

Engaging Cities

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

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A "Seamless" Education System within the
Long Beach City Limits



■ *Build support for schools by engaging business leaders and other community partners*

Mayor Beverly O'Neill of Long Beach, California, likes to show visitors a picture she displays in her crowded office. Entitled "Hands Up for Education," the photograph depicts the mayor, along with Carl Cohn, superintendent of the Long Beach Unified School District; Jan Kehoe, then president of Long Beach City College; Robert Maxson, president of California State University at Long Beach; and a class of elementary pupils all raising their hands, during a school visit by former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley.

Carl Cohn (left), Jan Kehoe, Mayor Beverly O'Neill, Robert Maxson, and students give a "hands up for education" during a visit by former U. S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley



To O'Neill, the photograph is a perfect illustration of what leaders in Long Beach have been trying to achieve over the past decade: a system in which all levels of education and the city government work together on behalf of the city's children. Their goal has been to create a "seamless" education system where it is possible to get a top-notch education from kindergarten through a master's degree, all within the city limits.

A Concerted Effort Pays Off

To Mayor O'Neill, education is a critical element in urban revitalization. "Mayors have become more and more involved in education because they realize that if there are not good schools in the city, new businesses will not locate there," she says. "One of the first questions people ask, whether buying a house or bringing in a business, is about the quality of schools. If they aren't succeeding, mayors are concerned." Mayor O'Neill and Long Beach's education leaders have made concerted efforts to engage the community and build public support for the schools. By bringing members of the business community and others into schools and being responsive to community concerns, the mayor and the education leaders have also sought to integrate the education system with the community.

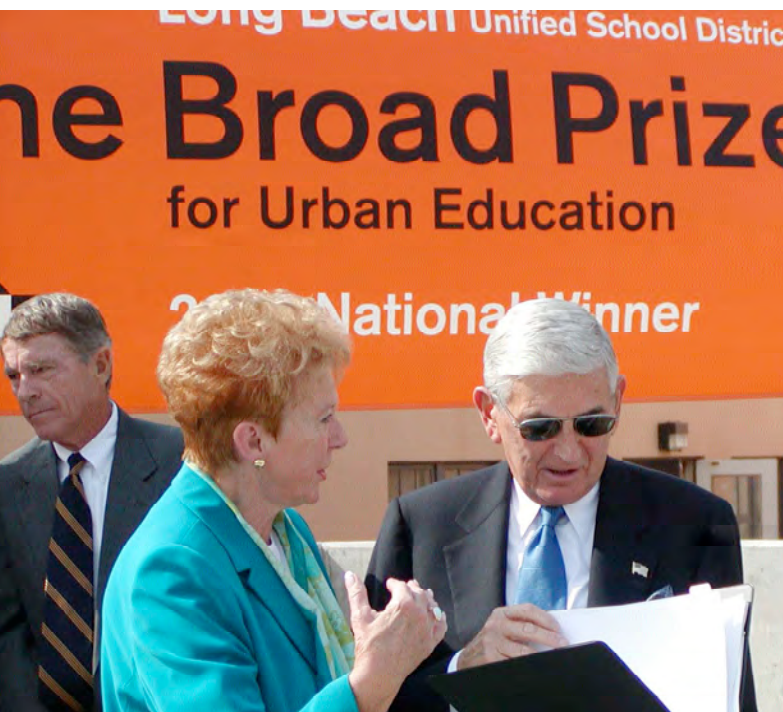
■ *Recognize and support the role of public education in urban revitalization*

Their efforts have produced impressive results. The public has shown its support for schools by approving a substantial bond issue for capital improvements. Data show that student achievement in elementary and secondary schools has improved and that more students are graduating from high school, getting a good preparation for higher education, and succeeding at community college and the university. And, in recognition of their efforts, the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) was named the 2003–2004 winner of the Broad Prize for Urban Education, given to a district that has made exemplary progress in raising achievement and closing achievement gaps (see sidebar).

“There is a seamless education flow we were trying for when we started,” says O’Neill, an educator who was formerly the president of Long Beach City College. “We really did make a difference.”

Creating a Common Mission

While the partnership among the education institutions and the city has won national accolades, Long Beach’s reputation was far different when the collaboration began in the early 1990s. At that time, the Navy had closed its shipyard and a major employer, McDonnell Douglas, was laying off hundreds of workers. Tourism, always a mainstay in the oceanside community, was down, and gang violence devastated many



Long Beach Unified School District: 2003–2004 Winner, Broad Prize for Urban Education

The Broad Prize for Urban Education is a \$1 million prize awarded annually to the best urban school districts in the nation that make the greatest improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among ethnic groups and between high- and low-income students. Five urban school districts are selected as finalists each year. The winning district receives \$500,000 in scholarships for graduating seniors, and each finalist district receives \$125,000 in scholarships.

- ▲ More about the Broad Prize:
www.broadfoundation.org/flagship/prize2.shtml
- ▲ LBUSD. n.d. “Did You Know?” Long Beach Unified School District Web site:
www.lbusd.k12.ca.us/district/didyouknow.asp

Mayor O’Neill speaks with Eli Broad at the award ceremony for the Broad Prize for Urban Education, 2003–2004

■ *Convene district, higher-education, and business stakeholders in a structured partnership to support a “seamless” education system*

neighborhoods. The city also experienced the riots that erupted in 1992 after Los Angeles police officers were acquitted of charges of beating motorist Rodney King.

In the wake of these troubling signs, then-mayor Ernie Kell formed a task force to address education, economic development, and public safety. He asked George Murchison, a local businessman, to bring the leaders of the public educational institutions together.

At Murchison’s urging, the education leaders met informally for breakfast, and then Murchison organized a retreat in 1994, where twenty-seven superintendents, presidents, vice presidents, and deans met for two days to plan a partnership. The meeting was considered so critical that Murchison arranged for a helicopter to fly Karl Anatol, then the acting president of California State University at Long Beach, from the airport to the retreat site, so that he would not miss the gathering.

Participants say the meeting began with the finger-pointing that often characterizes discussions between schools and higher-education institutions. “We said, ‘*You* send us better teachers’ and they said, ‘*You* send us better students,’” recalls Christopher J. Steinhauser, now the superintendent of LBUSD. Very quickly, however, their attitudes changed, and participants agreed to work together toward the common mission of improving education in Long Beach.

It helped that many of the participants knew one another and the city, Steinhauser adds. “Many of us in the room, including myself, were products of the community,” he says. “We had seen the glory days and seen it become almost like a ghost town.”

The participants agreed to create a formal partnership with the aim of creating a “seamless education system” and named Judy Seal, a Long Beach native who had attended and worked at all three institutions, to direct the partnership, with her salary paid by the three entities. Local businesses, such as Boeing, also contribute to the partnership (see sidebar).

Long Beach Education Partnership

The Long Beach Education Partnership began in 1994 when the leaders of the city’s three largest educational institutions met to discuss how they could protect the education of young people in Long Beach’s worsening economic environment. The partners work together to increase achievement for all pre-kindergarten through graduate school students in a large, highly diverse, multilingual urban area. The partnership seeks to solve problems ranging from day-to-day operational barriers to complex intellectual issues such as shaping the major redesign of the undergraduate preparation of elementary teachers. The leadership demonstrates a systems approach to the partnership that promotes flexibility and an ability to expand to encompass new problems and activities.

▲ More about the partnership:
www.ced.csulb.edu/about/partnerships.cfm

What the Partnership Did

The major work of the partnership has been to ensure a smooth transition for students between high school and college and between community college and the university. At the time of the partnership's inception, these transitions were rocky, recalls Mary Stanton, the president of the Long Beach school board. "I remember a parent called me," she says. "Her daughter passed all her classes, but failed the English entrance exam to Cal State. They were testing what we weren't teaching."

Aligned the K-16 Curriculum

The institutions were able to change that by getting faculty members from all three levels to sit down together and go over the content of their courses, course by course. In that way, they could make sure that students who passed at one level were prepared for the next level. "There are no secret formulas here," says Robert C. Maxson, president of Cal State-Long Beach. "It's done face-to-face by the faculty. Public school English teachers, English professors from

the community college, and English professors from the university get in a room. They look at the content and make sure it is seamless."

The institutions also sought to eliminate duplication by making it easy for students to take appropriate coursework at any level of schooling. Now, for example, a high school student who has completed college-level coursework can earn credit at the community college or Cal State after passing an examination. City College students can do the same.

Prepared Teachers for Urban Classrooms

The partnership also focused on teacher education. At the initial retreat, teachers and administrators from the school district sharply criticized Cal State for its teacher-preparation program, which they said did not prepare teachers adequately for the city schools, notes Stanton. "They were out there by themselves," she says of the university. "They wouldn't send student teachers to Long Beach; they sent them to Orange



Former U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige praises Seamless Education Partnerships as Mayor O'Neill, Cal State-Long Beach president Robert Maxson, and Cal State chancellor Charles Reed look on

California State Teacher-Education Program

The Department of Teacher Education offers a teacher preparation (credential) program for those desiring to become elementary teachers (K-8), course work for those preparing to be secondary (high school) teachers or special education teachers, and graduate-level course work leading to master's degrees, advanced credentials, and certificates.

▲ More about the program:

www.ced.csulb.edu/teacher-ed/index.cfm

■ *Make sure programs prepare teachers for urban schools*

County. When teachers came here to get a job, they didn't know what they were doing."

Maxson points out that many communities in Orange County are urban as well, but he says the university has rededicated itself to preparing teachers for where the jobs are: in the city of Long Beach. And the partnership, in 1998, retooled the Cal State teacher-education program to help ensure that teachers were well prepared when they started their careers (see sidebar on page 34).

The goal of the redesign effort was to integrate pedagogical skills and content knowledge, and teachers from the district played a key role. Teachers served on the steering committee and worked closely with university educators to design courses. The teachers were particularly important in keeping the district standards for student performance front and center, so that prospective teachers would know what students would be expected to know and be able to do.

The resulting program is so strong, Maxson notes, that it comes with a warranty: if a teacher, supervisor, or principal believes that a Cal State graduate is not adequately prepared, the university will provide additional instruction or send a supervisor to work directly with the teacher on site. Over the past five years, only three teachers have requested additional assistance. "Most people will only give a warranty on a thing that is going to work," he says. "We were so confident [in our program], we put this out."

Involved the Community

The city, the district, and the university collaborated on a novel plan to share an unused hundred-acre property that the Navy was willing to sell for one dollar. "We needed a high school; homeless veterans wanted a center; and Cal State needed a research center," says Steinhäuser. "We all worked together. There wasn't too much controversy."

In addition, the three educational institutions cooperated on a grant-funded program to prepare teachers for city schools. Under the program, known as CityTEACH, City College identifies students who are interested in teaching in Long Beach schools (see sidebar). If they are successful in introductory courses, they are guaranteed admission into Cal State's teacher-education program. If successful in that program, they are then

CityTEACH at Long Beach City College

CityTEACH is a comprehensive academic and experiential teacher-preparation program for students who plan to become elementary school teachers. Students who successfully complete the CityTEACH program are eligible for priority transfer into the teacher-preparation programs at Cal State–Long Beach and Cal State–Dominguez Hills.

▲ CityTEACH Web site:
<http://cityteach.lbcc.edu>

■ *Be responsive to community concerns*

guaranteed a job in LBUSD. Some 450 students have participated in the program.

Hundreds of city college and university students have also volunteered to tutor in Long Beach schools as part of their commitment to service learning. “Our students on this campus have donated two hundred thousand hours of volunteer work, much of it in schools,” says Maxson.

O’Neill and the other leaders have also reached out to the community to volunteer in schools. The partnership sponsors a

“principal for a day” program, in which community residents spend a day shadowing a school principal. By seeing what is actually happening in the schools, some negative impressions get wiped away, according to Judy Seal, the partnership’s director (see sidebar).

At the same time, city and education leaders have sought to be responsive to community concerns and improve their programs based on parent and community needs. For example, LBUSD launched a nationally recognized program to require school

■ *Encourage community outreach to schools*



Steven Chesser, a senior manager with the Boeing Company, visits Newcomb Academy as Principal for a Day

Principal for a Day Program

Principal for a Day, co-sponsored by the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce, the Long Beach Unified School District, and the Long Beach Education Foundation, brings residents of the Greater Long Beach area into every school in the district in the role of principal. Each “principal for a day” is given the opportunity to interact with students, teachers, parents, and administrators through classroom visits, meetings, testing, and playground supervision. Participants get a birds-eye view of what it takes to be in education leadership in the third-largest school district in the state. Following a day at the school, the principals for a day are hosted at a debriefing reception, where district school board members, administrators, teachers, and student representatives hear what the principals for a day learned and recommendations to improve local schools. This program has been one of the most successful business-in-education activities of the last decade, generating hundreds of business and education partnerships.

▲ More about program:

www.lbusd.k12.ca.us/community/education_foundation/LBEFpfad.asp

■ *Be a champion and keep public support for schools on the front burner*

uniforms because of parental demands for orderliness, says O'Neill. "That came through the parents at one of the schools," she says. "It's so successful. Now, 85 percent of kids are wearing uniforms."

Passed an Education Bond Issue

The result of all of this cooperation and engagement has been improved teaching and learning – and stronger support for the education institutions. In 1999, city voters approved a \$295-million bond issue for the Long Beach schools, with more than 70 percent support. And officials say there is strong confidence among residents for all the institutions. "The city is proud of its schools," says Mayor O'Neill. "They know that you can go from kindergarten to a master's degree in the same city, and they are all outstanding institutions. In the 1980s, there was White flight, but that's reversed now."

What Made It Work

Why does the seamless education partnership in Long Beach work so well? Many in the city credit Mayor O'Neill's role. Although the city government does not support the partnership financially, Mayor O'Neill has championed it and kept it on the front burner. And she is so popular – she was reelected in 2002 as a write-in candidate after she was barred from the ballot because of term limits – that when she speaks, people listen.

"The mayor just talks about it all the time," says Maxson. "Every time she gives a speech

about the accomplishments of the city, she mentions the program. That gives it credibility and visibility."

O'Neill says her support also keeps the partnership thriving, because the education institutions know they can count on the city to provide them what they need. "They know I am a champion for them, and that makes a difference," she says. "They know the city will cooperate."

The commitment of the leaders of the educational institutions also helps keep the seamless partnership thriving, Maxson adds. Although the hard work of the partnership is done by faculty members and administrators, the leaders' support is essential. "They know it's the commitment of the university," he says of the 2,000 faculty members and eight deans who are involved in the partnership.

The partnership also works because many of the partners know one another and connect with one another regularly. In various ways, many note, Long Beach, though a large city of nearly a half million residents, is a small town, where people have deep roots and informal ties. For example, Superintendent Steinhauser is the president of the local Rotary Club, to which Arthur Byrd, the vice president of City College, belongs. "If I want to talk to him, I know I'll see him next Thursday," Byrd says. "It makes it easier to get things done when you have those kinds of relationships."

■ *Think about sustainability and embed support for schools in the community*

Looking to the Future

Because of the strong support Mayor O'Neill has provided, some worry that the partnership may wane after she leaves office in 2006. She has said she will not seek a fourth term, and her potential successors, while supportive of the partnership, may have other priorities.

But others maintain that the partnership has become so entrenched in the community it will remain no matter who is mayor. "Seamless is a way of thinking and looking at education," says Seal. "You don't look at one issue as being your issue. If you need help, you call partners, and they help."

Indeed, the notion of partnership has spread beyond the three educational institutions; the city and the school district have been forging stronger partnerships. Here, again, Mayor O'Neill has been instrumental. She holds quarterly meetings with the superintendent and members of the city council and school board to consider everything from land use to the skill needs of the future workforce.

■ *Eliminate duplication to operate more efficiently*

The partnerships have produced some concrete results. In 2004, the district opened a new school in downtown Long Beach, the Cesar Chavez Elementary School, that represents a genuine collaboration between the school district and the city parks department. Under the arrangement, the school will have access to a city park that was built under a bond issue; in turn, the school will open its gymnasium to the public after school hours. "I really think [Phil T. Hester, the director of the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Marine] had a vision," says Suzanne Mason, assistant city manager. "I'd like to see it happen in many more locations."

The city and school district have also worked together to try to eliminate duplication and operate more efficiently, since



Mayor O'Neill speaks at the Broad Prize award ceremony

Photos courtesy of the Long Beach Unified School District (5)

■ *Establish an advisory group on youth and children*

both agencies face budget crunches, Mason notes. For example, the district's food service department will provide meals for the city jail, and the city is collecting recycling for the schools.

In addition, the city has established a commission on youth and children that includes a school board member along with representatives of city agencies and youth (see sidebar). As its first product, the commission prepared a report on the well-being of youth that includes educational data. "How can we not address what happens in school?" asks Cynthia Fogg, the superintendent of youth services for the City of Long Beach.

To be sure, these new partnerships are occasionally rocky. City officials, for example, have found working with schools somewhat difficult because of the district's policy of devolving authority to school principals; the city officials find they have to negotiate with hundreds of principals rather than a single official in the district office. And there have been occasional clashes over data collection. In one case, for example, the district was reluctant to issue a questionnaire to high school students for a survey of city services because district officials did not want to burden the students near test time.

City Commission on Youth and Children

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In 2003, the Long Beach City Council adopted a resolution forming the city's first Commission on Youth and Children, consisting of ten adults and nine youth. The adult commissioners include one Long Beach Unified School Board member, one parent of a child or children under the age of twenty-one, and eight youth service experts. Each youth member has been appointed by the City Council member of the district in which he/she resides, and is under the age of nineteen at the time of appointment. The Commission serves as an advisory group to the mayor and city council on issues affecting youth and children.

▲ Commission Web site:
www.longbeachyouth.org/comoyouth.html

But city and school officials say the relationships are improving. The city government, the school district, and the higher education institutions are producing a seamless system that will improve prospects for all of Long Beach's young people. "We're building relationships so that we have a cooperative spirit," O'Neill says. "I'm strong on partnership."

■ *Build relationships that support young people's success and foster a cooperative spirit*