interviews with mayors and with school and community leaders, helping with the logistics for site visits, arranging for photos, and reviewing several drafts of their city’s chapter.

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Photos courtesy of Denver Public Schools and the Mayor’s Office for Education and Children, City and County of Denver (3)

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